



## Shifeta wants a wildlife court

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Foreigners who are found guilty of wildlife crimes should serve out their sentences, be deported and should not be allowed back in Namibia.

This is the view of environment minister Pohamba Shifeta, who says the Nature Conservation Ordinance Act is outdated and far too lenient in its sentencing of poachers.

According to Shifeta, the ministry is in the process of amending the Act and proposed fines for poaching will range from N\$100 000 to N\$25 million.

Currently the maximum fine is N\$200 000.

Shifeta says poachers easily pay the fine and then simply commit the crime again.

He referred to the case of former football medic Gerson Kandji, who is now implicated in at least three separate cases. Kandji was out on bail in previous cases of rhino poaching and murder when he was arrested on charges of poaching rhinos on a farm near Gobabis in December.

Shifeta said foreigners convicted of wildlife crimes should be deported immediately after serving their sentence. They should not be allowed back into the country to commit more crimes.

"The problem is that they just pay fines and continue their business. To them it is peanuts what they pay. For them it is business as usual - as if nothing happened."

Shifeta said the business of poaching was like drug addiction. "It is very difficult to rehabilitate someone. A person involved in these activities will continue even after they were arrested because the payment is so high."

He elaborated on the workings of poaching syndicates and said five known syndicates were currently operating in Namibia.

"These have tentacles and that is where we need to break them, by giving heavy sentences and fines. We need to harm them so that they find it difficult to start again."

According to him the kingpins of these syndicates are from abroad and they recruit Namibian middlemen and footsoldiers to commit the poaching.

"A person leading the syndicate does not get their hands dirty, because he is not here - he has got absolutely nothing to do with it. Therefore it is hard to get somebody who is the leader because they just instruct."

The minister said when a poacher gets caught it is very difficult to get information from them because they fear for their lives. They report to the middlemen and to the kingpins and would rather take the blame and spend time in jail before informing on these syndicates.

"They conceal the identities of these people because they fear the handler. It is therefore that we have to target the middlemen and the chain of foreigners."



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/wants-a-wildlife-court2017-02-070.jpg>)  
GET OUT: The minister of environment and tourism, Pohamba Shifeta. Photo: NAMPA

Shifeta also elaborated on accusations that government officials were implicated in these syndicates and said there was no evidence that people employed in the environment ministry or security forces were involved in poaching.

"However, we have cases of former employees arrested," he admitted.

He said there were also cases of other civil servants arrested for illegal hunting.

He said the ministry took wildlife crime very seriously and therefore all possible avenues would be exploited to bring those involved to book.

Shifeta said the investigating officers and prosecutors must work together and remain in contact with each other. When that does not happen, it could lead to cases being withdrawn or suspects being acquitted.

He said prosecutors and the police had hundreds of cases to investigate and the legal process was cumbersome.

"It is a problem if they are loaded with cases."

According to Shifeta it would be better to have a separate court just for wildlife cases.

He said prosecutors should be trained in the prosecution of wildlife crimes and magistrates should be made aware of the importance of such cases.

Shifeta referred to a recent case in which four Chinese nationals were sentenced to 14 years in prison after being caught with 14 rhino horns in 2014. The prosecution in this case had proposed six-year sentences. Shifeta said luckily the presiding officer recognised the importance of the crimes and handed down stiffer sentences.