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### Ex-Botswana president explains 'shoot to kill'

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Ian Khama

**BOTSWANA'S** former president, Ian Khama, says his country's strategy to enforce a shoot-to-kill approach against Namibians should be seen as a warning to potential poachers.

"This sends a message to potential poachers. I personally plead to any who have such intentions to think twice about committing such a crime in our or any country," he says.

Khama made these remarks this week in an exclusive interview with The Namibian on his reaction to the killing of four fishermen by the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) last month.

"Like I said, it is not a policy which is written in law, but an operational procedure I support if applied in the circumstances I have outlined," he said.

Khama also expressed his condolences with the family of Tommy, Martin and Wamunyima Nchindo, and their cousin Sinvula Munyeme.

The four fishermen were gunned down on 5 November at the Chobe River in the Zambezi region. The family said they were fishing.

More than 37 Namibians are said to have been shot by Botswana soldiers along the river that divides the two countries.

"To the families: Words cannot describe their loss and the grief they are going through. I can only hope and pray that as such we all take responsibility to ensure there is no repeat of what took place," Khama said.

Botswana adopted the shoot-to-kill strategy in 2013 as a measure to curb the mass slaughter of wildlife in the country, particularly rhinos and elephants.

Khama, who was Botswana's president at the time, said the shoot-to-kill strategy is meant to warn potential poachers.

"They should think about the risks to themselves, the anxiety and grief for their families should they have encounters, and the tensions that arise between our friendly nations that can be avoided," he said.

The Botswana government has faced heavy criticism for shooting Namibians at will.

One of the fishermen killed last month was allegedly sprayed with bullets despite trying to run away.

Khama said 'shoot to kill' is not unique to Botswana.

He said people should not confuse 'shoot to kill' with 'shoot on sight', which is indiscriminate and without considering the necessity to do so.

"It has never been the practice in the BDF and I hope it remains so. I cannot comment on whether the recent shooting incident ... was justified, because I do not know the facts around what took place," Khama said.

To explain how the policy is used, he compared it to an officer protecting a very important person (VIP), who is confronted by a potential assassin.

"The officer would draw and fire their weapons at the assailant to save the life of the VIP. That would likely result in the killing of the assailant to protect the VIP as only trying to wound the attacker would give him another opportunity to harm the VIP," Khama said.

"When your life or those of your colleagues are in such danger, you have a split second to make the decision based on instructions, training and discipline as to whether to fire or not," he said.

#### **WILDLIFE VS HUMAN LIFE**

Khama has a long military history and was appointed as a brigadier general at the age of 24 during his father, Seretse Khama's presidency.

He later served as the commander of the BDF from his appointment in 1989, retiring from the position in 1998.

"Coming to poachers from the many incidents during my time in the Botswana Defence Force, they were armed insurgents crossing the international boundary into the sovereign territory of Botswana with the intention to shoot and kill wildlife, and those who protect them who were themselves also armed," Khama said.

"Obviously by doing so they were risking their lives, because no soldier, when confronted by an armed aggressor, would wait to be shot at first when it is his duty to protect himself and others and the country's national resources," he said.

"There is no poacher who does not know that in Botswana our wildlife is protected by the BDF who are obviously armed for that purpose and would engage a threat to defend what they are deployed to do," Khama said.

He said he has in the past urged authorities in neighbouring countries to educate their people on the risks and consequences if they were to cross the border for poaching.

"Our soldiers have been shot by poachers as well. I once again appeal to energetically deter people from undertaking these illegal activities," Khama said.

He also had a message for Namibians.

"My message to Namibians is that as neighbours and friendly countries seeking to constantly expand every opportunity to promote further cooperation and goodwill between us ... citizens of each country should not engage in any actions that would undermine these efforts," he said.

Khama said there is no need for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the African Union (AU) to intervene in the matter.

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The three Nchindo brothers were buried on 17 November at their Impalila Island village, along with their 69-year old mother, Alphonsina Mubu, who died days after her sons were killed.

Their uncle Pasco Sibuku shared at the funeral that when family members went to identify the bodies, they were shocked at what they saw.

"... my late nephew Wamunyima's face was in a bad condition. It seems as though he was tortured and shot. You cannot look at his face. He was shot twice, once close to the heart and in the lower back, which broke his back. As for Tommy and Sinvula, they were also shot twice each – close to the heart and in the lower back as well," Sibuku said.

A joint investigation by both governments was launched last month, after president Hage Geingob engaged with Botswana's president, Mokgweetsi Masisi, on the matter.

Police chief inspector general Sebastian Ndeitunga told The Namibian yesterday that a major part of the investigation has been concluded.

"We have covered the large part of our investigation. The team went back to Katima Mulilo today and after that, they are going to Botswana for three days to continue with the investigation. But we are almost done," Ndeitunga said.

**'TRIGGER HAPPY'**

President Hage Geingob has extended more condolences to the families of the four fishermen who were gunned down by the "trigger-happy Botswana Defence Force".

Geingob made this statement during the last Cabinet meeting of 2020 yesterday morning.

"A safe and peaceful environment is central to our development and survival as a country. Therefore, I once again reiterate and extend my deepest sympathies to the Nchindo and Munyeme families on their tragic loss of beloved sons and brothers, who brutally died at the hands of the trigger-happy Botswana Defence Force," Geingob said.

The president and his government were subjected to staunch criticism from the public over their silence for an entire week after the killings.

"I thank our esteemed traditional leaders from the Zambezi region for the support they have given the government during this trying period," Geingob said.