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11 August 2017 Author Kaula Nhongo



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Environmentalists and conservation groups have expressed their dismay over the decision by the Windhoek High Court to fine two ivory smugglers only N\$20,000, saying such a slap on the wrist defeats Government's efforts to curb poaching.

Chinese nationals Xinxi Xue and Ruhe Zhang were fined N\$20,000 this week after they were caught trying to smuggle ivory out of the country last year. The two men received the fine after they admitted guilt to the charges against them. Help our Rhinos Now (HoRN) Chairperson, Jaco Muller, said he was 'disgusted' by the sentence, adding that, in other countries people are hanged for such crimes.

He urged the National Council to fast-track the Protected Area and Wildlife Management Bill which holds stricter fines for people caught smuggling wild animal products.

Muller said that as an environment organisation, HoRN does not agree with the N\$20,000 fine. ^

“I understand that there were people with bags of money waiting to pay the bail money, meaning that to them this is nothing. They will go right back and do the same thing,” he said.

Save The Rhino Trust Chairperson Maxi Louis said she was disappointed by the High Court ruling. She urged the Namibian legal fraternity to recognise the seriousness of wildlife crimes and the role that illegal wildlife trade plays in undermining developing economies.

The 48-year-old Xixi and 61-year old Ruhe were detained on 7 December, 2016 at Kapps Farm roadblock while on their way to Hosea Kutako International Airport enroute to China.

The police on duty discovered 12 pieces of ivory weighing a total of 1.10kg and a seal skin among their belongings. The elephant tusks were cut into pieces and concealed in instant coffee tins.

International wildlife and law enforcement experts worldwide agree that illegal ivory sells in Asian countries for as much as USD\$2,200 per kg or nearly N\$30,000.

The pair was found guilty by the court on three charges of unlawfully dealing in controlled wildlife products and unlawful possession of controlled wildlife products.

The duo came clean in court, stating that they were found in possession of the controlled wildlife products without a permit.

They further stated that although they had intentions of transporting the ivory back home to China, they knew very well that such export of the product was illegal in Namibia.

The two men were in Namibia on working visas and were employed by a local construction company.

Minister of Environment and Tourism Pohamba Shifeta said that it is up to the presiding officer what bail amount to give depending on their assessment.

“We do not want to interfere with the judiciary, we are on the side of the prosecution,” Shifeta said.

He, however, said that it was unfortunate that the two Chinese nationals had been given an N\$20 000 fine.

