

'Horn smuggler' stuck at Violsdrif border post Plea agreement with SA authorities

28 July 2020 | [Crime](#)



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Francoise Steynberg - A man with dual citizenship and two identities connected to the robbery of 33 rhino horns from a safe in a house on Outjo in September 2019, was at the South African border post, Violsdrif, in February with two rhino horns caught.

Annanias Jeremiah Amukwa Shikongo or Thomas Francisco nicknamed Chester, and two Mozambicans apparently tried to smuggle the two rhino horns from South Africa to Namibia.

Shikongo was arrested last year after the sensational rhino horn theft at Outjo in Namibia. The owner of a private lodge next to the Etosha National Park dehorned his rhinos to prevent poaching and stored the horns in his safe.

During Shikongo's arrest, a firearm and ammunition were found without the necessary licenses. He pleaded guilty to this charge and paid a fine.

According to the Namibian police (Nampol), it is suspected that Shikongo sold the firearms and jewelery that were also stolen from the rhino owner's safe in South Africa.

None of the stolen goods were recovered, but the suspected Angolan buyer of the rhino horns was arrested in March this year.

Bail of N \$ 5,000

However, Shikongo was released on bail of N \$ 5,000 in the Outjo Magistrate's Court on November 11.

He was due to appear in the Outjo Magistrate's Court again on April 15, but did not show up. A warrant was issued for his arrest.

One mr. Thomas Francisco was arrested on 3 February at Violsdrif by the South African Police Service (SAPS) with two rhino horns in his possession.

The Head of the Protected Resources Unit (PRU) of Nampol and the Blue Rhino Task Force, Comm. Barry de Klerk told Republikein yesterday that Nampol had worked closely with the Falcons of South Africa to establish the accused's identity.

"He has both Namibian and South African citizenship, but different identities - Shikongo and Francisco.

"On 7 February, Nampol received information from the SAPS in Springbok that a South African citizen, Mr. Thomas Francisco, and two Mozambicans were arrested. "Francisco denied his Namibian identity to the SAPS and was in possession of a valid South African passport and identity document," said De Klerk.

"Nampol took Shikongo's fingerprints at the time when he was arrested, which indicated a clean record of him. The SAPS provided Nampol with Francisco's fingerprints that are positively associated with Shikongo's.

"The photo of the South African, his tattoos and scars had similarities with the accused in the rhino theft case of Outjo," De Klerk explained.

There is great dissatisfaction among Namibian private rhino owners because Francisco has reached a plea agreement on the charge of illegal possession and transport of rhino horns with the South African authorities.

His plea agreement entails a fine of R50 000 or 18 months imprisonment of which 24 months was suspended for three years.

"Why was Shikongo released on bail of only N \$ 5,000 in the first place?" asks a Namibian rhino owner.

The owner of the 33 rhino horns is just as shocked and says light penalties like these will in no way discourage rhino poachers and horn smugglers.

"It discourages us and the authorities who are doing all the hard work to catch wildlife criminals," he told Republikein.

Francisco's Mozambican co - accused would have appeared in court in Springbok again yesterday.

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