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# Rhino horn confiscated, three alleged traffickers arrested in Sumatra

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- *Indonesian authorities arrested three alleged wildlife traffickers and seized a rhino horn in Medan, North Sumatra on Aug. 13.*
- *Officials believe the horn comes from a Sumatran rhino, one of the world's rarest and most endangered mammal species.*
- *The arrest followed a June 12 raid in a neighboring province that also resulted in the confiscation of a Sumatran rhino horn. Authorities have not yet determined whether there is a connection between the two incidents.*

Environmental law enforcement authorities in Indonesia's Sumatra Island arrested three people on Aug. 13 in connection with the attempted sale of a rhino horn.

A man identified by authorities as Suharto, a retired captain in the Indonesian Army's special forces, was allegedly in possession of the horn at the time of his arrest in Medan, North Sumatra province's capital city. Suharto's wife was arrested with him, as was the alleged broker, identified as Herman.

The confiscated horn was sent for forensic analysis to confirm its origin, but authorities suspect it came from a Critically Endangered Sumatran rhino (***Dicerorhinus sumatrensis***), Halasan Tulus, head of the environment ministry's law enforcement agency in Sumatra, told Mongabay.



A female rhino at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park. Seven rhinos live at the sanctuary, and an additional three live at a similar facility in Malaysian Borneo. The rest of the species lives in the wild in Indonesia. Photo by Rhett Butler/Mongabay.

Conservationists estimate that only 50-100 Sumatran rhinos still survive, mostly in small, isolated populations on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo. The smallest and furiest rhinoceros — and the sole surviving representatives of the genus *Dicerorhinus* — Sumatran rhinos are among the world's most endangered mammals. They were driven to the brink of extinction last century by hunting and habitat loss, and conservationists now fear the remaining populations may be unable to breed quickly enough to allow the species to survive, even without additional pressure from poaching.

Anti-poaching patrols in known rhino habitats are credited with curtailing poaching in Sumatra's parks, but this was the second case in just over a month in which officials seized a rhino horn from alleged wildlife traffickers on the island. A [July 12 raid](#) in the South Aceh district resulted in one arrest as well as the confiscation of a Sumatran rhino horn and body parts of other endangered species. It is not yet clear if the two cases are connected, Tulus said.

The horn confiscated on Aug. 13 is around 15 centimeters tall and has a circumference of 36 centimeters. Tulus said officials had not yet determined whether the horn came from a rhino that died recently, but noted that it smelled due to the presence of flesh at its base.



The horn confiscated by authorities on Aug. 13. Photo by Ayat Karokaro/Mongabay-Indonesia.

According to Tulus, authorities launched an investigation after receiving a tip from a member of the public. "We discovered that they attempted to sell the rhino horn. But it's not only that. There were also tiger skin and elephant ivory," he said, noting that his agency worked the case alongside the Aceh and Jambi branches of the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA).

The arrests were made after investigators posed as buyers and set up a meeting in Medan. The detainees will be prosecuted for violating Indonesia's 1990 Conservation Law, as well as a 1999 government regulation on the preservation of flora and fauna species.

Tulus said the initial investigation suggests that a well-organized network was behind the intended rhino horn sale. "I see the operation as connected across provinces, and

even across countries," he told Mongabay. "This is still speculation, but in general, they're operating in Malaysia and Hong Kong. We are smelling that there's a connection."

***Mongabay staff writer Hans Nicholas Jong and Mongabay-Indonesia correspondent Ayat Karokaro contributed to this report.***