

Rhino horn smugglers get 14 years in prison

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by Werner Menges



FOUR Chinese citizens convicted of having tried to smuggle 14 rhinoceros horns and a leopard skin out of Namibia in March 2014 were sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment each at the end of their trial today.

"The message must be clear to the rest of the community and the international community that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated," magistrate Alexis Diergaardt told the four convicted men during their sentencing in the Windhoek Regional Court.

Having reminded the four that they were convicted of serious offences, she added that what made their crimes even more serious was the fact that they had travelled from China to Namibia with the intention of breaking the law in Namibia.

She also reminded them that rhinos were on the edge of extinction, and that there was outrage in society about the

poaching of rhinos for their horns.

The court had to impose a sentence that would deter not only the four from repeating their crimes, but would also act as deterrence for would-be offenders, magistrate Diergaardt said.

With each of the four sentenced to a 14-year prison term, the magistrate suspended part of the sentence of each, in accordance with the length of time they have already spent in jail in Namibia following their arrest.

Thirty months of the sentences of Li Zhibing (55), Pu Xuexin (51) and Li Xiaoliang (32), who have been in custody over the past two years and six months, were suspended for a period of five years on condition that they are not convicted of the export, attempted export, possession of or dealing in controlled wildlife products without a permit during the period of suspension.

The magistrate suspended 28 months of the sentence of Wang Hui (41), who has been in custody since his arrest in May last year.

Magistrate Diergaardt convicted each of the four two weeks ago on two counts of attempting to unlawfully export controlled wildlife products from Namibia.

The two Lis and Pu were arrested at Hosea Kutako International Airport on 24 March 2014, after 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin were discovered in two suitcases that the two Lis had booked on to a flight with which they and Pu were to leave Namibia.

Magistrate Diergaardt concluded in her verdict that the four acted with a common purpose and had jointly planned the attempt to smuggle the rhino horns and leopard skin out of Namibia. Her finding was based on evidence that the two Lis and Pu were in close contact with Wang at a Windhoek hotel during the evening before they were due to leave Namibia, that Wang had booked rooms in the hotel for them and had bought their flight tickets, and that the suitcases in which the contraband was found at the airport were moved to and fro between the two hotel rooms occupied by the four men and were handled by all of the four.