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## Kruger Park rhino poachers slapped with hefty jail sentences ranging from 16 to 18 years

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Rangers surround an injured rhino at Kruger National Park.  
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- **Five people have been sentenced for rhino poaching.**
- **Two of the accused will spend 16 years in prison, while the other three will spend 18 years behind bars.**
- **The sentences were handed down last week in the Skukuza Regional Court.**

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Five people found guilty of rhino poaching and related charges were handed down sentences ranging from 16 years to 18 years behind bars.

The five - Sam Nyagumbi Thobela, 50, Ezekiel Solomon Mafuyeka, 27, Simon Salomon Mhlanga, 43, Morris Paul Chauke, 41, as well as Sam Jack Maluleke, 48, were sentenced in the Skukuza Regional Court on different days last week.

Thobela and Mafuyeka were sentenced to 16 years behind bars, while Mafuyeka, Mhlanga and Chauke were given 18 years.

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According to Mpumalanga police spokesperson Brigadier Selvy Mohlala, Thobela and Mafuyeka had entered Malelane Section of the Kruger National Park on 30 January 2020 with the intention of hunting rhinos for the purpose of obtaining their horns.

"The rangers then noticed some strange tracks in the park which immediately alerted them [to] intruders. The two accused were traced with the help of a tracker dog then apprehended where they were found with two rhino horns, as well as one rifle which did not have serial numbers, six cartridges and an axe."

Meanwhile, the other three accused were arrested after they shot and wounded white rhinos at Kruger National Park.

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"The field rangers at the park heard some gunshots on the day in question and swiftly responded where they managed to capture the three accused thereby discovering that the intruders were in possession of a large calibre firearm as well as ammunition, an axe and some bags.

"The wounded rhinoceros, which was also [hacked] with an axe on the back, was found closer to the scene where the accused persons were apprehended," Mohlala said.

The Provincial Commissioner of the SAPS in Mpumalanga, Lieutenant-General Semakaleng Daphney Manamela commended the court for finalising the cases quickly.

"We are also happy with the synergy that exists between the investigators, the field rangers, the prosecution team and the judiciary. We are indeed winning the war against crime," Manamela said.