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**Wildlife security guard killed two rhinos,
then his accomplice to avoid sharing
R1million loot**



Bethuel Mdubane has been sentenced to 24 years imprisonment for an assortment of crimes including murder, unlawful possession of a firearm, and hunting and shooting two rhinos. Photo: NPA

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Pretoria - The High Court in Polokwane has convicted and sentenced 36-year-old Bethuel Mdubane to 24 years effective imprisonment for an

assortment of crimes including murder, unlawful possession of a firearm, and hunting and shooting two rhinos.

Additionally, Mdubane was also sentenced for unlawful possession of stolen car, two counts of possession of ammunition, and three counts of unlawful possession of prohibited firearms.

NPA spokesperson in Limpopo Mashudu Malabi-Dzhangji said: “The second accused, Ebony Mokoena, was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment or a fine of R3000 for malicious damage to property, while accused number three turned into a State witness. The court further ordered the sentence to run concurrently, and the accused is declared unfit to possess a firearm.

“The first accused (Mdubane) was a member of Waterberg ranger services, working as a security officer preventing the poaching of wild animals including the rhinos at Lapalala Wilderness Nature Reserve.”



Bethuel Mdubane has been sentenced to 24 years imprisonment for an assortment of crimes including murder, unlawful possession of a firearm, and hunting and shooting two rhinos. Photo: NPA

Malabi-Dzhanghi added: “On 10 March 2020, the accused was on duty when he shot and killed two rhinos and further removed their horns. He then killed Primar Salazar Maluleque, his accomplice, claiming that he is the one who was poaching the rhinos.”

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The National Prosecuting Authority said Maluleque and Mdubane had differences in sharing the proceeds from the rhino horns.

“The rhino horns were never recovered and the estimated value for both horns is R1 million. On 19 November 2022, when the police officers were arresting the accused in his homestead, they found a 303 rifle, a bag containing a silencer, an axe, a knife, and five rounds of 303 live ammunition,” said Malabi-Dzhanghi.

During the trial, Mdubane pleaded not guilty to the offences.

As aggravation of sentence, State advocate Trott Mphahlele submitted that Mdubane be found guilty of serious offences which were prevalent in the jurisdiction. The accused had not shown any element of remorse.

Mphahlele told the court that rhino poaching was increasing yearly. He submitted that it was upon the court to send a strong message to would-be offenders.

Meanwhile, the National Prosecuting Authority has welcomed the sentences, and applauded the “good work” done by Mphahlele and Warrant Officer Kruger.

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