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Press Release
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Editors and Journalists

22 September is World Rhino Day.

Namibia is joining the rest of the world in celebrating world rhino day on 22 September 2020. In celebrating this day, the Ministry wishes to take pride in the fact that Namibia currently hosts the largest population of black rhino of the subspecies *Diceros bicornis bicornis* in the world. Approximately 93% of the total population of this taxon are found in Namibia (as at Dec 31st, 2019) and rhino numbers are increasing steadily under a well-established and innovative conservation and management program.

The country has a third of the entire remaining black rhino on the planet and the second largest white rhino population in the world after South Africa. Namibia also has the largest population of black rhinos in a protected area and the largest free roaming black rhino population in the world.

Namibia's *Black and White Rhinoceros Conservation Strategies* concentrates on maximizing population growth rates. The Strategy's vision is that by 2030, both species of rhino are re-established in viable, healthy breeding populations throughout their former range, and is sustainably utilized; and the overall goal is a commitment to collectively manage the rhinos of Namibia as a meta-population.

Despite these achievements, Namibia's rhino conservation remains challenged by poaching incidences. Even though Namibia has seen a decline poaching numbers as a result of ongoing interventions by government, communal conservancies, private custodians and NGOs. However, poaching patterns are highly dynamic and any amount of poaching remains a major concern to the Ministry. In this regard, the

Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism and its partners have carried out a series of pro-active measures designed to prevent poaching. Recent areas of concern are the custodian program, Kunene and private white rhino populations which necessitates further preventative measures. Namibia has recorded 22 rhinos poached to date this year; 46 in 2019; 78 in 2018; 55 in 2017 and 61 in 2016.

The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism determined that the best strategy for 2020-21 (continued from 2014) would be to dehorn as many rhinos as possible in poaching hotspots. It is also necessary to translocate rhino out of high-risk areas to safer locations, thus establishing new populations and supplementing existing populations to stimulate growth and manage density-dependent factors.

Law enforcement and intelligence has been key to reducing the threat of poaching. New division was created at the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism to deal exclusively with wildlife protection, intelligence and investigations. The newly established MEFT K9 unit continues to gain success and has been issued with a state of the art, fully kitted vehicle with trailer sponsored by Standard Bank and various other local donors. The unit is now permanently deployed in Etosha National Park and more units are planned for the future.

National security forces were deployed in the Etosha National Park to counter rhino poaching there. Collaborative task forces between the Protected Resources Division of the Namibian Police Force and the Intelligence and Investigation Unit of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism have proven extremely successful. These collaborations have managed to shift law enforcement from reactive to proactive. Instead of the discovery of a dead rhino initiating an investigation, would-be poachers are now regularly arrested while they are still conspiring to kill a rhino.

During the first half of this year 30 per cent of the 88 arrests related to rhinos were preemptive arrests of suspects conspiring to poach – before they had managed a kill. The figures of 2019 are even more impressive: 68 preemptive arrests out of a total of 131. That's over half of all suspects caught before they managed to kill a rhino. Close collaboration with the prosecution is also leading to convictions with appropriate sentences. Six perpetrators were convicted in May 2020 in two cases of conspiring to poach rhinos.

The most significant achievement by law enforcement is the arrests of a long list of dealers, middlemen, aiders and abettors – including international kingpins. This is unravelling crime syndicates and forcing dealers to expose themselves in their search for new buyers, creating a domino effect of further arrests.

The black rhino has been listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN 2012) since 1996. Between 2012 and 2018, the Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) population across Africa has grown at a modest annual rate

of 2.5% from an estimated 4,845 to 5,630 animals in the wild, respectively. Population models predict a further slow increase over the next five years. One subspecies of the black rhino, the south-western black rhino (*D. b. bicornis*) – previously assessed as Vulnerable – has seen sufficient population growth over the last three generations to be newly categorized as Near Threatened (IUCN 2020). The future of the south-western subspecies and black rhino in general therefore largely depends on Namibia's ability to maintain adequate standards of protection and biological management for growth.

Over the years, Namibia has demonstrated increased commitment to safeguarding its rhinos through a variety of innovative means led by Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism in partnership with a diverse set of stakeholders including other line ministries, non-government organizations, local community-based institutions, and private sector tourism. Fundamental to Namibia's approach is to seek strategies that are contextual (e.g. align with local ecological, social and political reality) and collaborative across scales.

Namibia has a three-pronged approach which includes strengthening law enforcement, strategic biological management and enhancing collaboration with local communities. Strategies for each dimension varies by land tenure context (commercial, communal and state protected area) in order to provide novelty and nuance perspectives. Financial mechanisms devised specifically to help sustain these protection efforts include both consumptive and non-consumptive models. These innovative initiatives and dedication to safeguarding rhinos, puts Namibia firmly in the position as a global leader for rhino conservation.

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