

Chinese man gets 10-year prison sentence for rhino horn possession

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A Chinese businessman was sentenced to 10 years in prison or alternatively pay N\$100 000 for the illegal possession of protected wildlife specimen in the Opuwo magistrate court on Monday.

The sentence comes after Xu Jin Den, 34, pleaded guilty to a charge of being found in possession of two rhino horns.

Magistrate Leena Iyambo argued that the offence committed by Xu is a serious one and that Namibia is to serve as role model to other countries in the protection of rhinos.

Iyambo said that such acts are not good for the tourism sector, as tourists may no more feel safe in Namibia which will negatively affect the local tourism industry.

The magistrate noted that poaching is on the increase and it happens at the expense of the Namibian communities.

Frieda Keshi of Dr Weder, Kauta & Hoveka, who was representing the accused, suggested to the court that the fine be paid in instalments.

The state however objected to the suggestion, maintaining that the accused is not a Namibian national and may abscond.

Obert Masendeke who was singing the same tune as Iyambo said the increase of illegal hunting makes the lives of those Namibians meant to make a living from conservancies a living hell as wildlife become meaningless and not benefiting them.

Xu said he bought the horns from local people in the area of Sesfontein for N\$2 500.

"I bought the horns to make ornaments," he told the court.

He however said that he had no intentions of selling the ornaments he was to make out the horns.

Xu also said that he had no knowledge that a licence is required when purchasing rhino horns, and that he was under the impression that those selling the horns to him had a licence to do so.

According to Bernd Brell, Director of Special Operations at Safe the Rhino Trust, who served as a state witness, a rhino horn costs between U\$65 000 and US\$85 000 on the black market.

Brell is of the opinion that the illegal killing of rhinos may result in people losing their jobs as this may result in the downsizing of the tourism industry.

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta recently said despite a decrease in the number of poaching cases recorded, particularly in the Kunene Region, 17 poaching cases were recorded over the past four months.

In November 2015, *Nampa* reported that between January and April this year about 77 rhinos were poached in Namibia. NamPol has in areas surrounding the Etosha National Park and the Bwabwata National Park arrested 75 rhino and elephant poaching suspects since May this year.

At a media conference in November, Shifeta said between January and April 2015, 64 rhinos were killed in the Etosha National Park alone.

Xu is married and is father of two. He also told the court that he has two shops selling clothes in Oshakati.

-Nampa

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- 100000 sounds like a lot but it's only \$9000 Australian - so my guess is he will pay it. I guess if he'd been in possession of two stolen BMWs he'd get similar sentence. What the tragedy would be is if this guy is a level 4 - but you need evidence of that. He sounds like he had a good lawyer - I wonder how much that cost? His testimony sounds unlikely - but there is no evidence at least in this article that it isn't. Its good that there are some details about him re the shops - I wonder what kind of visa he is on and where is from in China. - Mic Smith | 2015-12-23 [18237]
- If a Rhino horn costs between U\$ 65 000 and U\$ 85 000 on black market. A fine for N\$ 100 000 is too low for a crime committed by these Chinese. Why not both (100 000 & 10 yrs). Those people have money and that is one of the reason that they do what they want, taking advantages of our weak laws. Who knows how many horns they have have smuggled out of the country before they were caught? Such criminal activities are committed by rich people. This is so lenient as it does not teach lesson to the rest. - Fillemon T Shaningwa | 2015-12-22 [18238]