

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM

MET/MTC Rhino Security Hotline

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE MET/MTC RHINO
SECURITY HOTLINE

Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, MP

12/05/2011

Official launch of the MET/MTC Rhino Security Hotline in Windhoek, Namibia at the Ministry of Environment and Tourism Head Office.

- Directors of Ceremonies
- Chief Corporate Affairs and Human Capital Officer for MTC, Mr. Tim Ekandjo,
- Representatives from WWF
- Representatives of the Protected Resources Unit in the Namibian Police and of Interpol in Namibia
- Representatives of Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), NACSO, Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF)
- Conservancy members
- Staff from my own Ministry
- Esteemed members of the media,
- Ladies and gentlemen.

Rhinos, specifically the black rhino, are Namibia's flagship species. It is no secret that our country is a world leader in rhino conservation, and we are extremely proud of this achievement.

Rhinos were once plentiful across the African plains, as well as in Namibia. But when Game Reserve Number 2– which is today Etosha National Park – was proclaimed in 1907, there was not a single rhino recorded within its boundaries. Hunters had shot out both black and white rhino, mainly for sport.

About fifty years later, the first black rhino was reported at Namutoni. In north western Namibia, rhino and elephant populations slowly increased.

But soon a new threat emerged. Worldwide, poaching of rhinos increased – this time animals were killed for their horns.

It is wrongly believed that rhino horn has healing properties and this has put the rhino in danger. Also the high value put on ornamental material for making ceremonial dagger handles, is forcing people to hunt for rhinos

During the 1980s, poaching was rampant in north-western Namibia, while in 1989, 23 rhino were lost in Etosha National Park.

Authorities took drastic action. In 1989 and 1991, some rhinos in the Kunene Region and Etosha were de-horned to deter would- be poachers. Although controversial, this operation was largely successful.

But it was the foundations laid by conservationists, working hand-in-hand with local traditional authorities to establish the Community Game Guard system, which produced the best results. Intelligence from communities led to a series of arrests and prosecutions. Poaching subsided.

We learnt an important lesson. By engaging you, our communities, as partners in caring for our rhinos and other natural resources, the poachers were beaten. We learnt that our best weapon was our communities.

As a result, research suggests that black rhino populations have more than doubled in north-western Kunene Region over the past 30 years, and much of this can be attributed to Community-based Natural Resource Management.

This programme ensures that local communities, through conservancies, can benefit directly from wildlife. In particular, rhino are 'the golden goose' that attracts tourists to our country. Tourism is one of the key contributors to our Gross Domestic Product, and gives direct income to individuals and communities.

Our protected areas are major draw-cards, while the wide open spaces – and desert dwelling animals - attract visitors to areas such as the Kunene Region.

The world-famous Okaukuejo waterhole in Etosha National Park is a well-known place to view rhino. Studies have shown that nearly half of tourists visiting Kunene Region go there to view either desert-dwelling rhino or elephant. They seek them on foot or from a tour vehicle, and stay at community campsites or luxury lodges. There are still many untapped opportunities to further develop rhino-based tourism, such as responsible rhino tracking tours and expansion of joint venture tourism.

In short, rhinos are a tourist magnet, bringing with them income and foreign exchange. This creates jobs, improves rural livelihoods, and alleviates poverty.

As we do not want to keep all of our 'goose eggs' in one basket, the Namibian Government has, since 1993, placed black rhino on freehold land outside of formally protected areas as part of Rhino Custodianship Programme.

More recently, with the help of various donors, we have translocated a number of animals out of Etosha National Park and the Palmwag Concession Area into communal conservancies areas. This was done after full consultation and agreement with all communities concerned.

This has and will significantly boost local economies, as rhino-based tourism grows.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are aware that despite international legislation and domestic bans on trade in rhino horn, rhino are still under threat from poachers who believe they can make money easily from selling their horn.

I want to reiterate to our people that our rhinos are worth far more alive than dead. Take that rhino away and the golden goose is killed forever.

Last year, at an auction held by the ministry, live rhinos were sold for between N\$ 450 000 and N\$ 475 000 each.

In short, both consumptive and non-consumptive uses of rhino can contribute significantly to the economic development and the improvement in the livelihoods of all of our people.

Directors of Ceremonies,

We are all aware of the dangers that face us. Across our borders, rhinos are being poached indiscriminately. We are carefully monitoring the situation in neighbouring countries as unscrupulous individuals driven by greed are using sophisticated methods to slaughter rhinos for short-term riches.

We, in Namibia, have not been complacent. Shortly after Independence, sentences up to twenty (20) years imprisonment were introduced for the poaching of animals such as rhino and elephant. These animals are also classified as specially protected.

Poaching and dealing in rhino horn or ivory is seen by the State as serious just as dealing in diamonds. To ensure proper protection of our specially protected species in particular the rhinos recently the following has happened;

1. Some staff members of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism have received expert training in tracking and law enforcement, weapons handling and crime scene investigation.

2. A sophisticated monitoring programmes and database is put in place in partnership with NGOs such as Save the Rhino Trust.
3. A national workshop to develop regional rhino security strategies was held and attended by many stakeholders.
4. Scores of animals are immobilised and fitted with transmitters to alert, should an animal be dormant or disappear for a few hours.
5. An inter-ministerial committee to help advice and assist in the combating of poaching and to investigate cases should they occur is established.

To sum up, several other measures that we will not reveal at this stage for security reasons, are in place.

I therefore want to make it very clear. Here, in Namibia, we have zero tolerance for poaching. Those who are caught will face harsh penalties.

In protecting our natural heritage, we are working closely with the Namibian Police, Interpol, conservation authorities in South Africa and other countries, as well as with international organisations such as TRAFFIC International. We work together with local organisations such as Save the Rhino Trust, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation and NACSO.

We are also working with the private sector, including businesses, lodges, and tour operators among others. We continue to work in partnership with

regional councils, traditional authorities' rural communities and conservancies. We appreciate their dedication and assistance.

Our best weapon against poachers is you, the public. You are the eyes and ears of the nation. Poaching will affect your life. Rhino poaching will steal from you and your family. It will rob you financially and spiritually. We are the generation that is the custodians of these, God's remarkable creatures. And we must protect them.

With this background, I want to announce that in partnership with MTC, we have established an SMS 'hotline' that enables people to share information that may threaten the safety of our rhinos and other natural heritage.

The SMS number is **55555**. In short, it is 'Five Fives for rhino'.

I urge every single one of you to unite in protecting our heritage. If you hear of any information regarding poaching, or plans to poach - rhinos – or any other animals, please make use of our new hotline.

Sending an SMS is free. Your information is confidential. You will receive a confirmation SMS to assure you that your efforts are worthwhile, as all plausible leads are followed up. However, I urge people not to abuse or misuse this facility.

The ministry will soon distribute posters across the country on the matter, while a small booklet on the status of rhinos in Namibia will be available on

our Ministry website. This poster and booklet have been sponsored by WWF, and we are grateful for their commitment and continuing support.

In closing, I send my heartfelt thanks to the people of Namibia who have proved that they are among the world's greatest conservationists.

Thank you for your outstanding commitment to rhino and other wildlife conservation in Namibia, and the world. Thanks also to all of our partners, as mentioned earlier, and a special thank to MTC for setting an excellent example for the private sector in caring for our natural heritage. Most of the time when we watch TV, we see many programmes brought by MTC. Thank you MTC for all that you have done to improve the living conditions of Namibians. I take this time to also thank the staff of the Ministry for their dedication and hard work in conserving our wildlife such as the rhino for the benefit of current and future generations. In the same vein I call on the Namibian media to help us ensure that the public is informed of this initiative. I also want to thank the media for ongoing support to our environmental efforts.

It is now my honour to declare the SMS hotline 55555 or Five Fives officially opened.

I thank you, for your attention