

Media Statement



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TO : ALL MEDIA

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RE : MILLIONS SEIZED IN RHINO HORN SMUGGLING GROUP

The Asset Forfeiture Unit (AFU) in the NPA, with the assistance of a Court-appointed curator, yesterday seized property belonging to a group, suspected of large scale illegal rhino hunting and smuggling. This was after the North Gauteng High Court granted the AFU a restraint order for R45 million in terms of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act on 30 April 2010.

These include the residential properties of the accused and all other properties in which they have an interest, such as George Fletcher's seven farms, situated at Sandhurst Safaris in Tosca in the North West Province. The seven farms are registered in a trust, named "Fletcher Trust", of which George Fletcher is a trustee. There is also a helicopter, which is in Mozambique at present, and an Aerostar small aeroplane belonging to Saaiman. Some of the accused also have business interests which have also been restrained.

The accused are George Clayton Fletcher, Gerhardus Bartlomeus Saaiman, Frans Andries van Deventer, Kumaran Moodaley and five other respondents. Their criminal trial is scheduled to start in the North Gauteng High Court on 11 October 2010. Three other accused, Nicolaas Barend

van Deventer, Gideon Gerhardus van Deventer and Pieter Johannes Swart have already pleaded guilty and were sentenced for their involvement in the illegal actions of this group.

The accused will face charges of racketeering, money laundering, various counts of theft, malicious damage to property and contraventions of the various provincial Conservation Acts and the Aviation Act. It is alleged that the accused committed these offences as members of a group consisting of hunters, a pilot, middlemen (agents) and buyers, who illegally hunted rhinos and traded in the horns stolen from the rhino carcasses. The Aerostar was used to locate the rhinos in various National Parks around the country. It was also used to transport poachers to different National Parks where the rhinos were spotted. The rhinos would be shot and dehorned. The Aerostar would then be used to transport horns to George Fletcher's farm in Tosca.

The offences were committed during the period December 2005 to August 2006 when 17 rhinos were killed and their horns cut off in the Kruger National Park, the Mfolozi National Park and game farms in the Bela Bela and Komatipoort districts.

The criminal trial and asset forfeiture application are the results of an intensive joint operation between the Hawks unit of the SAPS, the NPA's Organised Crime Prosecution Division and the AFU and the excellent cooperation between these departments.

The purpose of these initiatives is to ensure that those involved in illegal rhino horn smuggling are dealt with effectively and to send out a strong warning to all persons considering indulging in such activity. The NPA is of the view that the arrests, restraint of assets and institution of criminal proceedings will have the necessary deterrent effect.

Rhinoceros are a rare species and consequently require the protection as contemplated in the environmental legislation. The illegal hunting of rhinos is a serious and growing threat. According to our information, in 2009, 122 rhinos were killed and dehorned in the National Parks across the country. In the first two weeks of 2010, seven rhinos were killed in the North West Province and seven in the Kruger National Park. The primary motivation for criminals to hunt rhinos is financial enrichment.

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