



No jail for rhino-horn smuggler

Ye Zhiwei pays R1.2 million fine

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The Chinese man who smuggled 18 rhino horns through Hosea Kutako International Airport and was arrested in South Africa has been sentenced to a fine of R1.2 million or six years in prison.

He paid the fine and will not spend any time in prison.

Ye Zhiwei appeared before the Kempton Park Magistrate's Court last Wednesday. He pleaded guilty to smuggling the rhino horns from Namibia into South Africa.

Ye was arrested at OR Tambo International Airport on 23 November 2016.

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 18 rhino horns hidden in his luggage. The rhino horns were tightly wrapped in industrial cling wrap.

The horns weighed 43 kilogrammes and were valued at around N\$6.6 million.

Ye pleaded guilty to a charge of importing the rhino horns without the necessary permits. He 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 said.

He claimed that he had been approached in September last year by a certain Zang Fei, who offered to pay him for picking up a parcel in Namibia and taking it to Hong Kong.

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

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

He testified that he went to Hosea Kutako on 23 November to depart for OR Tambo en route to Hong Kong.

He said upon his arrival at the airport he booked the two suitcases and after his arrival at the OR Tambo the same day 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.

A few days after Ye's arrest an investigation into activities at Hosea Kutako was ordered when it was discovered that the rhino horns in his possession had in fact been detected by airport scanners.

The investigation resulted in the arrest of a Namibian Police sergeant, Pendapala Abraham litula (42), who had been stationed at the scanners when Ye was allowed to board.

The minister of environment and tourism, Pohamba Shifeta, said at the time that Namibia might bring its own charges against Ye if it could be proven that the rhino horns were of Namibian origin.



(<https://d3rp5jat0m3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse/jail-for-rhino-horn-smuggler2017-04-250.jpg>)

NO JAIL: Ye Zhiwei, who smuggled 18 rhino horns from Namibia to South Africa, has paid a fine of N\$1.2 million. Photo: CONTRIBUTED

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