



No bail for Chinese smuggling suspects

22 May 2014 | Justice

The three Chinese nationals accused of trying to smuggle rhino horns worth more than N\$2 million out of Namibia have been denied bail. They were remanded in custody and their case was postponed until August 6 for further investigation. Li Xiaoliang, Li Zhibing and Pu Xuexin appeared in the Windhoek Magistrate's Court on charges of the possession and export of controlled wildlife products. Magistrate George Mbundu said that taking into account the serious nature of the offences, the strength of the State's case and the possible sentencing upon conviction it would not be interest of justice to grant bail to the three accused. Mbundu added that he was not convinced that the three would return to stand trial if they were released on bail. Mbundu further referred to the serious nature of the charges faced by the three men under the Controlled Wildlife Products and

Trade Act of 2008. According to the Act a person found in possession of a controlled wildlife product is liable to a fine of N\$20 000, or five years' imprisonment, or both. On the charge of exporting such a product, a person faces upon conviction a fine not exceeding N\$200 000 or imprisonment for a period not exceeding 20 years or both. Mbundu said it is clear from the evidence before court that the three were acting with common purpose. Here he referred to the manner in which they travelled. They left China together on the same day, arrived and stayed in Zambia together, entered Namibia together through the Wenela border post, stayed at the coast and then went to Otjiwarongo where they stayed together and went to Windhoek and then later to the Hosea Kutako International Airport. Mbundu further said there is no dispute that Li Xiaoliang and Li Zhibing were found in possession of the suitcases that contained 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin. According to him the value of these items add to the seriousness of the charges that the accused face. He added that Pu Xuexin was found in possession of a bunch of keys that fit one of the suitcases. "There is no doubt that other players were involved in the alleged offence and the court was informed that the three accused did not pay for their hotel bill or purchase their own airplane tickets, but someone else did," said Mbundu. According to him someone else had to be involved because it was also testified that another Chinese national conveyed the two suitcases to Li Zhibing. The three accused will be transferred to the Windhoek Central Prison where there are medical facilities available following numerous complaints from them regarding the conditions in the holding cells at the Windhoek police station.



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