



Rhino horns disguised as coffee

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A poaching syndicate operating in Namibia is apparently posting rhino horns to China in parcels purportedly containing coffee.

Twelve pieces of rhino horn mailed from Namibia were seized by Hong Kong customs officers last week.

The horns, weighing 6.6kg, were found in two express airmail parcels at Hong Kong International Airport on 22 March.

The shipping labels stated that the parcels contained coffee, a press release issued by the Hong Kong government stated.

"Suspicious images were found under X-ray inspection. After opening the consignment, customs officers found the suspected rhino horns."

A 42-year-old man was arrested on 23 March and was released on bail pending further investigation.

In Hong Kong, a person found guilty of importing an endangered species without a licence can be fined up to US\$5 million and jailed for two years.

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta said the government was trying to get more information on the incident through Interpol.

"All we know is that somebody sent a parcel from Namibia with rhino horns to Hong Kong. We will have to find out who sent it and what courier companies were used."

He said the three Chinese nationals arrested at the Kapps Farm roadblock last year had hidden rhino horn in coffee tins and they could be part of the same syndicate.

The three were on their way to the airport when they were pulled over for a routine search.

"Now that the airport is busy, additional measures need to be put in place," Shifeta said.

He said customs and police officers at Hosea Kutako were overworked because of the new international airlines landing at the airport.

"We need additional personnel," he said.

The head of Interpol in Namibia, Chief Inspector Immanuel Sam, told Namibian Sun that they did not have much detail about the incident in Hong Kong, or about the suspect who was arrested, and were awaiting feedback.

"We are verifying with them and it needs to be clarified whether these are indeed Namibian rhino horns and what the itinerary of the suspect was," he said.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/horns-disguised-as-coffee2017-03-290.jpg>)

SEIZED: Hong Kong customs officers have seized 12 pieces of rhino horn suspected to be from Namibia. Photo: www.info.gov.hk