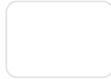
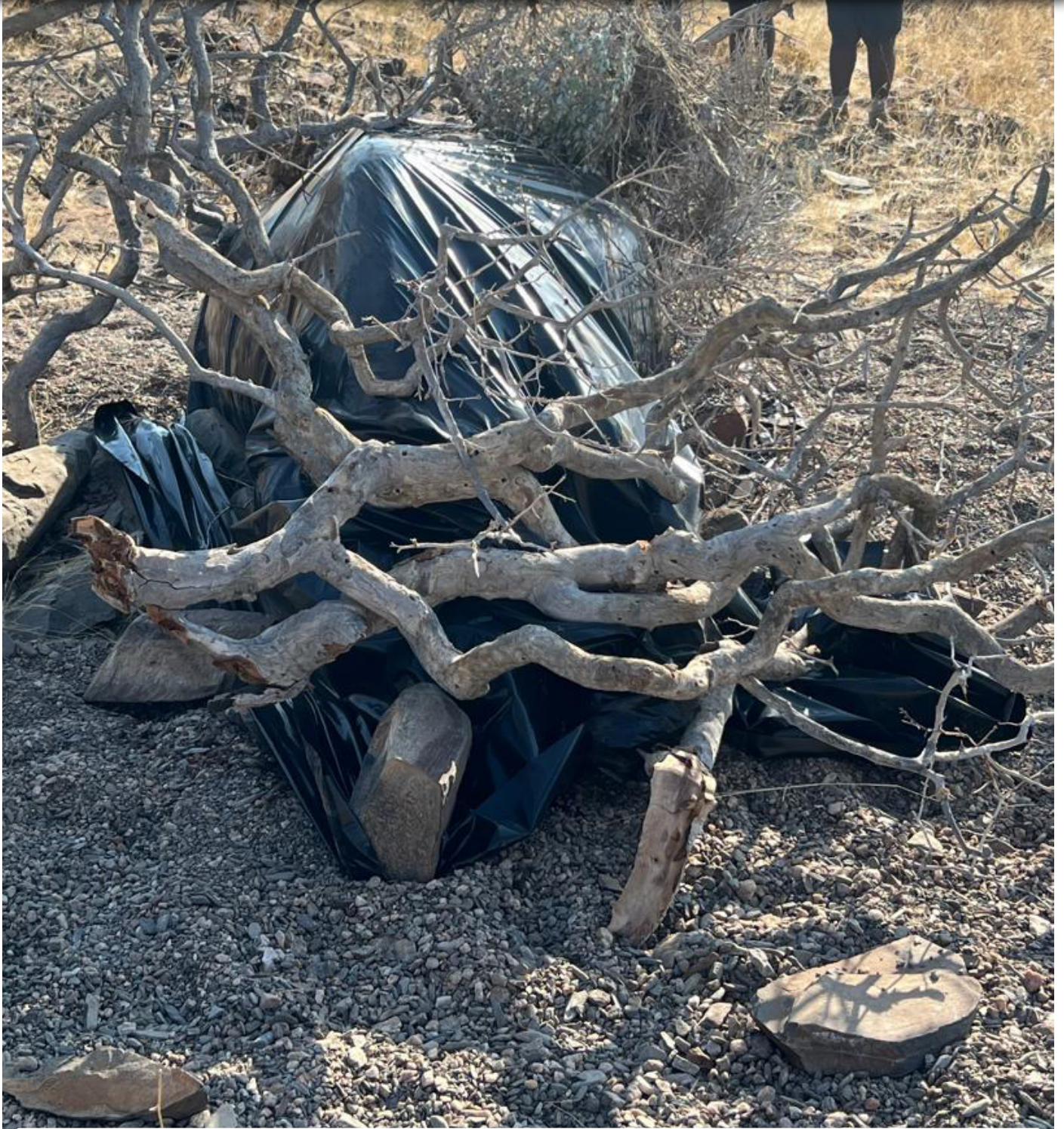


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Namibia's Red Mountain conflict deepens after rhino poaching incident

By Wonder Guchu

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Rhino conservation: A rhino poached at the weekend has become a tragic emblem of the Red Mountain dispute. Photo: Supplied

three community conservancies in north-western Namibia — Doro! Nawas, Sorris Sorris and Uibasen Twyfelfontein — reignited their opposition to mining inside

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areas with the ministry of environment, forestry and tourism.

The zone, jointly administered by the three conservancies, supports desert-adapted black rhinos, elephants and other species and draws eco-tourism revenue that sustains hundreds of rural households. But the same landscape is now targeted for tin and base-metal extraction.

Since 2024, government-issued claims and mineral exploration have expanded across Kunene, triggering protests and legal challenges from the conservancies.

In June 2025, Andrada Mining Limited entered into an ore-supply and profit-share agreement with Goantagab Mining, a Namibian-owned company whose claims fall within the Red Mountain Joint Management Area. The agreement allows Andrada to source up to 240 000 tonnes per year of high-grade tin ore, averaging about 1.5 % tin, to supplement feedstock for its processing plant in Erongo Region.

The three conservancies have since filed petitions to the high court, the ministry of environment, forestry and tourism, that of mines and energy, and the Anti-Corruption Commission, demanding an immediate stop to all mining operations in the area.

They argue that the activities violate environmental clearance conditions and undermine Namibia's flagship community-conservation model. Their petition, signed by more than 800 members, also calls for the removal of the Environmental Commissioner, alleging "gross violations" of the Environmental Management Act by authorising mining in a protected zone.

"We do not hunt in this area, we do not collect firewood in this area, we do not graze livestock in this area, and we do not even live in this area. It is a sanctuary, a protected area designated to benefit future generations," the conservancies said.

They said the ministry's failure to intervene has led to habitat disturbance, increased vehicle access and, most recently, poaching.

The discovery of the rhino carcass on 19 October amplified their warnings. Rhino rangers found the carcass covered with a tarpaulin. Human footprints and tyre tracks — likely from a Land Cruiser — were found nearby.

The ministry, non-governmental organisation Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), the Namibia Police Force, and conservancy teams launched a joint tracking operation with a helicopter deployed to follow leads.



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Amid the outrage, Andrada Mining issued a statement denying any wrongdoing and reaffirming that its operations were fully compliant with Namibian law.

“The Goantagab mining claims are legally registered to Namibian citizens, Timoteus Mashuna and Otilie Ndimulunde, whose rights were granted by the ministry of mines and energy, and the ministry of environment, forestry and tourism in line with all applicable legislation. Goantagab Mining operates as the duly authorised agent of the claim owners,” it said, adding that it “categorically rejects allegations of environmental or legal violations” and remains committed to “full regulatory compliance and responsible sourcing”.

The company said any suggestion that its agreements contributed to rhino poaching or environmental damage was “unfounded and misleading”.

The company further noted that its ore-supply and profit-share agreement, announced on 17 June, remains subject to all commercial and environmental conditions precedent and no mining activity can occur without final clearance.

Still, critics argue the government’s approval of the deal — and its apparent reluctance to suspend licences pending court review — has undermined trust in environmental governance.

The conservancies and partner NGOs insist that mining within custodianship zones violates the purpose of Namibia’s community-based natural resource management framework, which has been globally praised for balancing conservation with rural livelihoods.

The dispute has also drawn in traditional authorities. Daure Daman Traditional Authority chief Zacharias Seibeb has accused conservationists and tour operators of blocking local development and warned Ultimate Safaris, a prominent tourism operator, to stop opposing mining or face eviction from his communal area. He said his community faces mass unemployment and cannot afford to reject projects promising 300 jobs.

“If Ultimate Safaris and others are not willing to coexist with mining, I will request the environmental ministry to relocate these three rhinos to Etosha Pan in the interest of generating 300 jobs for my people,” Seibeb wrote in a letter to the company.

Ultimate Safaris argues that mining and rhino protection are incompatible, citing a Save the Rhino Trust study that found open-pit mining noise drives rhinos away from their core habitat.



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the fight for survival.

Andrada Mining, for its part, insists it is being unfairly implicated in a conflict between competing land-use visions.

The broader question — how Namibia will reconcile its conservation reputation with growing resource-development pressure — now looms larger than ever. Whether through courts or policy reform, the Red Mountain case will likely define how the country balances the pursuit of minerals with the protection of its most endangered wildlife.

Tags: Andrada Mining Limited, Black Rhino Poaching, Black Rhinos, Doro! Nawas Conservancy, Eco-Tourism, Goantagab Mining, Kunene Region, Namibia, Namibian Police Force, Nampol, Red Mountain Joint Management Area, Rhinos, Save The Rhino Trust, Sorris Sorris Conservancy, Sustainable Development, The-Green-Guardian, Tin Mining, Uibasen Twyfelfontein Conservancy, Wildlife Protection

