

## Namibians protest against rhino poaching

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by Staff Reporter



**ZOO PARK** was fittingly the venue for Namibia's first anti-rhino poaching protest, bringing together more than 60 demonstrators fighting the cause of the threatened species yesterday.

"Now that it looks as if the eyes of the poachers are turning towards Namibia, we want to send them a strong message that we have zero tolerance for poachers, and that they will be caught and sent to jail," high-school pupil Nita Pallett said during the protest.

She was joined by several other pupils from the Waldorf School and St George's Diocesan School in making sure the public and government realise they are fighting to ensure that rhinos form a part of Namibia environmental legacy for generations to come.

The protest took place during the ongoing bail application of three Chinese nationals, who were caught at the airport with suitcases stuffed with 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin late in March this year, on their way to China.

During the bail application last week, a law enforcement official testified that DNA tests had shown that the rhino horns originated from Namibia.

Dave Weeks, owner of Bushwhackers, was one of the people to protest the granting of bail to the Chinese during the hearing in the Windhoek Magistrates' Court in Katutura on Friday.

At yesterday's protest, Weeks told The Namibian that it was vital that the public took a stand during the bail hearing of the Chinese to ensure that a zero tolerance policy would be enforced "before the situation ends up like in South Africa", where rhino poaching has reached unprecedented and uncontrollable levels.

Weeks also said that the protest was aimed at creating awareness not only among the public but also among lawmakers, who should amend legislation to ensure that current laws to protect wildlife, which "are too lenient", are tightened.

Famed wildlife photographer Hans Rack was also present at the protest. Rack, who has been involved in wildlife protection for close to 20 years working with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) on the annual rhino census, said the demonstration plays an important role in creating awareness "among the public that this rhino slaughtering must stop".

He said the only way this can be achieved is if the public is aware of "what's going on" and he called on government to "get involved with this, in a proactive manner" in order to ensure that the slaughter of rhinos is "stopped or curtailed to a large extent".

Marcia Fagnoli, CEO of Save the Rhino Trust praised the public who took part in the demonstration and said that all of Africa's rhinos need all the protection they can get.

"It is inspiring to see that the public is concerned and willing to get involved to protect our rhinos and I am very grateful to them for their efforts. We will only solve this crisis if everyone unites for the common cause of saving this prehistoric animal which also has a right to exist long into the future".

She added that current court proceedings are an opportunity for Namibia's justice system to "demonstrate to syndicates that we take this issue very seriously".