

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



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**UPDATE TO CITES PARTIES ON THE POPULATION STATUS OF RHINOCEROSES (BLACK & WHITE) AND MEASURES IN PLACE TO ADDRESS RHINO POACHING IN BOTSWANA<sup>1</sup>**

1. Botswana is submitting this Information Document to CoP19 to update CITES Parties on the population status of Southern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*) and South central black rhino (*Diceros bicornis minor*), as well as measures and activities in place to address rhino poaching in the country. This is in response to section 36 and 37 of CoP 19 Document 75 submitted by the Standing Committee and the Secretariat. Additionally, there have been deliberate misinformation campaigns on rhino poaching in Botswana, including claims that the Government of Botswana is not working well with other range states in managing rhino poaching, and that Government does not share information on rhinos with non-state actors. Regrettably, these misleading claims are made by non-Botswana based NGOs that have little understanding on what is happening in-country, yet they had not engaged the Government of Botswana to establish the facts.
2. This document will address Botswana's rhino conservation interventions, and update the CITES Parties on the following:
  - Historical rhino population trends and re-introductions in Botswana
  - Botswana rhino poaching trends
  - Response measures in place to counter rhino poaching

*Historical rhino population trends and re-introductions in Botswana*

3. Historically, the combined effects of unregulated hunting and poaching activities during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century led to a significant decline of rhino populations across Africa. As a result rhinos went extinct in Botswana in the late 1890s.
4. Forty six (46) Southern white rhino *Ceratotherium simum simum* were reintroduced between 1967 and 1976 into Northern Botswana. Another ninety two (92) were re-introduced between 1978 and 1986. In 1987, an aerial survey done by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks counted only one hundred and twenty (120) of the expected one hundred and fifty (150) rhinos in the Northern Botswana. A follow up aerial survey done in 1992 showed drastic population reduction and that resulted in a Government decision to translocate

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all rhinoceros from Northern Botswana to fenced-in sanctuaries, with the objective of breeding these animals for reintroduction into the wild at a later date.

5. Since the 1990s, Botswana has been building its rhino populations in the fenced environment. These fenced populations were supplemented by rhinos from neighboring countries, namely Zimbabwe and South Africa. A total of thirty three (33) Southern white rhinos were re-introduced back into the wild between 2001 and 2003 in Moremi Game Reserve (Okavango Delta) as a combined effort between the Government of Botswana and its stakeholders. Twenty eight (28) of these rhinos came from South Africa. Shortly after the re-introduction of Southern white rhino in the north, other rhinos started to disperse to build subpopulations elsewhere in the country. The population in the Okavango Delta established well and increased to an estimated sixty (60) animals by the end of 2012. Private rhino ownership also started to increase around the period of 2014 to 2017 and contributed largely to the growth of the Southern white rhino population in Botswana.
6. A total of eighty seven (87) Southern white rhinos and thirty eight (38) Black rhinos were brought into the Okavango Delta from South Africa and Zimbabwe between 2014 and 2017. Eight of the black rhinos came from Zimbabwe, sixteen (16) from the South Africa's Northwest Province and fourteen (14) from South Africa's Limpopo Province, and were released into various concessions in the Okavango Delta. By the end of 2018, according to Department Wildlife and National Parks official records, there were an estimated two hundred and one (201) white rhinos, including 50+black rhinos in the Okavango Delta and environs, and 4 black rhinos on private ranch/ sanctuary.

#### *Poaching trends*

7. Even though the dramatic surge in organized rhino poaching in the region has been going on for decades, Botswana was spared the scourge until 2018 when organized rhino poaching eventually hit the country. This increase in rhino poaching in Botswana coincided with a decline of rhino poaching in South Africa from 2018 to 2020 (CoP 19 Doc 75 p-8), suggesting a displacement of the poaching syndicates from South Africa to Botswana. The recent decline in rhino poaching in Botswana (2021 and 2022, relative to 2020, see Table 1) coincides with the increase in rhino poaching in Namibia and South Africa, further suggesting displacement of the poaching syndicates across the sub-region. A total of one hundred and forty (140) animals were killed by poachers between 2012 and 2022, see Table 2, with a peak in 2020 and a sharp decline in poaching incidents during 2021 and 2022. Furthermore, more than 99% of the poaching occurred in the Okavango Delta and some parts of Moremi Game Reserve. Typically the swampy Okavango Delta and adjacent areas are the most difficult and challenging terrain for law enforcement officers to patrol.
8. Paragraph 36 of CoP19.Doc75 (Rev 1) reads "*Table 8 of the report in Annex 4 shows that the number of rhinoceroses illegally killed in Botswana started to escalate in 2017, with nine rhinoceroses poached in the country that year. This continued to further escalate, with 18 rhinoceroses poached in Botswana in 2018, 31 in 2019 and 55 in 2020. Incidences of illegal killing of rhinos in Botswana were not available for 2021.*" There are inaccuracies in some of these figures, and the correct and verified statistics of rhino poached in Botswana are shown on Table 1 below. Table 1 also shows that claims such as in paragraph 64 of CoP19.Doc75 (Rev 1) that suggest a continued increasing trend in rhino poaching in Botswana are false, as the reality is that poaching incidences in 2022 have been reduced to 2018 levels.

*Table 1. Number of rhinoceros poached in Botswana each year from 2012 to 2022 (up to 13 Nov 2022)*

	YEAR											TOTAL
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Number poached	0	1	0	0	1	0	7	30	62	33	6	140

*Response measures to counter rhino poaching that was occurring in the wild*

9. As of 13 November 2022, there are an estimated two hundred and eighty-five (285) white rhinos and twenty-three (23) black rhinos in various properties across Botswana. Below we summarize what Government and its non-state collaborators are doing to mitigate poaching threats, which interventions are working as demonstrated by the decline in number of poaching cases during 2021 and 2022, relative to the 2020 peak.

**(a) Rhino Conservation Strategy**

10. A National Rhino Conservation Strategy was adopted in January 2005 and the Botswana Rhino Management Committee established in the same year. The Botswana Rhino Management Committee consist of members of security agencies from Government, Non-Governmental Organizations with rhino interests, Botswana Wildlife Producers Association, Private veterinarians specialized on rhinos, National Rhino Coordinator (Government), Conservation managers from different private rhino sanctuaries, the Chairman of the committee who is a member of one of the rhino sanctuaries, and the Director of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. The overall purpose of the Committee is to advise the Director of Wildlife and National Parks on all issues related to rhino conservation in Botswana. The National Rhino Conservation Strategy was revised again in 2011 but only adopted in 2013. The new Strategy under review for the period 2022 to 2027 will address shortcomings in the previous 2013 Strategy; this Strategy is undergoing stakeholder consultation, and is scheduled to be launched by March 2023. The key tenets of this 2022 to 2027 Strategy are already being implemented.

**(b) Increased law enforcement efforts in poaching hotspot areas**

11. The Government has deployed a large contingent of the Army into the rhino range area, including in Private Reserves and game farms, to support the Department of Wildlife and National Parks and private game ranchers to fight poaching by armed and highly organized criminal gangs involved in rhino poaching. Similarly the Police and State Intelligence are involved in counter-poaching operations in order to augment the Department of Wildlife and National Parks' efforts to combat wildlife crime. The National Anti-Poaching Strategy (see point (f) below) provides among others Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that govern the inter-agency relationships, and so there is clarity in how the law enforcement agencies work together on anti-poaching and illegal wildlife trade operations.

**(c) Inter-agency cooperation and collaboration**

12. Government has enhanced inter-agency collaboration such that all law enforcement agencies (i.e. Army, Police, State Intelligence and Department of Wildlife and National Parks) work together to deal with poaching. Inter-agency committees have been established both at National and district-levels, and they meet weekly in order to share intelligence and other crucial operational information, and also to plan and implement law enforcement operations together.

**(d) Strengthening Bilateral and Multilateral relationships**

13. Botswana has been engaging all her neighbors through Joint Permanent Commission on Defense and Security (JPCD&S) structures, chaired by Cabinet Ministers of the respective countries. Most of the JPCD&Cs have since been elevated to Bi-National Commissions (BNCs) chaired by Heads of State. Wildlife crime, most of which is transnational, is one of the major thematic areas covered by these Commissions. Resolutions on commitments during these meetings are implemented at district-level especially joint border patrol, joint investigation, sharing of intelligence, and conduct of joint/synchronized transboundary law enforcement operations. Botswana also has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with South Africa on rhino management, and finalizing one with Zimbabwe. The MoU's permit sharing of technical information and request for capacity building when necessary.

**(e) Active member of Regional structures fighting wildlife crime**

14. Over and above the bilateral structures, Botswana is an active member of a number of regional and international structures meant to build collaborative relationships with other regional States to combat

transnational wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade. This includes the SADC/Interpol Rhino and Elephant Security group, Interpol Wildlife Crime Working Group, Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) Safety and Security Group, among others. Through these platforms, Botswana coordinates its anti-poaching operations with those of its neighbors, such as for example epitomized by implementation of the SADC Law Enforcement and Action Plan (SADC LEAP), which has further been cascaded for implementation within the KAZA TFCA landscape by Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

**(f) The National Anti-Poaching Strategy**

15. A key response has been the development of a National Anti-Poaching Strategy (NAPS; originally developed in 2014, updated in 2022). The 2014 NAPS formed the basis for Inter-agency collaboration. As a result, law enforcement agencies (Army, Police, State Intelligence and Department of Wildlife and National Parks) started working together in all spheres of wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade, including joint planning and execution of intelligence-led operations. This has allowed for pooling of resources and synergies, which are enhanced in the 2022 NAPS, which also brings into the fold other statutory agencies (e.g. Botswana Unified Revenue Services, Financial Intelligence Agency, Civil Aviation Authority of Botswana etc.) whose mandates support combat of poaching and illegal wildlife trade. Several MoUs are being developed to codify these relations (e.g. a Department of Wildlife and National Parks–Civil Aviation Authority of Botswana MoU signed in 2022), clarifying fine-scale NAPS implementation mechanisms.

**(g) Strategic Government-private partnerships and International Cooperating Partners**

16. In its effort to enhance efforts to combat wildlife crime in the country, the Government of Botswana has built strategic partnerships with other organizations, including the private sector and International Cooperating Partners such as UNDP/GEF, KAZA, UNODC, Interpol, amongst others. These strategic partnerships have enhanced transnational and regional cooperation on efforts to combat wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade. As a result, a number of international as well as regional operations aimed at combating wildlife crime have been carried out since CoP18. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies routinely undergo numerous capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing efforts towards combating wildlife crime.

**(h) Dehorning of the country's Rhino population**

17. The Government of Botswana took a decision to dehorn all rhinos in the wild in an effort to reduce their appeal to poachers and subsequently discourage poachers from traveling to the country for hornless animals. Similarly, owners of private sanctuaries housing rhino are being encouraged to dehorn their animals. As a response to poaching that occurred in the wild, over one hundred (100+) Southern white rhino from the wild population were dehorned in 2020 to mitigate risk of poaching.

**(i) Safe keeping of rhino horn**

18. Botswana keeps its rhino horns in a strong room that is well secured to prevent leakages of horn into illegal markets. Live rhino, and rhino specimen, are not traded at all in Botswana, and so calls for Botswana to review trade data on rhino and rhino specimen (e.g. paragraph 19.CC of CoP19.Doc75 (Rev 1)) are misplaced.

**(j) Establishing secure and safe rhino havens/Sanctuaries**

19. The Government of Botswana took a deliberate decision to move all rhinos in high-risk-areas to areas that are safer, with the intention of reintroducing them back into wilderness areas once the situation improves. In addition, security has been strengthened at all rhino-holding facilities including those under private ownership. To date the vast majority of rhinos which were remaining in the delta have been translocated to fenced establishments.

**(k) Curbing illegal wildlife trafficking**

20. Efforts geared towards combating wildlife crime have been intensified across the country through targeted regional operations, use of detection dogs at strategic points including ports of entry/exit. These involve inter-agency collaborating partners including the aviation authority and other border control authorities.

**(l) Community beneficiation and Communities as First Line of Defence**

21. The Government of Botswana has always promoted Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) as a tool to foster community participation in the protection and sustainable use of natural resources. Rhino sanctuaries and concessionaires holding rhinos have employed the CBNRM model and worked with local communities to improve community support for rhino conservation, in order to address rhino poaching that usually starts at community level.

**(m) Public education and awareness-raising**

22. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks has a Community Support and Outreach (CSO) Division, whose functions among others include publication of awareness-raising materials and engaging members of the public (e.g. at public fairs and other events where large groups of people congregate). These platforms are used to raise public awareness on poaching and illegal wildlife trade, as well as other issues of interest to wildlife conservation. Moreover, press statements are released on a need basis, including a specific press statement on 22 October 2021 that provided 10 year trends (2010 to 2020) rhino and elephant poaching. Consequently, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks keeps Botswana informed of poaching in Botswana, contrary to some assertions by non-Botswana NGOs that suggest otherwise. Additionally, the Botswana Police Service runs a popular weekly television programme (called '*Itshereletse*'), where issues of wildlife poaching have been featured, in an effort to raise awareness on poaching of rhino and other wildlife species more generally.

**(n) Improvement to prosecution and the judiciary in respect of wildlife crime**

23. The Government, through the prosecution authority created a division dedicated to prosecuting wildlife crime related cases in order to increase successful prosecutions of wildlife crime cases. The positive effects of this development are already being felt.

**(o) Capacity building for forensic analysis**

24. Several law enforcement and laboratory officers have been undergoing training on forensic analysis, with these courses increasing after COVID 19 travel restrictions were lifted. The training has included trophy identification using DNA analysis of among others tissues (fresh meat and biltong), blood samples, skin, hides, nails, teeth, bones. Field officers have been trained on presentation of evidence in court. Botswana just like other rhino range state is experiencing challenges in genetic profiling of its rhinos due to lack of skilled manpower and analytic skills such as kinship and parentage analysis of threatened species such as rhinos and elephants, and this is an area that is being improved on.

**CONCLUSION**

25. It is noteworthy to note that there is a significant decline in rhino poaching incidences between 2020 and 2022, following the peak in 2020. This decline is a direct result of the Government response in the form of various interventions, including those summarized above. Misguided calls by some western NGOs calling for each of the interventions to be evaluated in isolation (such as whether dehorning by itself curbed poaching), are misleading and divert attention from the key indicator that matter, which is whether overall rhino poaching is decreasing or increasing. It is clear that conservation and anti-poaching efforts have been intensified to combat poaching across the country since CoP18, and there is explicit evidence of a decline in rhino poaching in 2021 and 2022, relative to the 2020 peak. Moreover, the Government has improved the ecological management of rhinos in fenced-in areas for better breeding performance to ensure that the targeted growth rate is met. These measures are being implemented through a combination of Government-only programmes, Public-Private-Community Partnerships, and through the support of International Cooperating Partners, who have all committed substantial resources to intensify anti-poaching measures. Botswana has intentions to maintain the current decline until it reaches negligible levels, working with agencies that genuinely do want to lend assistance.