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Namibia disregards the dangers of trade as it seeks to sell elephant ivory and rhino horn

Despite Africa's elephants and rhinos still living under serious threat from poaching and illegal trade, Namibia is pushing hard to resume ivory and horn sales.

From 23 November to 5 December, representatives of the 185 countries that are signatories to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) will gather in Samarkand, Uzbekistan for the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20).

Namibia has put three proposals before the meeting which would rescind existing international trade bans and allow it to sell rhino horns and stockpiled elephant ivory, a move EIA and many other conservation organisations warn would be catastrophic for remaining wild populations, not just in Namibia but elsewhere in Africa too.



Elephants in Namibia

It's first proposal seeks a change to the status of its population of southern white rhinos to allow for international commercial trade in their horns.

Its second is to transfer its population of Critically Endangered black rhinos from Appendix I – the strongest level of CITES protection – to Appendix II to allow for international commercial trade in horns.

And its third is to seek approval to sell off more than 46 tonnes of registered raw ivory (whole tusks and pieces) for commercial purposes.

EIA Deputy Campaign Leader (Elephants) Rachel Mackenna said: “Parties to CITES have a strong history of rejecting attempts to resume legal trade in ivory and rhino horns and we would expect them to hold the line at CoP20.

“Namibia’s proposals are reckless, given the huge weight of evidence that legal ivory and rhino horn trade in the past has primarily served to stimulate demand, which inevitably leads to more poaching and trafficking of illegal wildlife products.”

Namibia’s push comes as rhino populations around the world remain at high risk from poaching and illegal trade – and Namibia in particular continues to experience high levels of rhino poaching, increasing by nearly eight per cent in the country in 2024, with 83 rhinos killed compared to 77 in 2023.



Adult white rhino in Namibia (c) safaritravelplus

EIA’s Senior Wildlife Policy Analyst (Rhinos) Taylor Tench highlighted: “It is especially concerning that Namibia has not consulted any other rhino range states in Africa about its plans, despite the exorbitant risks that Namibia’s proposals presents to the safety and conservation of their rhino populations.

“In addition, rhino horn trade is illegal in end-use countries such as China and Vietnam and so Namibia has no apparent viable prospective trading partners.’

“The proposals would also undermine significant efforts made by these consumer countries to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products over the years.”

Namibia’s third proposal to be allowed to sell of 46 tonnes of stockpiled ivory would undo decades of hard-won progress to end the international ivory trade and aid the recovery of elephant populations.

Previous one-off sales of stockpiled ivory under CITES proved to be a disaster for elephants as they primarily served to fuel demand in Asian markets, triggering sharp increases in poaching and trafficking and contributing to catastrophic declines in elephant populations in range states such as Tanzania and Mozambique.

EIA’s Wildlife campaigners will be actively engaging at CoP20 on a range of key issues relating to the protection of elephants, rhinos, Asian big cats, pangolins and vaquita porpoises and will be pushing back hard against Namibia’s detrimental proposals.

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