



## Questions about bail for rhino suspects

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The Ministry of Environment and Tourism and rhino conservationists are questioning the release last week of two suspected rhino-horn smugglers and well-known businessmen on N\$50 000 bail each.

Minister Pohamba Shifeta told reporters that the release of suspected rhino syndicate members was a "headache" to the ministry, and said prosecutors and investigators should improve communication between the two arms of justice.

The minister implored the investigating teams and prosecutors to keep suspected poachers or smugglers behind "lock and key" and to oppose bail, urging them to consider the work and time invested in making arrests.

Deputy Minister Tommy Nambahu also questioned the communication between investigators, prosecutors and the ministry. He said the ministry had not been informed that bail would not be opposed.

Nambahu yesterday said ministry officials were "not impressed" with the release of the two suspects and expected answers about the reasons for not opposing bail.

Nambahu said the ministry was too often kept out of the loop when decisions were made by investigating officers and prosecutors.

Following a week behind bars, Tangi Sheefeni Amon Namwandi (32), known as 'Mox', and Jairus Shaalukeni (32) were released on bail following their arrest during an undercover sting operation on 14 June 2016.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse-about-bail-for-rhino-suspects2016-06-280.jpg>)

SUSPECTS: Jairus Shaalukeni (left) and 'Mox' Namwandi shortly after their arrest in Windhoek.  
PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

The two were caught with four rhino horns in their possession. The origin of the horns has not been confirmed, although it was reported that they were still fresh and "bloody".

It is alleged that both businessmen are well known in certain social circles, and the Katutura Magistrate's Court was packed with supporters at Thursday's court appearance before Magistrate Jermaine Muchali.

Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) management and field teams CEO Simson Uri-Khob yesterday said the release of the suspects was "demoralising" to those fighting rhino syndicates on the ground.

He said keeping them behind bars would set a good example and show the "seriousness" of the crime.

"But then this happens," he said.

Uri-Khob warned that there is "no point" in releasing suspected rhino syndicate members, as they will "go back and do the same thing. N\$50 000 is nothing to them."

He said relevant authorities should "work more closely together" in order to ensure that suspects are not released.

At the formal bail application on Thursday, prosecutor Fillemon Nyau did not oppose bail despite the fact that bail was objected to during the first court appearance of the two accused a week earlier.

A source close to the investigation explained that opposing bail would have been a "losing battle" because of the business operations of the two accused businessmen.

According to the source, Namwandi employs approximately 20 people and appears to be managing companies that belong to his uncle, convicted murderer and fugitive Lazarus Shaduka. Namwandi is also currently working on a government tender worth N\$5 million, the source said.

Shaalukeni, who has business interests in northern Namibia, has more than 40 employees, it was said.

The source said a magistrate has to consider whether the accused poses a flight risk and has to take personal circumstances into consideration.

He said the likelihood of more than 60 people losing their jobs would more than likely have swayed a magistrate to rule that the personal interests of the accused outweigh the public interest of keeping them locked up.

Nevertheless, the source said the prosecutors believe they have a strong case.

As part of the bail conditions, both men were ordered to surrender their travel documents to the police.

The magistrate ordered them not to interfere with witnesses.

Namwandi was told to report to the Katutura police station three times a week, while Shaalukeni must check in at the Ongwediva police station three times a week.

Namwandi may not leave the Windhoek district without informing the police, and Shaalukeni may not leave the Oshana, Ohangwena, Omusati or Kunene regions without permission.

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