



FAUNA AND FLORA ZIMBABWE

## 4 nabbed for Ivory Possession in Zimbabwe: About CITES and International Trade in Ivory

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### **The case**

Four Zimbabweans were recently arrested for possession of 5 pieces of raw ivory in contravention of the Parks and Wildlife Act, Chapter 20:14.

On Friday 7 October 2022, Police in Guruve, a district in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe received information from a whistleblower to the effect that there were some men in possession of raw pieces of ivory.

Acting on the the tip off, the police intercepted Moses Matienga (45), Simbarashe Matore (35), Last Karande(23) and Thomas Tangai (32) near Dande Bridge, along Guruve-Mahuwe Road.

The four were arrested and 5 pieces of raw ivory weighing 30.13kgs were seized as exhibits.

In terms of section 128 of the Parks and Wildlife Act, Chapter 20:14, a person convicted for ivory possession must generally be sentenced to not less than 9 years imprisonment.

### **CITES and International Trade in Ivory**

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between states. A total of 184 countries are CITES member states. The international agreement is aimed at ensuring that international trade in wild animals (Fauna) and plants specimens (Flora) does not threaten their survival.

Despite international trade restrictions through CITES, demand for ivory is high in countries like China, Japan and the USA where ivory is considered a luxury and a symbol of wealth.

The black market price for illegal ivory is very high in China where the rich buy carved ivory and whole tusks as a status symbol of wealth.

CITES makes its decisions through what is known as a Conference of Parties (COP). In 1997, at the 10th CITES COP, elephant populations for Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana were downlisted to CITES appendix 2 from appendix 1. In simple terms, CITES gave a green light for controlled trade in ivory for the three Southern African countries.

The downlisting was followed by massive elephant poaching. Through an elephant aerial census which was carried out between October and November 1999, an estimated 1378 elephant carcasses were recorded in the Zambezi region in Zimbabwe.

Today, Zimbabwe elephants are still in CITES appendix 2 where trade is allowed. However, CITES imposes very stringent conditions which heavily restricts trade. Zimbabwe must first ask for permission from CITES before trading.

3 years ago, Zimbabwe alongside with Botswana and Namibia asked for the right to sell ivory acquired through natural deaths and poaching confiscations. CITES refused to allow the sale.

The late 90s experience is testimony that allowing international trade in ivory triggers elephant poaching. As a result, most CITES member countries outside Southern Africa have been calling for all African elephants to be put on appendix 1 where there won't be any trade.

On the other hand, countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana are praying to be allowed to freely trade. The argument is that there are too many elephants and this is causing human elephant conflicts. It has also been argued that the Southern African countries are financially incapacitated to manage the elephant populations and therefore they need the money from ivory trade.

The latter triggered Zimbabwe to host an Elephant Summit in May this year. The summit was attended by representatives of 14 African countries, Japan and China. The elephant summit was aimed at discussing conservation, elephant management and the negative impact of the ban on international trade in ivory. Japan and China attended the summit for obvious reasons. They are large consumer markets for both legal and illegal ivory. Do they care if international trade in ivory fuels elephant poaching?

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