

Chinese national arrested with 18 rhino horns

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by Theresia Tjihenua



A CHINESE man was arrested on Wednesday in South Africa when he was found with 18 rhino horns worth R6,6 million which are suspected to have been smuggled from Namibia.

The suspect (28) had flown from the Hosea Kutako International Airport where he avoided detection, only to be arrested by the Hawks' Serious Organised Crime squad of the South African police at the OR Tambo International Airport.

In a statement yesterday, the Hawks said the horns that weigh about 43 kilogrammes were discovered concealed in the suspect's travelling bags during a routine search.

The man, who was in transit to Hong Kong, is expected to appear in the Kempton Park magistrate's court today. A director responsible for wildlife and national parks at the environment ministry, Colgar Sikopo, confirmed that they were alerted by South African wildlife authorities about the arrest on Wednesday.

Sikopo said they immediately informed the Namibian police.

Police spokesperson Edwin Kanguatjivi said they were informed of the incident, and were investigating.

The arrest of the man comes a day before the environment ministry released a statement, saying seven more rhinos were poached at the Etosha National Park this month.

The ministry yesterday said investigations on these carcasses are underway, and the latest figures bring the total number of rhinos poached this year to 47.

"Namibia and other African countries are experiencing unprecedented levels of rhino and elephant poaching," the environment ministry's spokesperson Romeo Muyunda said in a statement yesterday.

He said the Zambezi and Kavango East regions recorded the highest number of 69 elephants which were poached this year.

Muyunda stated that the wildlife trafficking business is fast becoming a million-dollar criminal enterprise that has expanded to more than just a conservation concern.

Although Sikopo said combating poaching was a mammoth task, this year's poaching figures are less than last year's.

"There were 127 rhino poaching incidents last year and only 47 this year, so I think we are making progress," he noted.

The ministry has appealed to anyone with information that may lead to the arrest of those involved in illegal activities of poaching at Etosha to contact the police or the ministry immediately, saying a reward of N\$60 000 is still available for anyone who will provide such information.