

Media Statement



Tel: +27 12 845 6000

Email:
media@npa.gov.za

Victoria & Griffiths
Mxenge Building
123 Westlake Avenue
Weavind Park
Silverton
Pretoria

www.npa.gov.za

TO: ALL MEDIA

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**RE: TWO SOUTH KOREAN MEN DECLARED UNDESIRABLE PERSONS,
HEAVILY FINED AND DEPORTED**

Two South Korean men, who stole rare and critically rare plants in the Western Cape, have been declared undesirable persons in South Africa. Millions of rands have been confiscated from them and one has been deported to his country while his co-accused is in the process of being extradited to United State of America for similar crimes.

Cape Town Regional Court convicted Byungsu Kim, 44, and Young IL Sunwoo, 71, on three counts which include possession of flora without documentation, picking of protected flora without a permit and picking of flora without written permission of the landowner and possession.

Both accused were sentenced to six years direct imprisonment, wholly suspended for five years on condition they are not convicted of any offence related to picking, possession and collecting flora committed during the period of suspension.

The court attached R2, 476m in cash from Kim and R2, 405m from Sunwoo. The money was divided between the Criminal Assets Recovery Account (CARA), the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board and the South African National Biodiversity Institute. CARA received R1, 882m, the Western Cape Nature received R2m and South African National Biodiversity Institute received R1m.

Kim was re-arrested on an Interpol warrant and his case was postponed to 28 February 2020 for an extradition to California, where he faces charges similar to the crimes he committed in South Africa. Sunwoo has been deported back to South Korea.

Advocate Aradhana Heeramun welcomed the sentence, saying there is a recent increase in cases involving the trafficking of succulent plant species. The accused arrived in South Africa last year with a plan to search and collect flora. They were in the process of arranging for the flora to be exported from a nursery in the Western Cape when they were arrested. It came out that the pair did not have permits to pick, possess, or permission from the landowners, to pick the flora. They admitted that their conduct was unlawful and intentional.

They were found with plants listed as rare and critically rare in the SANBI Red List of South African plants. Advocate Heeramun told the court: "The accused are part of at least twelve groups apprehended with illegally collected succulents in the Western Cape and the Northern Cape in the past five months. Illegal trade in wild flora and flora is one of the five largest illegal activities in the world, along with illegal drug trade, illegal weapons smuggling and human trafficking."

She said the accused's objective was to remove the oldest and largest plants they could find, which showed complete disregard for nature and law. "Most importantly, the collection of these plants is an ecological tragedy. A rough estimation conservatively estimates the cumulative age of the 2018 collected plants amount to at least 44 000 years. When one puts it in these terms, the severity, tragedy and brutality of this crime against nature is clear. South Africa has both national as well as an international obligation to address wildlife trafficking. This is due to several international and multilateral environmental agreements, which oblige South Africa to conserve its natural resources and ensure that international trade in listed wildlife species does not threaten their survival in the wild," she added.

Eric Ntabazalila

Regional Communications Manager

Western Cape

Tel: (021) 487 7308 Mobile: 073 062 1222

Email: entabazalila@npa.gov.za