



## 18 horns received in Windhoek

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The Chinese national who smuggled 18 rhino horns through Hosea Kutako International Airport and was arrested in South Africa, had received the rhino horns in Windhoek.

Ye Zhiwei, 28, who pleaded guilty to charges of importing the rhino horns without the necessary permits in the Kempton Park Regional Court in South Africa, said in his plea explanation that he had received 15 black rhino horns and three white rhino horns at a hotel in Windhoek.

"I confirm that I imported the rhino horns from Namibia in transit to South Africa with the intention to take them to Hong Kong," he testified.

Ye was arrested at OR Tambo International Airport after flying from Hosea Kutako International Airport on 23 November at 06:40.

He was travelling in transit from Namibia on board a South African Airways flight to Hong Kong when the South African Hawks received an anonymous tip-off and discovered the 18 rhino horns hidden in his luggage. The rhino horns were tightly wrapped in industrial cling wrap.

The rhino horns weigh 43kg and are worth around N\$6.6 million.

According to Ye, during September last year, he was approached by a certain Zang Fei who asked him if he was interested in earning extra money.

Ye said he expressed interested but wanted to know what he was supposed to do to earn the money and was told that he had to pick up a parcel in Namibia and take it to Hong Kong.

Ye said that he was experiencing serious financial problems and therefore accepted the offer to earn extra income.

According to him, he was never told what he would be paid for his services.

"I was so desperate that I had no other option but to accept this."

According to Ye, all his travel expenses to Namibia and South Africa would be reimbursed.

He said at that stage he was not aware that he would be transporting rhino horns.

According to him, it was the first time he had travelled outside China. He left Fuzhou for Windhoek on 7 November and booked into a hotel in Windhoek as instructed by Zhang. Ye did not state the name of the hotel.

At the hotel Zhang handed him two suitcases wrapped in plastic and informed him that they contained rhino horns, he said.

"I enquired from him if it was legal for me to be in possession of the rhino horns and he informed me it was in fact illegal."



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse-horns-received-in-windhoek2017-02-160.jpg>)

SMUGGLED: The rhino horns found in Ye Zhiwei's luggage.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse-horns-received-in-windhoek2017-02-161.jpg>)

GUILTY: Ye Zhiwei has pleaded guilty in a South African court. Photos: CONTRIBUTED

Ye said Zhang was not known to him before their meeting.

According to Ye, he went to Hosea Kutako Airport on 23 November to depart for OR Tambo en route to Hong Kong.

He said upon his arrival at the airport he booked in the two suitcases and upon his arrival at OR Tambo he went to the transit lounge to wait for his connecting flight to Hong Kong. He said after a while he was approached by the police and the 18 rhino horns were discovered in his luggage.

The police will next week send a team to South Africa with identikits of persons with the surname Zhang for identification, but there are chances that the name may be false.

While DNA testing of the horns is still ongoing, it has been established that at least one set of horns was from Namibia.

Ye will be sentenced on 10 March.

A few days after the arrest of Ye, a full-scale investigation was launched into activities at Hosea Kutako International Airport.

The probe was ordered after it was discovered that the 18 rhino horns found in Ye's possession had in fact been detected by airport scanners.

It resulted in the arrest of a police sergeant, Pendapala Abraham litula, 42, who was stationed at the scanners at the time that Ye was allowed to board the flight to Johannesburg with his luggage.