

Six rhino poachers sentenced to between 16 to 20 years



BY [APHIWE NGOWAPI](#) JUNE 15, 2023 UPDATED: JUNE 16, 2023 [NO COMMENTS](#) 3 MINS READ



The conservative community await for the judge to read the sentence. Front row: The six accused felons inside Court A at the Makhanda High Court. Photo: Aphiwe Ngowapi

By Aphiwe Ngowapi

Six Zimbabwean nationals, found guilty of rhino poaching, appeared at the Makhanda High Court on Wednesday, 14 June 2023, for their long-awaited sentencing.

The six felons were first arrested in July 2018. Almost five years after their arrest, Francis Chitiyo, Trymore Chauke, Misheck Chauke, Simba Masinge, Nhamo Muyambo, and Abraham Moyane have been sentenced to between 16 to 20 years for conspiracy to kill rhinos so that they could steal their horns and for possession of an unlawful firearm and ammunition.

The Eastern Cape conservation community and members of the public filled the Makhanda High Court courtroom for the sentencing of six poachers.

Each felon was given a different sentence of imprisonment respectively; accused number one, Chitiyo, 20 years; accused number two, Chauke, 17 years; accused number three, Chauke, 16 years; accused number four, Misinge, 17 years; accused number five, Muyambo, 19 years; and accused number six, Moyane, 18 years.

Judge Gerald Bloem considered that the defendant's attorneys, Viwe Mqeke and Charles Stamper, pleaded that their clients were all fathers to young children and had families that depended on them back in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

On 30 September 2022, all six felons were present for their initial conviction. Then on 18 October 2022, the felons, besides accused number three, Chauke, escaped from custody. They were recaptured one by one, with accused number four, Masinge, being captured on 21 October 2022; accused number two, Chauke, on 1 November 2022; accused number six, Moyane, on 11 April 2023; and accused number one, Chitiyo, and five, Muyambo, on 21 May 2023.

The judge also elaborated on the nature of the offence when it comes to conspiracy to commit theft of a rhino horn, quoting [section 57-1 of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act and subsections one, three, five, nine and ten](#). This section inhibits any activity which endangers the lives of threatened, endangered species. It was also mentioned that statistics suggest that the six accused had played a crucial role in the extinction of rhinos in the Eastern Cape because when the felons were in the custody of the police, there were no poaching incidents, except when the other prisoners escaped.

The prosecution commended SAPS Jeffreys Bay Stock Theft and Endangered Species Commander Captain Mornay Viljoen and his investigative team for their excellent work. Viljoen is also responsible for all rhino poaching investigations in the Province.

Eastern Cape provincial commissioner, Lieutenant General Nomthetheleli Mene, also commended the investigating team for its crucial role in ensuring heavy poacher sentencings. He stated that SAPS is unwavering in its commitment to fighting organised crimes against wildlife.

“We will continue to cooperate with role players to implement robust measures to curb rhino poaching and to arrest perpetrators of this crime within the Eastern Cape borders,” said Mene.

Dr William Fowlds, Wildlife vet and conservationist of the Eastern Cape said, “I think that justice has been served; this is a landmark decision in that it sends a clear message to poachers that the intent to commit these crimes is just as serious, in the eyes of the law, as actually committing the crimes themselves. I think it sends a strong message to the illegal underworld of crime that we are serious about protecting biodiversity and our environment.”



The conservation community waiting for the judge to read the sentence. In the front row sit the six accused felons inside Court A at the Makhanda High Court. Photo: Aphiwe Ngowapi