

Arrest buyers of poached products – Ankama

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DEPUTY fisheries minister Chief Samuel Ankama says the only way to combat poaching is by apprehending the end-users, who keep the market alive.

He was speaking at the launch of the Namibia Conservation Parliamentary Caucus held in Windhoek yesterday.

The event, organised by the International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF), was attended by several members of parliament from Botswana, Zambia, Mexico and various non-governmental organisations.

"There has been a lot of poaching reported, and it has become a problem. But why do people poach? There should be somebody who is buying the products somewhere. We should not necessarily just apprehend the culprits, but also those creating the opportunities for these culprits, or maybe educate them in this regard," he stated.

Supporting this sentiment was Robin Hurt, the owner of Kenyan Robin Hurt Safaris, who said it might decrease if only Asian communities can be stopped from buying wildlife products.

"We will never stop the poaching, because there is too much money involved in it for the local people."

He said this after giving several examples of poaching in Kenya, which led to the demise of 300 000 elephants in a period of 10 years, and the black rhino, whose population decreased from 18 000 to a near-extinction figure of 100.

Deputy environment minister Tommy Nambahu said in a speech read on his behalf by deputy permanent secretary for environment Louisa Mupetami that the existence of a wildlife enforcement agency does not help much in combating poaching.

"In the face of highly-valued products such as rhino horn and ivory and the involvement of external criminal syndicates, this is seldom sufficient, and additional components and funds are required," he stressed.

According to Nambahu, wildlife conservancies have been successful because of the good management of wildlife, despite the poaching. He said Namibia's black and white rhino population is still the largest in the world, and the country's elephant population had grown from an estimated 1 500 animals in 1995 to over 20 000 to date.

Similarly, he said the country has a healthy population of crocodile, giraffe and cheetahs, while the lion population in north-western Namibia had grown from 25 in 1995 to around 150 today.