



Ya Nangoloh dared to give evidence

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The Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Namibian Police have requested evidence from Namibia Media Holdings (NMH) as well as the executive director of Namrights, Phil ya Nangoloh, to substantiate allegations of political leaders' involvement in rhino and elephant poaching. At a joint press briefing on Wednesday, Minister Pohamba Shifeta and police chief Inspector-General Sebastian Ndeitunga requested ya Nangoloh to submit the said evidence before the end of December. NMH had quoted ya Nangoloh as saying that at least two ministers, one current and one former member of parliament, as well as the head of a traditional authority in the North, were kingpins in a poaching syndicate. He also described Okahao as the "ground-zero of the poaching racket" responsible for poaching inside the Etosha National Park. Ya Nangoloh was also quoted as saying that he had provided the findings of an independent investigation to Ndeitunga. He charged that that nothing would be done in that regard because the police chief's hands were tied since he was a political appointee. Ndeitunga denied having received any report or SMS from ya Nangoloh containing any such information and took issue with the assertion that his hands were tied, saying that no one had ever interfered with his work. Shifeta also insisted that the ministry was not aware of any current or former ministers being involved in poaching. "The ministry is guided by the laws and policies of this country when it comes to issues of poaching. The ministry is determined to stamp out all forms of poaching, regardless of social status, and every culprit should be brought to book without fear, favour or prejudice," said Shifeta. He urged ya Nangoloh to give the names of the suspected politicians to the authorities. Ndeitunga added: "When this problem [poaching] emerged, we took it very seriously and got resources to ensure the protection of the animals. People should not promote themselves by spreading rumours and economise on the truth. Namibians have a civil obligation to fight any type of crime, especially poaching. But trying to generalise allegations or withholding evidence is not helpful." Ya Nangoloh was adamant that he did send SMSes to Ndeitunga, but confirmed that he did not give any names of suspects to the police chief. "In the SMSes I told the Inspector-General that high-ranking ministers and a traditional leader in the Omusati Region are named as those involved with poaching," ya Nangoloh said. On the deadline set for him to provide evidence, ya Nangoloh said angrily: "Why do they think they can give me a deadline? I don't work for them. I don't owe them anything. I was doing them and the country a favour. If they don't want people to give them information that might help with their investigations, then fine. I was only trying to help. It does not encourage law-abiding citizens to assist them anymore." He further said that the information he had provided to the police included place names. "I gave them very clear leads on how big this thing is," maintained ya Nangoloh, adding that the "attitude of the ministry and police is very bad". Shifeta said the ministry and police had worked hard together to curb poaching in Namibia, especially poaching of rhinos in Etosha and the Kunene Region. "The ministry will continue to work with the police to protect the country's wildlife especially this time of the year when criminals come to enjoy their Christmas. I can assure them we are ready for them. There is a 99% risk that they will be arrested," said Shifeta. He said the ministry was looking at amending the Nature Conservation Ordinance to ensure heavier sentences for poaching. He said although there had been recent incidents of rhino poaching, the rate of poaching had dropped significantly compared to the beginning of the year. Shifeta reported that in the past four months seven rhino carcasses, which included two fresh carcasses, were found in Etosha. Four carcasses were found in the Palmwag area and two each on three private farms. CATHERINE SASMAN