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SOUTH AFRICA

Rhino horn trafficking must be treated as transnational organised crime, say wildlife organisations

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World Rhino Day seeks to create awareness and find new ways to stop poaching and keep the endangered species from extinction.

Image: Steve Winter

Law enforcement agencies globally must address rhino horn trafficking as transnational organised crime, with an increased focus on the higher-level actors in the supply chain.

This was the main message that emerged from a joint webinar hosted by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) SA and the Wildlife Justice Commission to mark World Rhino Day on Thursday.

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Malaysia seizes animal parts worth \$18 mn

Malaysian customs officials say they have seized a stash of rare animal parts worth \$18 million thought to have come from Africa, including elephant tusks, rhino horns and pangolin scales.



The webinar focused on the status of African rhino populations and gave insight into an analysis of the trafficking of rhino horn over the past decade.

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The findings of this analysis will be published in a Wildlife Justice Commission report before Cites COP19 in Panama City in November.

The report is intended to produce an assessment of the threat to rhino in 2022 to inform law enforcement, conservation and policymakers' interventions to tackle the illegal trade and ensure the global response is appropriately targeted to current needs.

Sarah Stoner, director of intelligence of the Wildlife Justice Commission, said there was irrefutable evidence pointing to the involvement of transnational organised crime as a main driver of rhino poaching and trafficking.

“As a high-value criminal commodity, illicit trade in rhino horns is showing no signs of abating. The threat must be addressed as a crime crisis rather than just a conservation crisis.”

Corruption was also found to be a crucial enabler of all forms of wildlife crime, helping criminal operations acquire and move rhino horns throughout the supply chain and undermine the criminal justice system.

The organisations said the average shipment weight increased markedly after 2017 and this trend continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

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South Africa dehorn rhinos to prevent poaching

South Africa has dehorned dozens of rhinos in three popular game parks, aiming to prevent armed poachers taking advantage of the post-COVID-19 crash in tourism to kill them for their horns. Soraya Ali reports.



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Jo Shaw, Africa rhino lead with WWF, said in the [latest population figures](#) for African rhino released by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's African Rhino Specialist Group (IUCN AfRSG) last month, it was encouraging to see an increase in numbers of the critically endangered black rhino.

Populations increased by 3% a year from 2017 to 2021, reaching a total of 6,195 by the end of 2021. However, it was concerning that numbers of the more numerous white rhino declined to 15,942 and were 11.8% lower at the end of 2021 than the 18,067 white rhino recorded at the end of 2017.

These declines predominantly occurred in the large, state-managed protected areas in SA.

“Entrenched organised crime networks co-ordinating these crimes threaten not just rhino, but also the people who conserve them and societies living around conservation areas.”

Shaw added that the IUCN AfRSG report on the newly-released population figures showed rhino populations co-managed through partnerships, such as those between local people, the private sector and state agencies, were performing better than those managed solely by state agencies.

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