

MEDIA RELEASE - 20 October 2003

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RHINO POACHERS BUSTED

Minister Moosa hails joint SA/Mozambique operation as a success story for conservation.

A cross-border operation by a joint South African and Mozambican team of law enforcers have slammed down on a large group of rhino poachers over the last two weeks.

Six Mozambican men were arrested after the team, which included SANParks Corporate Investigation Services (CIS), Kruger National Park (KNP) rangers, South African Police Services, Mozambican Border Police and Mozambican Conservation officials, tracked the suspects 30 kilometres into Mozambique.

South Africa's Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mr Mohammed Valli Moosa applauded the actions of this cross-border operation:

"It is this sort of operation that proves that the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park will become a sanctuary against poachers for Africa's precious wildlife," the Minister said.

Evidence obtained from the scenes of two rhino poaching incidents over the last two months resulted in the spoor of the suspects being tracked over the border into Mozambique. These incidents occurred on September 7, 2003 when a heavily pregnant rhino female was found shot dead with her horn removed and on October 7, 2003 when a further two white rhino adult males were shot and their horns hacked off by the poachers.

Both incidents occurred in a remote, wilderness area in the Central Region of the KNP and CIS operators were able to obtain quality intelligence and evidence that led to suspects across the border. Then the South Africans linked up with the Mozambicans and followed the spoor for about 20 kilometres to a temporary base in Mozambique, where four rhino horns, three rifles, an axe, clothes and ammunition was confiscated by the Mozambican authorities.

With evidence and intelligence provided by CIS, the Mozambicans have arrested the six suspects believed to be involved. Investigation into these, and other rhino poaching incidents in the same area over the past two years, is likely to lead towards more arrests.

Minister Moosa further commented that this was a classic operation that will hopefully change possible negative perceptions relating to the GLTP initiative:

"Everyone concerned worked extremely well together on this case, which we believe to be history in the making," he said.

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) security agreement makes it possible for South African and Mozambican conservation agencies to work together during operations of this type.

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