



‘Mistaken identity’ led to rhino poaching ‘kingpin’ arrest

Dumisani Gwala's trial resumed in Mtubatuba this week

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Rhino poaching accused Dumisani Gwala Photo: Tamlyn Head

Dumisani Gwala, who was in 2014 arrested on rhino poaching charges along with co-accused Wiseman Mageba and a third, since deceased accomplice, told Mtubatuba Regional Court that his arrest and charging following a sting operation was a case of mistaken identity.

Gwala, whose legal representative Zwelonke Ngwenya was on Tuesday cross-examining retired undercover SAPS agent Thatia Moremi, alleged that he became the 'target' of the police operation erroneously as it was his brother, Senzo 'Shibilika' Gwala, who was infamous in the Manguzi and Ingwavuma areas for the crimes for which he has been accused.



Ngwenya said there is 'evidence' at the Ingwavuma court to back his client's claim because that is where 'Shibilika' was convicted and sentenced.

"I don't know anything about Shibilika, he was our Shibilika," Moremi responded.

After having suffered more than 30 postponements since 2014, Gwala's trial resumed in Mtubatuba this week.

Background

- Dumisani Gwala, with co-accused Wiseman Makeba and Aubrey Dlamini (since deceased), were arrested in December 2014 after an eight-month intelligence-driven sting operation in which he was sold rhino horn by undercover cops
- Former Hawks police officer Jean-Pierre van Zyl Roux led the operation and is the prime witness for the State
- At the time, Gwala was described as the rhino poaching 'kingpin' and it was alleged he was involved in about 80% of KZN's illegal rhino horn trade
- Gwala lives in Manguzi, some 19km from the Mozambique border, a notorious hub for wildlife and drug trafficking
- When arrested, a fight ensued, during which Gwala was shot after allegedly resisting arrest and trying to drive over a policeman

- The matter was meant to go on trial on 4 August 2015 but has suffered over 30 postponements, including at least nine delays owing to changes of lawyers by the defence
- The trial also led to accusation of 'protection' by magistrates of alleged rhino poachers and other serious crime offenders.

This led to the suspension by Parliament of Court President Eric Nzimande in October 2018

- The trial was originally heard at Ngwelezana Magistrate's Court but was transferred to the Mtubatuba Regional Court in May 2018