



ACC investigation into rhino funds advanced

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The anti-poaching organisation Conserving Our Valuable Elephant and Rhino (Cover) said yesterday that an investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) into the misuse of funds raised to help protect rhino is in an advanced stage. At the same time the founder of Cover, Jofie Lamprecht, responded to recent criticism against the organisation and gave an update about the first private anti-poaching unit that has been trained by French outfit Wildlife Angel. According to Lamprecht, there has been a lot of controversy surrounding the Next Generation Trust since Cover opened a case with the ACC. The case was opened with regard to a fundraising event held earlier this year for the protection of rhinos. The event was organised by Next Generation Conservation Trust, founded by Henri Slabbert. According to information received, around half of the money raised at the so-called Black Tie dinner and wine auction was allegedly spent on hiring premises for the Wine Extravaganza hosted by Slabbert's brother, Mynard Slabbert. That event was held just after the wine auction. About N\$495 100 had been raised by the wine auction but the Trust received only N\$241 449. Lamprecht said yesterday that the case is ongoing, but is at an advanced stage and that more than one party is involved. He said no more details could be disclosed at this stage. "I think when the truth comes out we will see Next Generation Trust's name cleared and they will join us again. It is, however, up to the ACC." Lamprecht added that Cover is obligated to ensure that funds solicited from the public for conservation projects are properly dispensed. "Consequently the paper trail of these funds must be traceable and transparent accounting of all such proceeds must at all times remain a priority." Meanwhile, an intense two-week training course by Wildlife Angel has been completed. During the course five people were trained in anti-poaching activities. According to the president of Wildlife Angel, Sergio Lopez, the unit was trained in fitness, navigation, moving formation, shooting exercises, standard operating procedures such as arrests, crime scene preservation and medical treatment. Lamprecht said Cover is still seeking a meeting with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to discuss how they can assist in anti-poaching activities. He furthermore responded to remarks about Cover being a "secret anti-poaching organisation". Lamprecht said although he is a professional hunter, he is also a conservationist. "Conservation is the act of preserving, guarding or protecting, as well as the wise and sustainable utilisation of natural resources." He further responded to accusations that Security Solutions Africa - a South African-based company with Namibian partners, is a mercenary outfit. "This is not true," he said. According to him the company is helping Cover with Namibia's poaching problem. Lamprecht said they have also been criticised for only protecting white rhino. Black rhino are exclusively owned by the State. He stressed that future projects later this year would include communal conservancies and other areas. He also said that Cover has been criticised for not allowing cell phones or other electronic devices in their meetings but that is for security purposes. "We have privileged information of rhino and elephant that we want to keep secret." Lamprecht said in his opinion poaching has only just started in Namibia. "The surface has only been scratched. They (poachers) have seen where we are vulnerable and there may be a lull now but it is something to stay. We need to prepare ourselves for the worst." It was also pointed out that a private rhino farm in Namibia incurs expenses of N\$200 000 per month just to protect its rhinos. The salaries of its anti-poaching unit are around N\$100 000 per month. WINDHOEK ELLANIE SMIT