

## Namibia, We Have A Crisis

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# EDITORIAL



**LAST year Namibia lost 24 rhinos to poaching. For the first four months of this year, 60 rhino carcasses have already been found. If that is not a crisis, what is?**

We need to act now. With determination and precision.

We are dealing with something that is not just an environmental crisis but also of diplomatic concern and something that borders on economic sabotage. One in which, for instance, the Ministry of International Relations must address our concerns with countries in East Asia such as China who are known destinations of rhino horns.

It is no secret that Chinese mining companies have moved closer to rhino and elephant areas. Also, some Chinese nationals are behind bars facing charges of possession of ivory and rhino horn. This is no coincidence. It should also give us a lead on how to tackle the crisis.

We know that the demand for rhino horn is increasing in the East despite no scientific proof that it can cure illnesses like cancer or that it acts as an aphrodisiac.

As ridiculous as it might sound, recent reports from China also indicate that rhino horn is fast becoming a hit among young men between the ages of 18 and 27. Apparently they believe that if you ingest rhino horn it either prevents or cures hangovers.

It has become increasingly clear that we are a target of ruthless international criminal syndicates.

This is not a case of need but of greed.

Over the past two years the number of poaching cases has risen steadily. However, this year's dramatic rise needs to get all of us worried.

The criminals are highly organised and well financed. Their target, it seems, are officials who are supposed to protect the rhinos.

Whereas we turned poachers into guards, criminal elements are now trying to turn protectors into killers.

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta noted this week that the poachers have also switched from using hunting rifles to automatic guns.

It means we need to up our game. Each and everyone of us need to play our part. From the immigration official to the cleaner in a guest room who might suspect something. From the villager who might find the tracks of illegal hunters to staff members who are offered bribes for information about the movement of the animals.

Non-governmental organisations, private game farmers, conservancies all have a key part to play.

The increased poaching surely gives us an opportunity to look towards the strengthening of our community-based conservation.

No stone must be left unturned, while communication and transparency are vital if we are to effectively tackle this beast called poaching.

Minister Pohamba and key staff have already moved swiftly, increasing the reward for poaching whistle-blowers from N\$30 000 to N\$60 000.

They have also brought in more police to increase patrols from 40 to 140 in the Etosha National Park, Bwabwata National Park and Palmwag Tourism Concession Area.

We need soldiers to move in too. We still have the largest population of black rhinos in the world.

Even if the rest of the world ignores the plight of the rhinos, it is our duty, as Namibians, to stand firm against the criminals trying to turn our country into wildlife killing fields.

Today it might be rhinos, tomorrow elephants, next our precious cheetahs.

Our wildlife is part of our heritage as a people. We need to act. Now.