

JUSTICE

## RHINO FARMER ARRESTED

### Allegations of an alleged politically motivated witch hunt

**After the world's largest rhino farmer was arrested in the neighbouring country last week, the question arises as to whether this will have a negative impact on Namibia's application to CITES to legalise the trade in rhino horns.**

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The largest rhino farmer in Namibia says the arrest of his South African role model and mentor, John Hume, is a kind of witch hunt and politically motivated. Jaco Muller of the Rhino Momma Project expressed his opinion after the world's largest rhino farmer was arrested last week.

Asked whether Namibia's application to CITES for the legal trade in rhino horn would be negatively affected by this, Muller said that Hume had gone bankrupt precisely because of the ban on the legal trade in rhino horn. "If it weren't for this ban, he would still be the largest rhino farmer in the world, and still busy increasing the global rhino population by almost 200 calves every year. I am 110 percent sure that he is innocent, and that this is politically motivated." "The facts will come to light, and if I am wrong, I would be deeply shocked," Muller told Network Media Hub (NMH) Publishing. Müller has already visited Hume twice and asked him how to farm white rhinos.

#### Application to CITES

Namibia has now submitted an application to the 20th session of the International Climate Change Conference (COP20) of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to amend the entry of its population of the southern white rhinoceros in Appendix II of CITES.

According to the document submitted to CITES, this will only allow international trade in live animals for in-situ conservation, hunting trophies and stocks of rhinos of Namibian origin owned by the government or private landowners. However, confiscated horns as well as those of unknown origin would be excluded.

Namibia's document to CITES explains that the white rhino population continues to face a constant threat of illegal poaching, driven primarily by the horn's high value. "In response to the growing risk of poaching, these private landowners have borne high security costs, including upgraded fences, ranger patrols and

surveillance systems."

#### Southern Africa's

Community Effort Another well-known Namibian game farmer whose white rhinos have been repeatedly attacked by poachers, Gerrie Odendaal, said the problem lies with the two-thirds majority of votes in CITES. "I can't see how we're supposed to do that. It will really take a joint effort by Southern Africa, with many threats and pressure for them to withdraw from CITES. But can they afford it?" asks Odendaal. "Not really, with the strong hunting industry and the consequences that would entail." The former Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Pohamba Shifeta, had already threatened that Namibia would leave CITES. About 77 percent of Namibian white rhinos live on private property. According to the document, many owners were forced to reduce their rhino herds or to increase them altogether and all rhinos. "Unfortunately, when private owners remove rhinos from their land, the entire habitat for white rhinos in Namibia also decreases." Since 2022, Namibia has exported 124 white rhinos to Angola, South Africa, Zambia and the USA. Muller's rhinos were exported to Texas, and he confirmed yesterday that they are doing very well there.

The CITES summit will take place in Uzbekistan from November 24 to December 5. Hume, who is accused of having been involved in an international syndicate dealing in rhinoceros, insists on his innocence. Hume, 83, explained in a letter to his friends and family that he has been actively working with the South African Police Service (SAPS) since 2020 to support the investigation. "During this time, I have complied with every request and communicated openly with law enforcement to support their investigations."

#### Background

The fact that the bail negotiation remained unchallenged speaks volumes. "It reflects the confidence of the state in my willingness to endure the trial with dignity, and I believe it underscores their recognition of my integrity and accountability," Hume writes.

He appeared last week at the district court in Pretoria together with five co-defendants, including a family member, his former lawyers and his farm manager – on 55 counts in connection with the illegal trade in rhino horn. The charges range from fraud, money laundering and theft to violations of the National Environmental Management and Biodiversity Act of 2004 and organized crime.

Meanwhile, another rhino farmer in South Africa, Derek Lewitton (55), is a free man for the time being. He was arrested almost two years ago in Limpopo during a dramatic raid because he allegedly illegally possessed rhino horns. All charges against Lewitton, who was born in South Africa and grew up in the USA, were dropped last week at the district court in Namakgale near Phalaborwa. Lewitton is the owner of the Black Rock Rhino Sanctuary on Harmony Farm near Gravelotte.