



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND TOURISM**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON. POHAMBA SHIFETA, MP**

**MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND TOURISM**

**AT THE NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER FORUM FOR WILDLIFE**

**PROTECTION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

**MOVENPICK HOTEL**

**03 July 2024, 09H00**

**WINDHOEK, KHOMAS REGION**

Director of Ceremonies,

Lieutenant General Joseph Shikongo, Inspector General of the Namibian  
Police Force,

Advocate Martha Imalwa, Prosecutor General,

Officials and officers from Government Offices, Ministries and Agencies,

Representatives of foreign missions in Namibia,

Representatives from International Development Partners,

Representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations,

Community and Conservancy Representatives,

Rhino Custodians,

MEFT staff members and Projects Staff,

Esteem guests, Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you here today as we have gathered for the 2024  
Annual National Stakeholder Forum on Wildlife Protection and Law  
Enforcement.

Since controlling a surge in poaching in the late 1980s and early 1990s  
Namibia has experienced comparatively low levels of illegal killing of wildlife,

particularly of rhinos and elephants. The changes in Protected Areas and Wildlife Management Policies that followed with Independence and the rapid growth of the Community Based Natural Resource Management and the Conservancy and Community Forest Programme in particular have no doubt contributed to the upward population trends shown by most wildlife species in the country, including rhinos, elephants and pangolins.

However, criminal activities related to wildlife and other natural resources are now expanding and escalating, despite concerted counter measures. This is as true for Namibia, as it is at a global level.

The poaching of rhinos continues to be a major concern and the year 2023 saw a slight increase in rhinos poached compared to 2022, with 79 poached in 2022 and 83 in 2023. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, along with its partners, have developed a range of tactical responses to deal with this, and we are hopeful that during the current year we will dismantle key syndicates. Although the data for the past year is not encouraging, I need to acknowledge the work of our staff and operatives on the ground, as well as the Blue Rhino Task Team for the number of pre-emptive arrests of poaching syndicate members who were intercepted before gaining access

to rhino areas including Etosha National Park. These efforts certainly prevented the killing of a significant number of rhinos.

Pangolin seizures showed a sharp increase during 2023 following a significant decline in 2022. The drop in 2022 may be due to the strong sentences handed down during the Special Courts held during the year. Again this challenge has been addressed by the Office of the Prosecutor General who has planned and is indeed undertaking Special Courts during the current year. The key drivers to pangolin trafficking is not fully understood and there are efforts to gain a greater understanding of the illicit trade.

Namibia's elephant population has steadily been increasing and the efforts of the anti-poaching forces in key elephant ranges has ensured minimal poaching incidents during the past year. This is in stark contrast to poaching in neighbouring countries. We are mindful that continued vigilance is required as illicit ivory trade in the region shows alarming trends. These are demonstrated by the spike in seizures during this reporting period when 102 tusks were seized. Namibia, especially the north-east regions, remains an important transit country for traffickers but we remain committed to our

responsibility of countering this trade no matter the source country of the ivory.

Three significant seizures contributed to almost 60% of tusks seized and this is as a result of vigilance and intelligence-led operations by inter-agency investigative teams who do collaborate with colleagues from neighbouring countries. Further investigation and research regarding the origin of the source and destination of illegal ivory remains a priority.

One of the largest causes for concern during the reporting period has been the dramatic increase in the trafficking of live plants for the international ornamental-plant market. This worrying trend has been apparent for the past few years but I am pleased to inform you that significant progress has been made in understanding the “nodes and flows” of this trade.

I am even more pleased to share with you the news that an international kingpin, from Tanzania, was arrested in Opuwo, Namibia for possession of the near-endemic *Adenia pechuelii* plant or elephant’s foot as it is commonly known. Again this was possible due to the vigilance of local law-enforcement officers and the analytical support from the Blue Rhino Task Team. This

species has high international demand and deserves close attention, along with a few other species, as the real possibility exists that local populations could be wiped out by illegal harvesters.

Poaching can have severe economic implications. As Government we will continue strengthening our efforts in effective crime prevention and law enforcement through a coordination and integration of clusters of activities such as planning, monitoring and adaptive management; a strong and effective presence on the ground; dedicated investigation units that focuses on criminal syndicates and organised crime; use of technology; collaboration between the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; Police, the Army, Judiciary, Intelligence Service, communities, farmers, and others; and training and retraining of our staff members and the operatives on the ground.

Director of Ceremonies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are also launching the 2023 National Report on Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement. This report is a demonstration of Namibia's inter-

sectoral commitment to fight environmental crime with three Government agencies forming the integrated focal points of wildlife protection and law enforcement. Besides the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, the Namibian Police Force and the Office of the Prosecutor General work in close cooperation while the Namibian Defence Force continues to play a unique role within its mandate of defending the state and its resources against threats. Other Government agencies play an important role in our inter-agency partnership and these include the Namibia Central Intelligence Service, the Namibia Revenue Agency and the Financial Intelligence Centre.

The Namibian partnership approach includes valued funding partners and other non-government entities along with the private sector making vital contributions and contribution to significant positive impacts. The role of communities across the Namibian landscape needs to also be acknowledged.

We place a high value on transparency regarding wildlife crime and we provide weekly updates on wildlife crime statistics while we give regular updates on rhino and elephant poaching. This report gives context to these weekly reports while the narrative of this report aims to build a greater

understanding of the key drivers of environmental crime as well as the challenges faced by the partnership and steps taken to counter these.

The prevention and investigation of wildlife crime is time-consuming and costly and the partnership continues to deliver outcomes of which we can collectively be proud. While the investigation of key species is headed by the Blue Rhino Task Team, who have been acknowledged as setting the benchmark for the inter-agency approach, parks and regional MEFT and NAMPOL teams continue to deliver good outcomes. I am pleased to hear of the close collaboration of these teams and the support of the Namibian Defence Force. Their efforts are evident in this report.

This data-rich report is a collaborative effort and I need to acknowledge these efforts. Establishing and maintaining Namibia's wildlife crime database has been one of the most noteworthy achievements during the past four or five years. It is the reason why we are able to provide such data-rich detail of wildlife crime investigations and prosecutions. A dedicated team from the Intelligence and Investigations Unit in the Ministry and the Blue Rhino Task Team manage and maintain the database with countless investigators and prosecutors providing data in close-to real time.



The data team meets once a week to clean and verify data. This is a monumental effort and I would like to acknowledge their role in ensuring that Namibia is at the forefront of having a reliable wildlife crime database that is widely recognised in the region and beyond.

Compiling the report has also been a collective effort and many individuals from the partnership have contributed with the admirable observations and details. Their efforts complimented by the insights elegant pen of Mr. Helge Denker. Rooikat kindly coordinated the production while printing was financed by German Development Cooperation through KfW Development Bank.

Partnerships have long been one of our great conservation strengths. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism express its sincere gratitude to international funding partners, including the German Government through KfW, the US government through USAID and INL, as well as the Wildcat Foundation, WWF and the Global Environment Facility for their continued financial support to achieve the goals we set in the National Strategy on Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement.

We thank our own Game Product Trust Fund for the continued intervention and support for wildlife protection and law enforcement. We thank the national and international NGOs, Civil society, community forest and conservancy representatives, rhino custodians, private sector and the general public for their ongoing commitment to wildlife conservation, under challenging circumstances. Your work contributes to the prosperity of our Wildlife, National Parks, the National economy, and our international biodiversity commitments.

Director of Ceremonies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I close, let thank the men and woman on the ground out there, who are protecting our wildlife resources. Sometimes no sleep for an entire night, sometimes walking and running the whole day, working under cold conditions in the open, working in extremely hot conditions, and sometimes working under rain conditions. It is not an easy job, but they are doing it. Well done to them, where ever they are in this beautiful country of ours.

I thank the Integrated Wildlife Protection Project of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism co-funded by the German Government through KfW for making it possible for our National Stakeholder Forum to meet on this important subject matter, that need all our attention and action.

I also want to once again condemn such ill-intentioned activities of wildlife poaching and call upon those involved to refrain from such activities or risk their chances of being caught and face the full wrath of the law.

I now declare the 2024 National Stakeholder Forum on Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement officially open, and wish you success in your deliberations.

(I also take this opportunity to launch the report as the 2023 National Report on Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement).

**I thank you all.**