



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND TOURISM**

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT,  
FORESTRY AND TOURISM ON THE SALE OF ONE  
HUNDRED AND SEVENTY ELEPHANTS**

**01 FEBRUARY 2021  
WINDHOEK**

We wish to provide clarity in response to concerns, as well as the local and international media reports regarding the sale of one hundred and seventy elephants (170) by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Namibia.

The reports and concerns from international media institutions, animal rights groups, individuals and self-proclaimed conservationists are baseless, misleading, inaccurate and devoid of any truth. These reports are mostly driven by individuals who unfortunately in the name of conservation have ulterior motives. The reports are insinuating that the sale of 30 elephants in Omatjete area, 50 in Kamanjab commercial farming area, 60 in Grootfontein-Kavango Cattle Ranch area and 30 in Grootfontein-Tsumkwe area is devastating for elephant conservation in Namibia, and also for the elephant populations shared with our neighbouring countries of Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, reports and critics are refuting our basis for the sale by claiming the sale is orchestrated to advance a corrupt agenda and is not necessarily aimed at reducing the increasing numbers of elephants to mitigate the impact of drought and human elephant conflict incidences.

In clarifying these allegation, we wish to put in context that elephants occur across the entire north of Namibia with two main sub-populations in the northeastern and the northwestern parts of the country. In 1995, Namibia had about 7,000 elephants, in 2004 the total population was estimated at about 16,000 animals, while the current figure is just over 24,000 elephants.

In Namibia, perhaps more so than in other elephant range countries, elephants are not confined to protected areas and share the land with rural communities and commercial farming areas. Elephant conservation has to be a win-win situation for people to tolerate elephants in the long term. For this reason, elephant conservation and management cannot happen without involving the people that live closest to them. While elephants are part of our African heritage and are revered by many communities, they also exact a significant toll on rural communities and farmers. In different regions, elephants' impact on water installations, infrastructure, gardens, livestock and crop farming, they are thus threatening the livelihood security of many

communities and individual small scale farmers. Elephants also impact commercial livestock farmers and it is quite extraordinary and highly commendable that commercial farmers have been as tolerant as they have been and increasingly adapted their farming practices towards co-existence with elephants, although some conflicts remain.

There has been persistent problems caused by these elephant, to the extent that the conflict become an intolerable burden on resident communities and a threat to human lives. In 2020, elephants killed two cattle (when they do not eat meat, and in competition for water) and chased thousands of livestock from drinking water, damaged three thousand three hundred and forty six (3346) hectares of crops for rural communities and farmers, caused several damages to grain storages and houses where farmers keep fodder for livestock feed, repeatedly damaged several water infrastructure and fences, and injured one person who is now disabled, and has to live with that condition for the rest of his life.

In light of all this, the Namibian Government has accordingly established a range of incentives for people to co-exist with elephants, based on the intrinsic value of elephants. These range from affirming rights over wildlife resources through our community-based natural resource management programme with 86 rural communities now taking part in it through registered communal conservancies, promotion and facilitation of tourism investments in rural areas, conservation hunting and traditional use of elephants as a source of food.

The most important incentive namely the value that can be generated from trade in ivory is currently severely compromised by the actions of animal rights groups who have influenced decisions at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) that undermine Namibia's conservation programmes. For how long this is going to be the case is unclear, but our tolerance is being severely tested. Namibia has major stockpiles of valuable wildlife products including ivory which it can produce sustainably and regulate properly, and which if traded internationally could support our elephant conservation and management for decades to come. We favour a collective approach on the regulation of international trade but ultimately, we have to act in the interests of conservation and the rural people that are so important in

determining the fate of elephants in the long term. Elephants are part of the natural resources of Namibia over which we have full sovereignty and there is a limit to how much external interference we will accept in the use of this resource.

There are suggestions within our critics that we should overlook our own people's plights at the expense of tourists to the country, and the wishes of the arm-chair conservationists thousands of kilometres away from us. This is despite the fact that our citizens have accepted to share their living space with wild animals which most of the time destroy their properties and other sources of their livelihoods. In some instances human lives are lost or people are injured.

It is a pity to see that some people still think Namibians and Africans in general cannot run their own affairs and therefore should be subjected to their ideologies that have no regard for our people. For as much as we value tourism as an economic sector based on the revenue it generates, as responsible government we will always put the needs of our people first without compromise or fail.

As we said before and unfortunately, we also have a few individuals in Namibia who are simply unable to get their heads around the big picture of conservation on communal and commercial land, and the vital role that incentives, elephant management and social acceptance play in the process. They cannot look into the future to see where Namibia needs to be in decades to come. They rather look at each elephant individually. This is not conservation biology approach, but a more western urban short term animal rights approach which is higher counter-productive to the long term conservation.

The conservation and management of elephants in Namibia is a high priority for the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism. Elephant conservation in Namibia has been amongst our greatest successes as a nation. While elephants have drastically declined in numbers and their habitat has been severely fragmented in other countries, we have seen a consistent increase in elephant numbers over more than 30 years and we now have more than three times as many elephants than at Independence in 1990. Elephant distribution range has expanded, and elephants seem to be in the process of recolonizing their former range in areas that we have not expected this to happen

in our lifetimes. Last week, we even had elephants getting into the town of Uis in the North Western part of the country. Namibia is indeed unique in that elephants occur over wide gradients of rainfall, vegetation types, land use and human density from the hyper-arid northern Namib Desert in the Kunene and Erongo Regions in the west through to the highest rainfall woodlands and riverine areas in the north-east in the Kavango West and East Regions and the Zambezi Region.

The removal of 170 elephants would amount to less than 1% of the Namibian elephant population, which is growing at 5% per year and that the intention is to remove around half of the elephants in four conflict hotspots only, and not to reduce the population in general. The elephants will not be removed from conservancies and National Parks but from communal and commercial farming areas. In the Omatjete area there are about sixty (60) elephants including the Kalkveld metapopulation and thirty (30) is to be sold in this area; in the Kamanjab area there are about one hundred and twenty (120) elephants and fifty (50) are to be sold; in the Grootfontein-Kavango Cattle Ranch Area there about one hundred and thirty (130) elephants and sixty (60) are to be sold; and in the Grootfontein-Tsumkwe area there are about seventy (70) elephants and thirty (30) are to sold.

On the transboundary matter, it is absolutely rubbish to say that elephants from the four hotspot conflict areas are transboundary animals and does not belong to Namibia alone. How do elephants in the Omatjete and Kamanjab areas in north western Namibia move to other countries, these are resident elephants in the areas but move between areas in around the Omatjete and Kamanjab areas. Even the elephants in the Grootfontein-Tsumkwe area are residents, and we have forty collars over the years to prove that. In the Grootfontein-Kavango Cattle Ranch area we have breeding herds but we have observed movement of individual bulls into Angola and back in Namibia. The active transboundary movement of elephants between Namibia and neighbouring countries is actually from east of the Kavango River and the Khaudum National Park. In this regard, we work with Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe through the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA). We have as five countries just completed the collaring of elephants in our countries and in the KAZA TFCA so we jointly monitor the movements of our shared natural resource, in this case our elephants. Discussion are under way through KAZA TFCA for a joint KAZA

Elephant survey. If we are to base our numbers on the transboundary movements between countries, then Namibia will even have more elephants than the 24,000 we have. There are about 130,000 elephants in Botswana, 80,000 in Zimbabwe, 50,000 in Zambia and about 10,000 in Angola. Namibia is a neighbor to all the four countries, and we find ourselves on the heart of the KAZA TFCA.

We do not have time to address disparaging aspersions of these self-proclaimed conservationists. We choose to focus on the constructive work of implementing approved conservation policies, in the best interest of our citizens and wildlife conservation. In the past few years we have gone to great lengths to explain the intricacies of managing complex systems, the trade-offs involved to keep elephants on farmlands and communal areas and the many other aspects which our Ministry needs to balance to ensure the long-term conservation of biodiversity across landscapes while considering people's livelihoods and safety. In contrast, these few individuals in Namibia who are simply unable to get their heads around the big picture of conservation have been dismissive and unwilling to be guided by professionals with decades of experience in these sectors. They have rather chose to attack, undermine and misrepresent what we do via social media, relying on simplistic and emotive messages to get people who are unfamiliar and uneducated with conservation management and the situation on the ground in Namibia, to be become upset and to engage on social media. Where they could have been educating people to the challenges and innovative approaches developed and implemented in Namibia, they chose to mislead.

We remain committed to the sustainable use of wildlife resources, as is indeed provided for in our National Constitution. Sustainable use of wildlife resources is the result of good conservation and good wildlife management, and it is in our collective interest to ensure that we use this resource sustainably.

There are also allegations that the sale of elephants is linked to corruption, the ruling Swapo Party winning votes and to the oil drilling project in the Kavango. This is totally unfounded. This is actually nonsense, like the rest of it. As mentioned before, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism is selling the 170 elephants due to drought and increase in elephant numbers coupled with human elephant conflict

incidences. Besides the sale of elephants being based on scientific evidence, the Ministry has also followed the legal procedures for the sale and tender procedures. First Cabinet approval was obtained on the matter, then Treasury authorization was granted. The advert has been open to all those interested and run for a long time to give sufficient time to interested bidders. The process of opening the tenders and evaluation thereof will be supervised by officials from Treasury at the Ministry of Finance before final approval is granted by the Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism.

Funding from the sale of elephants will be deposited in the Game Product Trust Fund (GPTF) for use on wildlife conservation and rural development projects. These include projects of wildlife crime prevention and law enforcement (anti-poaching), protected area management and human wildlife conflict mitigation measures including the provision of alternative water points for elephants to prevent them from using community waterpoints. The GPTF was established by an Act of Parliament (Act 7 of 1997). The Act provide for the establishment of the GPTF in support of the conservation and management of wildlife resources, and of rural development in Namibia; to provide for the management and control of the Fund by the GPTF Board; and to provide for incidental matters. The GPTF is a mechanism to ensure that revenue realized from the sale of wildlife products is used for wildlife conservation, communal conservation and rural development programmes aimed at harmonizing the co-existence of human and wildlife, thus securing a future for wildlife outside of and within protected areas in Namibia. Any suggestions of corruption must made with evidence and reported to relevant authorities for action. The Ministry upholds high standards of transparency and zero tolerance to corruption.

We also want to make it clear that we could not participate in the Africa-wide Great Elephant Census of 2016 because we saw it being driven by emotions and not science. Some of those behind it have always provided wrong information about Namibia and other African countries hence our decision not to participate. We have nothing to hide, and in fact most of our elephant surveys have been conducted by the private sector. We plan to do a National Elephant survey this year should resources allow, and this too will be outsourced to be done on our behalf. Saying that we have not provided the 2019 aerial survey results for the North East Regions is absolutely

rubbish because this was already done at the National Elephant Management Workshop in November 2020 where media was also present. Those saying so keep on referring to the discussion of this workshop but never attended the workshop despite our invitation. Furthermore, we have it on our plans for this year (actually this month) to have open day session where we can provide information on elephant status in the country. The option of removal of elephants by reducing numbers in conflict hotspot areas was also discussed at the National Elephant Management Workshop but we could not specifically mention the four hotspot areas and numbers to be sold as we still had not received Cabinet approval yet. This option of removal of elephants in reducing numbers is included in the National Elephant Management Plan which is just been concluded in drafting.

In summary, there are more elephants in Namibia today than at any time in the past 100 years. One of the reasons for their increase in numbers is that they have a value, communities have rights to manage and use the wildlife, and are starting to earn significant income from wildlife and this is creating the incentives for them to look after and protect wildlife and wildlife habitat, including elephants, all of which leads to a positive conservation result. Sustainable use of wildlife is a result of good conservation. Namibia's elephant population is a healthy and growing population. The 170 off-take is extremely conservative. This is well below sustainable off-take levels, and the population continues to grow and expand.

We once again call upon critics on elephant population management and human wildlife conflict management to stop and let us implement policies and programmes on our wildlife conservation, community livelihood and sustainable use thereof, for improved economic growth, species management and poverty eradication. We further call upon them to provide support to sound elephant management practices, in particular, to programmes such as human wildlife conflict management, community based natural resource management, strengthening law enforcement and elephant protection, among other priorities.

The Namibian public and the international community are thus called upon to ignore these inaccurate, rubbish and false reports and assumptions on our elephants and



sustainable utilization practices. We should manage elephants based on science and not emotions.

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