

MEDIA RELEASE

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WWF reacts to the latest delay in the 'Groenewald Gang' case

The case against suspected rhino poaching kingpin Dawie Groenewald, his wife and their alleged co-accused has been postponed to 19 October 2012. According to the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the delay is to give the defence more time to finalise their application on further particulars on the charges. The so-called Groenewald Gang appeared in the Musina Magistrate's Court in Limpopo yesterday. They face hundreds of charges under South Africa's Biodiversity Act, Medicines and Related Substances Act and the Act on the Prevention of Organized Crime.

The eleven suspects are believed to have killed 20 rhinos and are accused of illegal hunting, weapons and permit violations, illegally trading rhino horn, as well as fraud, racketeering and money laundering.

"A high level of criminal sophistication was required to orchestrate the killing of these rhinos, but this case demonstrates that no one is above the law, said the head of WWF's African Rhino Programme, Dr Joseph Okori. "The world is watching and waiting for justice to be served."

The carcasses of 20 rhinos were found buried on Groenewald's property in late 2010. The rhinos were missing their horns, which are of high value on black markets in Asia, particularly Vietnam.

Groenewald and his wife operate a safari tour company and according to investigators, they are said to be the masterminds behind the killings. Other suspects in the case include veterinarians and veterinary assistants, professional hunters and a helicopter pilot.

Rhino poaching in South Africa has spiked in recent years driven by demand for rhino horn in Asia. So far this year 181 rhinos have been killed in the country, according to Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) statistics released last week. The DEA says Kruger National Park has already lost 111 rhinos this year.

If not curbed, poaching rates could exceed the record 448 rhino deaths that occurred in South Africa in 2011.

WWF-SA CEO, Morné du Plessis said, “WWF is as impatient as the majority of the public about the delays in the process but we respect that justice has to follow its course.”

WWF works with the South African government and the NPA to improve forensic investigation of rhino crime scenes and to improve the knowledge and skills of the people who prosecute rhino crimes.

“We will continue to watch this case closely,” du Plessis concluded.

**High resolution photos are available*

here:<https://photos.panda.org/gpn/external?albumId=4171>

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