

Shifeta calls to up game against wildlife crime ... as 11 rhino carcasses discovered

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by [Charmaine Ngatjiheue](#)



ENVIRONMENT, forestry and tourism minister Pohamba Shifeta says the recent discoveries of 11 dead rhinos are an indication that the country needs to up its game in curbing wildlife crime.

This comes after the rhino carcasses were discovered at Etosha National Park, since the beginning of June to date, with their horns removed.

Investigations indicate that the carcasses range between three weeks and older.

To date, a total of 22 rhinos have been poached so far this year, compared to 43 in 2021, and 40 in 2020.

The ministry, in collaboration with the police, the defence force and other partners, will intensify wildlife protection and law enforcement interventions. This includes intensifying their patrols, security and intelligence at Etosha National Park. No arrests have been made since the discovery of the carcasses.

Shifeta yesterday said there is an urgent need to reorganise their combined forces and change their operation strategies. Speaking at a wildlife protection and law enforcement forum, Shifeta said the loss of natural resources as a result of poaching cannot easily be quantified in monetary terms.

He stressed that Namibia has experienced a massive increase in wildlife crime over the past decade, which is driven by an increased global demand for illegal wildlife products.

"Concerning this latest poaching incident in the Etosha National Park, I respectfully and unequivocally give you marching orders, as a combined team, to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes are brought to book by all means."

He said the country has lost a significant number of rhinos, elephants, pangolins and other wildlife to poaching. These losses have had a much wider impact, and as a result, tourism and conservation-hunting industries have adversely affected rural livelihoods, in addition to the impact on the domestic economy.

Shifeta said the involvement of organised crime in poaching and wildlife trafficking promotes corruption, threatens peace and national security, and strengthens illicit trade routes.

"It equally destabilises our economy and the livelihoods of our rural communities who depend on wildlife," Shifeta said.

Prosecutor general Martha Imalwa said wildlife crime in Namibia has become a serious concern, which threatens national heritage and damages the environment.

Speaking at the same platform, Imalwa said it is only practical for everyone to work together to find ways to tackle wildlife crime.

"As the criminal elements commit these crimes against our rich biodiversity and continue to change their methods and tactics of committing wildlife crimes, as stakeholders we must also do the same in our efforts to counter these threats," Imalwa said.

Police deputy inspector general for operations Joseph Shikongo said although the National Strategy on Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement was revised, they have observed a growing international demand for wildlife and wildlife products. He said in an effort to supply the demand, transnational criminal syndicates have created networks that facilitate the execution of poaching and related wildlife crimes.

"These networks make it so dynamic to combat such crimes, which involve the recruitment of locals for a minimal financial reward, by mostly foreign criminal syndicates," Shikongo said.

The ongoing joint anti-poaching efforts and operations between the police, the ministry and the defence force are yielding notable results, despite challenges hampering the consistent eradication of poaching incidents, especially rhinos for their horns.

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