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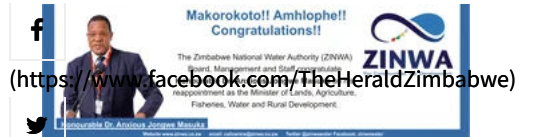
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September 14, 2023

Courts intensify fight against wildlife crimes





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Ivan Zhakata and Trust Freddy

Herald Correspondents

The courts have intensified the fight to combat breaches of wildlife laws with the Harare Magistrates Court dedicating Court 5 to deal with such issues, acting Deputy Prosecutor General Mr Michael Reza said yesterday.

He told the Zimbabwe Animal Law conference in Harare yesterday that since the beginning of the year, nine cases have been completed while 12 new cases have been recorded.

From January 2020 to date, 45 cases involving breaches of the parks and wildlife law have been prosecuted at the Harare Magistrates Court, and Mr Reza said given the prevalence of such cases, the courts have “an obligation to keep the wildlife safe”.

Apart from dedicating Court 5 to parks and wildlife cases, prosecutors have also been ordered to ensure that the correct charges are preferred against suspects brought to court.

Prosecutors were required to ensure the docket had all the necessary paperwork for trial and that the correct exhibits were available and booked at the court.

“Preferring a wrong charge against an accused person is in itself tantamount to a criminal act,” said Mr Reza. “As prosecutors, we are trained to keep a sharp eye on that and we need to have the proper character for this work.

“Collectively, all of us who deal with animal matters must worry about our character, not our reputation. We have an obligation to keep the wildlife safe on behalf of our children and our children’s children and failure to do so, collectively we will all wear the cap of madness.”

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Mr Reza said poachers and their ilk, who use and abuse animals, know that the law and all decent people were against them and they have upped the ante making it “extremely difficult to apprehend, but we must all be on the lookout”.

He also said Zimbabweans must not expect people from outside to look after the animals for them, but should do it themselves in keeping with President Mnangagwa’s mantra, “Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo/ Ilizwe lakhiwa ngabanikazi balo”.

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Zimbabwe communications officer Mr Luckmore Safuli said they believe the judiciary has a critical role to play in combating wildlife crimes.

“It is for this reason that we continue to engage governments and multilateral organisations in all the countries where we operate to develop effective laws and policies that protect individual wild animals, wild populations and their habitats,” he said.

“Under the Wildlife Crime Programme, we are collaborating with ZimParks to increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies to detect, interdict, seize and transfer to investigatory agencies illegal wildlife products through raising awareness, training and provision of critical equipment.

“Together with Speak Out For Animals we also support the wider justice system through the provision of training and sensitisation opportunities for prosecutors, magistrates and judges,” said Mr Safuli.

Meanwhile, the National Prosecuting Authority says it has completed 70 percent of the trials for wildlife crimes brought before the courts in the first seven months of this year.

This came out yesterday at the signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association and the NPA, aimed at enhancing the fight against nature crimes.



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Speaking during the ceremony, acting Prosecutor-General Mr Nelson Mutsonziwa said the number of wildlife crime-related cases had drastically gone down as a result of stiffer penalties being meted out on culprits.

“We are making good progress. So far we have managed to complete 70 percent of all wildlife cases that have been brought to us by the investigating authorities such as ZimParks and the police.

“I can confidently confirm that the number of crime dockets that are coming in has gone down and we now have very few cases and that is a big indication that we are being successful in terms of prosecution,” said Mr Mutsonziwa.

Besides ZELA, Mr Mutsonziwa said the NPA was working with several organisations involved in wildlife and environmental protection to stop wildlife crimes.

“Most of these organisations including ZELA are working with law enforcement agencies to crack down on poachers and traffickers as well as educate the public about conservation of our flora and fauna.

“They are also investigating the drivers of illegal wildlife trade in Zimbabwe in a bid to design public awareness and behavioural change campaigns to combat wildlife and environmental crimes,” he said.

There was a need for continuing legal education of prosecutors through specialised training in wildlife and environmental law to enhance efficiency. There was a need to find new and improved methods of gathering and analysing information about the criminal networks to support policy formulation by the Government.

ZELA programme manager Ms Nyaradzo Mutsonhori commended the NPA for its dedication to reducing nature crimes.

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“We applaud the authority’s efforts towards fighting and combating wildlife and environmental crimes that are now threatening environmental and wildlife resources in Zimbabwe and globally.

“The Authority has a pertinent role in safeguarding the environment and all its resources through undertaking criminal prosecutions on behalf of the state and today we pledge our support and commitment to collaborate with the Authority to ensure that environmental and wildlife crimes are prosecuted expeditiously,” she said.

The collaboration is expected to enhance the fight against nature crimes and ensure the environment and its resources are protected for present and future generations to come as enunciated by the national constitution.

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Prosper Dembedza Herald Correspondent The fraud trial involving George Katsimberis has been adjourned to September 25 following the presiding magistrate's unavailability. Katsimberis is facing a charge of defrauding Pokugara Properties of US\$1 million in a botched deal after he built a showroom in Borrowdale using an unapproved building plan, resulting in the structure being destroyed [...]

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