



Poachers are winning the war

30 November 2016 | Opinion

Namibia is a country hit by devastating poaching there is certainly no doubt about that. Activists and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism have particularly turned the tide against this surge for rhino horns and elephant ivory and while it has led to a number of arrests, there is still no end in sight to this disturbing phenomenon. Efforts to combat poaching have been complemented by the Namibian police, which have carried out a series of operations across the country. There have been success stories here and there, which led to the arrest of perpetrators, but the wider problem of demand, corruption and organised crime still continues to rear its ugly head. At this rate it seems that the poachers are winning this battle as global efforts against rhino horn traffickers still fall short. Wildlife trafficking is estimated to generate billions of dollars a year globally and AFP reported in September this year that poaching syndicates have shipped large amounts of African elephant ivory last year despite global calls to dismantle the trafficking networks. In most cases, these networks collude with corrupt officials and conservationists, while the middlemen and kingpins orchestrating the trade continue to live at large. This begs the question if law enforcement is winning the war against illegal rhino horn trafficking. Just a week ago a Chinese strolled through airport security with a suitcase containing 18 rhino horns. The horns were detected on the scanners, but he was nevertheless allowed to proceed. Ye Zhiwei who was in transit from Windhoek to Hong Kong, was still allowed to board a South African Airways flight bound for Johannesburg where he was fortunately arrested. Again this shows that there is plenty of corruption. Yet, nobody is really uncovering the identities of these kingpins, the well-connected ringleaders and the corrupt officials who aid and abet them in their heinous crimes. There is little hope of success given the organised crime syndicate behind rhino horn trafficking. Guns alone will not win the war against poachers. Bigger fines, longer jail sentences and the political will to enforce the law might do the trick.