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Informanté

Theft of 34 rhino horns will damage Namibia's reputation

Niël Terblanché

THE protection and management Namibian wildlife and products derived from it will suffer immeasurable damage after 34 rhino horns and millions in local and foreign currency with a total value of N\$100 million was stolen on an unguarded hunting farm in the district of Outjo over the weekend.

One of the most comprehensive investigations were launched by the Inspector General of the Namibian Police, Lieutenant General Sebastian Ndeitunga, into the theft and especially the circumstances surrounding the theft while the police legal department on the instruction of the general will scrutinise the circumstances under which law permission was given to a farmer to keep such vast amounts of rhino horn in his possession while it could have been in the custody of the state for safekeeping.



Photo for illustrative purposes only

The serious repercussions for Namibia's reputation as a country known for its strict wildlife management and laws to curb the scourge of poaching follows a burglary at the hunting farm.

General Ndeitunga said the burglary where an unknown number of suspects broke into the house on the hunting farm over the past weekend to gain entry to safe inside where the 34 rhino horns and large amounts of cash in United States Dollars, Euro, South African Rand and Namibian Dollars were kept.

The official police report about the incident states that besides the wildlife products and the cash, two wedding rings and three fire arms were also stolen.

"The entire incident is very suspicious because such a large amount

of rhino horns and cash were kept at the house. The farmer does have a licence to keep the rhino horn that was gathered during dehorning operations but no one besides the farmer and the person who issued the licence knew about it," General Ndeitunga said.

He said if the farmer knew he was going to go away for an extended period of time he should have informed the police to at least help keep an eye on the farm or he should have hired private security to guard the farm.

"The farmer does not even have closed circuit television cameras and now we are left to piece together this crime with very little evidence and clues left behind by the burglars. If items of such high value were kept at the farm one would have expected that some serious security measures would have had to be implemented. The burglars broke through the roof of the house and managed to disable the alarm system very easily."

According to the report the farmer only realised that his house was broken into on Sunday evening at around 19:00 and that the burglary could have happened any time between Friday and Sunday because no-one was home for the weekend.

General Ndeitunga said the theft of specifically the rhino horn will definitely damage the reputation of Namibia and that of the Government and that it will take hard work from everybody involved to clear their names.

Namibia's request to sell legally harvested rhino horn and ivory outside the CITES multilateral treaty to protect endangered plants and animals could also be placed under scrutiny.