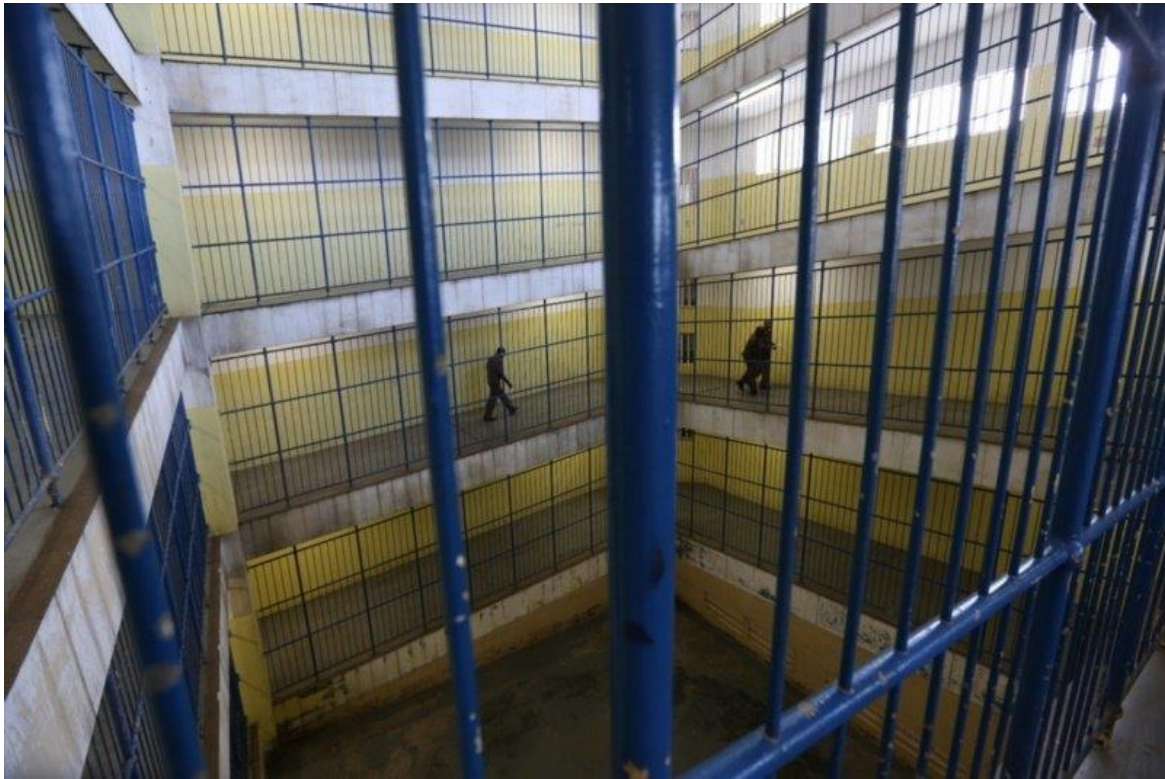


Two men sentenced to 44 years' imprisonment for rhino poaching

Lisalee Solomons
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- Two men have been sentenced to 44 years' imprisonment for rhino poaching.
 - They have also been found guilty of possession of four rhino horns.
 - Their sentences will run concurrently.
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The Zeerust Magistrate's Court in North West on Thursday sentenced two men to 44 years' imprisonment each for rhino poaching and other offences.

Alfredo Siteo, 43, and Thomas Mlambo, 46, were found guilty of possession of four rhino horns, rhino poaching, trespassing and possession of an unlicensed firearm.

Some of the sentences will run concurrently, meaning the men will only serve 12 years behind bars.

The charges against a third accused were withdrawn.

Siteo and Mlambo's conviction came after they and three other people were arrested while travelling in a minibus in Nietverdiend outside Zeerust in October last year.

"The accused's vehicle was spotted by Madikwe game rangers, who approached it. Upon seeing the rangers' vehicle, the minibus sped off, leading to a car chase," Lieutenant Colonel Amanda Funani said.

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Police said the minibus was ultimately brought to a halt, and police were summoned.

"During the search, an unlicensed firearm and rhino horns wrapped in foil... were found inside a black plastic bag. The police also found an axe, one rifle, ammunition, a knife and a silencer. The suspects were arrested after failing to account for the [items]," said Funani.

One of the men escaped before detention while Thomas Chauke escaped before his court appearance in November last year, added Funani.

The police have urged anyone with information about their whereabouts to contact their nearest police station or Crime Stop on 08600 10111.

North West police commissioner Lieutenant General Sello Kwena applauded the Lehurutshe Stock Theft and Endangered Species Unit for its collaboration with game rangers in ensuring that the men were arrested and convicted.