



Poaching networks infiltrate Africa

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South Africa last week announced that the number of rhinos poached during 2015 had gone down from the 1 215 record total in 2014 to 1 175 in 2015. The wildlife trade monitoring network, TRAFFIC's Director of Policy Sabri Zain said in a statement that although there was a slight decrease in rhino poaching in South Africa and the authorities are having some impact on the ground, the numbers are hardly cause for celebration or complacency. "The figures remain unacceptably high and continent-wide, the scale of the rhino poaching crisis is spreading." According to TRAFFIC the 2015 decrease in South Africa has been more than offset by significant increases in neighbouring Zimbabwe, where rhino poaching rose from 12 in 2014 to a widely reported total of at least 50 last year, while losses in Namibia also rose sharply from 24 in 2014 to 80 in 2015. According to



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TRAFFIC data, Africa-wide rhino poaching totals reached 1 299 animals in 2014 while the latest figure from South Africa means the continent-wide total in 2015 was at least 1 305, according to TRAFFIC. "For Africa as a whole, this is the worst year in decades for rhino poaching," said TRAFFIC's Rhino Expert Tom Milliken. "The poaching epicentre has spread to neighbouring Namibia and Zimbabwe, but is nowhere near being extinguished in South Africa. Despite some commendable efforts being made, we're still a very long way from seeing the light at the end of this very dark tunnel." Of the four major rhino range States, only Kenya is expected to report a significant fall in rhino poaching in 2015. "We desperately need coordinated international efforts by police and other law enforcement agencies to combat the organised criminal syndicates trafficking rhino horn across southern Africa and beyond," said Dr Jo Shaw, Rhino Programme Manager for World Wildlife Fund South Africa. "Major transit and consumer countries, such as Mozambique and Vietnam need to take urgent steps to stop the trafficking and buying of illicit wildlife products." Meanwhile a number of rhino conservation measures were agreed during the 66th Standing Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). All countries affected by rhino poaching were directed to implement key strategies and actions developed by the CITES Rhinoceros Enforcement Task Force with specific instructions issued to: Mozambique to implement its National Ivory and Rhino Action Plan, including adoption of its strengthened conservation legislation and regulations; to South Africa and Mozambique urgently to finalise their joint action plan on rhino poaching; and to South Africa and Vietnam to enhance their collaboration on criminal investigations. Vietnam, as a key destination for rhino horn, was instructed to implement their improved penal reforms effectively and to take action to reduce the demand for rhino horn in domestic markets. "The world is watching especially those destination countries whose demand drives the trade - Vietnam and China. There is an urgent need to implement the full provisions of the measures agreed by CITES Parties and to close those cross-border markets in Vietnam that service Chinese consumers," said Milliken. "Failure to do so means the future outlook for Africa's rhinos remains very bleak." ELLANIE SMIT