



Rhino horns: Heads will roll

28 November 2016 | Crime

Full-scale investigations have been launched into activities at the Hosea Kutako International Airport after it was determined that the 18 rhino horns that a Chinese national was found in possession of in Johannesburg, were detected by scanners at Hosea Kutako International Airport.

However, even though the scanners detected the rhino horns in the luggage of Ye ZhiWe, 28, who was in transit from Windhoek to Hong Kong, he was still allowed to board a South African Airways flight bound for Johannesburg.

The spokesperson of the Namibian Airports Company (NAC), Dan Kamati, confirmed this to Namibian Sun and said that follow-up investigations are underway to determine why and how the passenger was allowed to proceed.

According to him, an empirical investigation is being carried out by the agencies involved with aviation security to establish what happened.

He said that the NAC accessed the memory of the scanning equipment and it was confirmed that the rhino horns were in fact detected. According to Kamati, it is vital to establish what happened because it is the airport's reputation that it is at stake.

ZhiWe was arrested with 18 rhino horns at the OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg last week Wednesday. The rhino horns, weighing 43 kg, are valued at around N\$6.6 million.

The South African Hawks received an anonymous tip-off and discovered the rhino horns hidden in his luggage.

It is unclear whether the horns are from Namibian animals. DNA tests will have to be conducted to determine the country of origin.

The inspector-general of the Namibian police, Sebastian Ndeitunga, also confirmed that a full-scale investigation has been launched into the matter to establish what occurred and how the passenger was allowed to board the plane with the contraband in his luggage.

Ndeitunga told Namibian Sun that he has established a team which started investigations on Friday at the airport.

"I suspect that many heads will be rolling."

Ndeitunga also said that meetings have been arranged with the NAC and the directorate of civil aviation and that he wants answers on what has happened.

"These criminals are part of syndicates and foreigners are using locals and bribing them to be corrupt. I am not saying that this is what happened."

Meanwhile, well-placed sources told Namibian Sun that with regards to positions such as customs and excise officers, immigration police and the like, corruption is relatively common and often seen.

Approached for comment, environment minister Pohamba Shifeta said that the case is still extra-territorial and they are waiting for the completion of investigations thereof.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/horns-heads-will-roll2016-11-280.jpg>)

SYSTEM ERROR: Police presence at the check-in counters at the departure lounge at the Hosea Kutako International Airport. Photo: Ellanie Smit

"We are in constant contact with the South African authorities and as soon as facts have been established including DNA testing, we will issue a statement."

Hawks spokesperson Captain Ndivhuwo Mulamu confirmed that ZhiWe appeared in the Kempton Park Magistrate's Court on Friday. She said that he was remanded in custody until 30 November for a formal bail hearing. He has been charged with dealing in rhino horns under the Endangered Species Act.

ELLANIE SMIT