

Heavy sentence as preacher admits rhino poaching

News - National | 2022-09-13

Page no: !

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Jackson Babi

THE preacher and admitted rhinoceros poacher Jackson Babi is facing a prison term of at least 10 years, which would increase to 27 years if he does not pay fines also imposed on him, after pleading guilty on 11 criminal charges in the Gobabis Regional Court.

Magistrate Eden Iyambo sentenced Babi to an effective period of 10 years' imprisonment and also to fines totalling N\$370 000 or further prison terms totalling 17 years on Friday.

Babi (32) was sentenced after he admitted guilt on eleven charges on Monday last week.

He pleaded guilty on two counts of illegally hunting specially protected game, two charges of theft, charges of illegally supplying a firearm and ammunition to persons, two counts of money laundering, and charges of racketeering, possession of rhino horns and bribery.

Babi has been held in custody since being arrested after two rhino horns were found in his house in Windhoek in May 2020.

With his pleas to the charges, Babi admitted he was involved in the poaching of a rhino cow and calf at a farm in the Gobabis district on 21 to 22 May 2020.

He also admitted he was involved in the theft of the two rhinos' horns after the animals had been illegally killed and that he supplied a hunting rifle and ammunition to five men who had been charged with him.

Babi further admitted he was guilty of racketeering and acquiring the stolen horns of the two poached rhinos and that he was in possession of two rhino horns at his house in Windhoek between 23 and 27 May 2020.

In respect of the bribery charge that he faced, Babi admitted that he offered a bribe of N\$13 000 to a police officer in June 2020, in an attempt to get the officer to facilitate his release on bail.

The magistrate sentenced Babi to direct prison terms of three years, plus a fine of N\$100 000 or two years' imprisonment, on each of two charges of illegally hunting specially protected game.

On each of the two counts of theft of rhino horns, Babi was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The magistrate also sentenced him to fines totalling N\$170 000, or a combined period of 13 years' imprisonment, on the remaining charges, and declared Babi unfit to possess a firearm for a period of four years after his eventual release from prison.

The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism has welcomed the sentences imposed by the magistrate.

"We view it to be commensurate with the nature of offences committed. It is our hope that it will also serve as a deterrent to those with an intention to commit similar crimes," the ministry's spokesperson, Romeo Muyunda, said in a statement after the sentencing.

Babi was represented by defence lawyer Mbanga Siyomunji.

Public prosecutor Marchell Hoëb represented the state.

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