

Only 30% of wildlife crime arrests over 9 years resulted in convictions – report

Of the 6 060 arrests made in connection with wildlife crime cases since 2015, only 1 802 resulted in convictions by the end of 2024 – a conviction rate of just 30%.

By the end of 2024, 1 738 of the 2 845 wildlife crime cases registered since 2015 remained unresolved, a new report has revealed.

The Namibia National Report on Wildlife Protection for 2024 notes that these figures highlight shortcomings in gathering sufficient evidence during investigations, effectively proving guilt during prosecutions, finalising cases in court and ultimately, delivering justice.

The report warns that the high number of unresolved cases places a huge burden on law enforcement, the judiciary, prosecutors and detention facilities.

“Identifying and charging the suspect(s) is the vital first step in delivering justice for a committed crime. Then begins the arduous task of securing sufficient incriminating evidence and preparing the case for trial,” the authors write.

The report notes further that while “arrests are widely celebrated as ultimate successes yet arrests of perpetrators are meaningless if they do not lead to appropriate sentences.”

Justice served

The authors add that “while conviction rates in finalised cases were above 70% for all years since 2016, the rate of case finalisation has been far below the rate of case registration.”

The report notes that the ultimate aim of an arrest is to ensure a conviction with an appropriate sentence for the committed crime and that to achieve this, investigators and prosecutors need to work closely together, and the courts must recognise the seriousness of the crime.

Moreover, the point of criminal prosecutions is to ensure justice is served by demonstrating the guilt of charged suspects and convincing the court of a suitable sentence to fit the committed crime.

Systemic changes urgent

In 2022, the Namibian prosecutor general initiated proactive interventions to reduce the widening gap between registered and finalised wildlife crime cases.

Special courts dedicated to wildlife cases were held in a number of priority locations for limited periods.

“These made substantial contributions to expediting case finalisation, yet only reduced the rate at which case backlogs were increasing, rather than reversing the ratio. Systemic changes are needed to truly address the issues,” the national wildlife report notes.

The report highlights that the relentlessly growing backlog of wildlife cases in courts prompted the establishment of a dedicated Environmental Crimes Court in Namibia, which was inaugurated in 2024.

Viewed as a major milestone, the court is expected to reshape the country's response to wildlife crime within the halls of justice.

“In combination with targeted special courts and other initiatives, it should be possible to balance the backlog of cases – if the severity of wildlife crimes is fully recognised," the authors point out.