

## Black rhino poached at Erindi, 4 arrested

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**THREE** Zambians and a Namibian, the latter suspected to be a former policeman, were arrested last Friday after poaching a black rhino at the Erindi private game reserve near Omaruru.

According to Alexander Steyn, who heads the Omaruru District Watch, a massive operation involving the district watch, game reserve personnel, government and police was launched to capture the suspects, who were considered "extremely skilled and dangerous".

Tourists at Erindi came upon the dehorned black rhino carcass last Thursday, resulting in the massive operation, which included the use of a helicopter.

A camp was discovered in the reserve, where an AK47 assault rifle was also found.

The operation included a roadblock near Otjiwarongo, where a vehicle with the suspects was stopped and the men arrested. Interrogations led the investigating team to a house at Okahandja, where the horn and a heavy-calibre .375 rifle, which was allegedly used to kill the rhino, was confiscated.

Police spokesperson chief inspector Kauna Shikwambi confirmed the incident to The Namibian yesterday. She said the men are being held in custody, adding that one was a former police officer.

Steyn said the loss of the black rhino was enormous.

"It is not just the value of the animal. It is also the finances that go into operations like this to catch the criminals. It is also a loss when tourists who sadly found this carcass take this message out of Namibia," he stressed.

None of the black rhino in Namibia are privately owned. They all are owned by government, who then places them at different farms. Black rhino are extremely endangered.

Steyn said he was "very worried" about the fact that poachers are using assault rifles and heavy-calibre rifles when doing their dirty work.

"They have these weapons, while we who are mostly peace-loving volunteers who love and want to protect Namibia and its people and animals, are not allowed to shoot, unless they shoot first. How long will it be before one of us gets shot and killed? These guys are highly skilled and do not care about our lives," Steyn charged.

He added that neighbouring countries are enforcing stiffer laws and sentences against poachers, and that the criminals are now coming to Namibia because they know that Namibia cannot defend itself. Last month, environment minister Pohamba Shifeta described the latest rhino and elephant poaching figures as "a pity".

According to him, known rhino mortalities were 37 this year. The latest incident has pushed this figure to 38 rhinos.

Last week, a concerned group comprising community members and commercial farmers demonstrated in front of the Omaruru magistrate's court against the granting of bail to seven suspects accused of involvement in rhino poaching in the district.

The seven were arrested at different places in March, after they had allegedly shot two rhinos at the Epako Game Lodge near Omaruru. They face charges of hunting specially-protected game, and being in possession of an unlicensed firearm.