

Xi offers Namibia hand in anti-poaching

... Chinese leader says perpetrators should be punished

By Confidante Reporter

CHINESE President, Xi Jinping says his country will gear up cooperation with Namibia to protect local wildlife and will never assist in illegal activities such as the smuggling of wildlife products.

Xi was quoted in the China Daily newspaper recently when he welcomed President Hage Geingob during a ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Geingob was in China on an official visit by Xi's invitation.

State House spokesperson Alfredo Hengari on Wednesday confirmed Xi's remarks which he said were made during bilateral talks with Geingob.

"He informed President Geingob that if there are bad Chinese nationals who engage in illegal activities in Namibia, he will be on the side of the rule of law. He said that they must be punished within the relevant laws of the country.

"He also said that he is partisan in this matter and does not support poaching and the smuggling of wildlife products. He said that China condemns such activities," Hengari said.

Although Hengari could not give further details as to how China will cooperate with Namibia in protecting wildlife, he indicated that there is a detailed plan with specific strategies provided by Xi's government.

Namibia has experienced unprecedented levels of rhino and elephant poaching over the years implicating several Chinese nationals. Some the Asians citizens have been apprehended and charged with wildlife crimes, including illegal possession of pangolin skins (one of the most trafficked



Presidents Xi Jinping and Hage Geingob

mammals), rhino horn and ivory.

Nampol Inspector General, Sebastian Ndeitunga earlier indicated that poaching remains a serious situation in Namibia, where most poachers are Namibians while the buyers are mostly Chinese.

In 2017, the Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE) accused Chinese nationals for being responsible for wildlife crime taking place in Namibia. NCE's chief executive officer Chris Brown, in a letter to then China's Ambassador to Namibia, Xin Shunkang expressed concern and sought effective action to halt wildlife crime.

While noting that the situation is far more serious, Brown highlighted that Chinese nationals have been involved in rife poaching of rhinos and elephants in Namibia and the illegal

export of rhino horn and ivory.

Moreover, he also expressed concern over the rise in bushmeat poaching wherever Chinese nationals are working on infrastructure projects.

Other allegations against Chinese nationals according to Brown include; illegal collection of shellfish on the Namibian coast, capturing and killing of Carmine Bee-eaters at their breeding colonies by means of nets and importing Chinese monofilament nets via Zambia to

the northeast of Namibia, which are destroying the fisheries of the Zambezi, Chobe, Kwando and Okavango Rivers

The letter stated: "As Chinese nationals moved into all regions of Namibia, setting up businesses, networks, acquiring mineral prospecting licenses and offering payment for wildlife products, the incidence of poaching, illegal wildlife capture, collection, killing and export has increased exponentially."

Brown also expressed apprehension over the "long-standing interests by some Chinese nationals to start a shark fin industry in Namibia". Brown said that Chinese nationals had proposed to capture marine mammals and seabirds for the Asian aquarium market, but their plan was rejected by the Namibian government.

"We are concerned by an apparent total disregard by some Chinese nationals for Namibia's wildlife, conservation, and animal welfare laws and values,"

Brown also said that the criminal activities harm Namibia's reputation of pursuing a policy of international conservation and sustainable development.

He noted that the conservative estimate of the extent of losses to country's wildlife and ecosystems caused by Chinese nationals at the time is about N\$811 million. This he said excludes additional

resources that the Namibian government, donors, corporations and NGOs have had to commit to combat escalating wildlife crimes.

Meanwhile, Chinese Ambassador to Namibia, Zhang Yiming had warned that reports of poaching by his countrymen risked tarnishing excellent diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Yiming was quoted in the media saying that Chinese nationals who engage in poaching and other illegal activities create a bad image and tarnish the reputation of all well-meaning Chinese business people and expatriates in Namibia.

"In every country we have a few rotten apples, but those rotten apples cannot represent the image of the country, the image of the majority of innocent people. I can assure you that the Chinese government will continue to render our assistance to the line ministry, to the law enforcement agencies, to protect the wildlife in Namibia," he was quoted as saying.

In November 2016, a Chinese man was arrested in South Africa when he was found with 18 rhino horns worth R6, 6 million which are suspected to have been smuggled from Namibia. The 28-year-old Ye Zhiwei was arrested at OR Tambo airport in Johannesburg, en route to Hong Kong with the 18 rhino horns in his luggage.