



Rhino horn judgement postponed again

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The long-awaited judgement in the trial in which four Chinese nationals stand accused of trying to smuggle 14 rhino horns worth millions out of Namibia has again been postponed.

A large media contingent yesterday gathered at court ready to hear the judgement in the largest rhino horn smuggling trial in Namibia, but had to turn away disappointed when it was postponed for almost a month to 13 September.

Li Zinbing, Li Xiaoliang and Pu Xuexin were caught at Hosea Kutako International Airport on 24 March 2014 with 14 rhino horns valued at more than N\$2.3 million and a leopard hide of N\$50 000 in their luggage.

Wang Hui was arrested later that year and has been labelled as the kingpin of the operation.

They have all been charged with unlawful export of rhino horns under the Controlled Wildlife Products Act.

Accused Li Zhibing pleaded guilty to the unlawful export or attempt to export the rhino horns and leopard hide out of Namibia.

The other three - Wang, Li Xiaoliang and Pu - denied all charges against them.

The four men appeared yesterday in the Regional Court in Katutura before Magistrate Edward Kesslow where their case was postponed until 13 September this year because the trial magistrate Alexis Diergaardt had been booked off sick this week.

This is the third time the judgment has been postponed since closing arguments ended this year and the trial was postponed for judgement to 22 June.

However the judgement was then postponed to 15 July when Diergaardt indicated that the judgement was not yet ready.

On 15 July the judgment was again postponed to 11 August because Diergaardt had other commitments.

The new date for delivery of the judgement was agreed upon together with the State Advocate Simba Nduna and defence lawyer Orben Sibeya as well as Magistrate Diergaardt.

When the accused were informed about the postponement Wang expressed his frustration about the delay in judgement and said he does not understand the why there are on-going postponements in the judgement.

He said that he was hopeful that the judgment would have been delivered today.

Magistrate Kesslow said that he understood his frustration but that it had to be taken up with the trial magistrate.

ELLANIE SMIT



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse-horn-judgement-postponed-again2016-08-120.jpg>)

WAITING: The four accused in the rhino horn trial have been remanded in custody until the judgement in their case, now postponed to September. Photo: ELLANIE SMIT



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