

South Africa: Leading Conservationist in South Africa Denies Smuggling Rhino Horns Worth \$14m

A leading conservationist in South Africa, charged with smuggling rhino horns worth \$14 million, has insisted he has "nothing to hide".

In a statement, John Hume, the former owner of what is thought to be the world's largest rhino farm, denies allegations that he trafficked the horns from South Africa to South East Asia.

Hume (83) and five others, including a lawyer and a game reserve manager, have appeared in court on 55 charges, including theft, money laundering and fraud.

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The group was allegedly part of an international rhino horn trafficking syndicate between 2017 and 2024, prosecutors say.

Hume and his co-defendants are accused of smuggling more than 960 horns, obtaining permits to sell them locally, when the true intention was to export the horns to South East Asia, where they are used in traditional medicine.

The sale of rhino horns is legal between citizens in South Africa, but exporting them is not allowed.

The accused appeared in a magistrate's court in the capital city Pretoria on Tuesday and were granted bail. They did not enter a plea - this is not required in South Africa during an initial court appearance.

Hume, however, proclaims his innocence in a statement.

"I have nothing to hide and have fully cooperated with investigators for years," he says.

"I categorically reject the allegations against me and maintain that I have never acted unlawfully. I am confident that, once the facts are tested in court, I will be vindicated and my innocence confirmed."

Hume's former farm, Platinum Rhino, was home to approximately 2 000 southern white rhinos.

He sold the farm in 2023, saying he could no longer continue to support the rhinos, which he had been breeding for over two decades.

Hume was born in Zimbabwe and raised on a sheep farm. He made a living developing holiday resorts, before turning his hand to conservation in the 1990s.