

RHINO HORN – THE ORGANISED CRIME ANGLE

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Annette Hübschle, Senior Researcher of the Organised Crime and Money Laundering Programme, presented the linkage between rhino horn poaching and organised crime networks. Research findings are based on a 3-year regional research project on organised crime trends in southern Africa.

The definition of 'organised crime' used for the project consisted of the following elements:

- a crime committed by two or more perpetrators, who are aware of each other's existence and general role, and who are acting in concert;
- it is a serious crime;
- it is a crime committed repeatedly; and
- motivated by the prospect of financial gain.

The presentation dealt with the main methods and idiosyncrasies facilitating organised crime in South Africa and the region. The research found that loosely-associated multinational networks were dominant. They operate on an *ad hoc* basis with each member servicing a specific function. Any 'service provider' within the network is replaceable and the relationship between the different nodes is tenuous and based on size and type of the operation.

Tacit collusion of law enforcement agents, government officials and politicians facilitates many organised crime activities, while different networks are increasingly collaborating with one another. Organised criminals prefer convenience and speed when it comes to smuggling goods and commodities. The research found that criminals preferred legal border points and airports in spite of the region's long and porous borders.

The presentation then explored why the illicit trade and poaching of rhino horn had increased and the level of organisation and professionalism of the criminals. It was argued that the rhino poachers were highly organised, professional and multinational. The use of hunters, helicopter pilots, vets, agents and middlemen indicates a clear division of labour. The presenter rejected claims that opportunistic criminals had entered this highly lucrative market as rhino poachers had international partners and high-tech equipment. Smuggling methods and law enforcement challenges were explored.