



April 9, 2018



His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa
The Presidency
Republic of South Africa
Union Buildings
Private Bag X1000
Pretoria, 0001
South Africa



Re: Appeal for Urgent Major Actions Against the Criminal Rhino Horn Syndicates

Dear President Cyril Ramaphosa:



We, the undersigned 34 environmental and conservation organizations, 12 of which are based in South Africa, are writing to congratulate you on becoming the new President of the Republic of South Africa and to respectfully appeal to you to publicly denounce the criminal syndicates responsible for the poaching of South Africa's rhinos and unleash a full-scale legal and investigative attack on their operations, finances, and political enablers. We are heartened by your commitment to eliminate corruption, and encourage you to install clear leadership to expedite prosecution of the syndicates and purge the rot of corruption from South Africa's conservation, enforcement, and judicial sectors.

South Africa is currently engulfed in a rhino poaching crisis that has seen more than 7,100 rhinos poached over the last ten years. More than 1,000 rhinos were killed in South Africa last year alone, a 7,800 percent increase over the 13 rhinos killed in 2007.¹ This poaching onslaught is destroying South Africa's wildlife heritage, fueling deadly violence, contributing to the continued disenfranchisement of indigenous communities, and negatively impacting the country's tourism industry, which supports 1.5 million jobs and contributes R402 billion to the country's GDP.²

There is a desperate need for clear and effective leadership at the national level to bring the chaos of corruption and the poaching it facilitates under control so that the criminal syndicates responsible for the rhino poaching crisis will finally face justice. Given the allegations of widespread corruption throughout South Africa's enforcement and judicial sectors, we recommend appointing a Special Prosecutor who would oversee a task force of carefully vetted investigators mandated to expose and prosecute these criminal syndicates and their compromised government protectors.

The actions of the Special Prosecutor would be complementary to South Africa's National Integrated Strategy for Combatting Wildlife Trafficking (NISCWT), which should be implemented as a matter of urgency. The Special Prosecutor should establish specialized courts, as recommended in the NISCWT, at poaching hotspots like Kruger National Park in Limpopo, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park in KwaZulu-Natal, and Pilanesberg National Park in North West to efficiently address rhino-related crimes. Greater priority must be given to dismantling rhino poaching and trafficking syndicates along with the corrupt officials shielding them from justice. Once arrested, these criminals must be successfully convicted and handed the maximum penalty allowed under the law so as to provide an effective deterrent against future crime and corruption. Additionally, investigators should place particular emphasis on tracking illicit financial flows to identify complex transnational wildlife trafficking networks and utilize anti-money laundering legislation that can effectively dismantle these syndicates.

The Special Prosecutor should answer only to the office of the President while being supported by the Directorate for Priority Crimes Investigation, Financial Intelligence Centre, National Prosecuting

¹ https://www.savetherhino.org/rhino_info/poaching_statistics

² <https://www.fin24.com/Economy/travel-and-tourism-to-contribute-r4122bn-to-sas-gdp-in-2017-20170421>





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Authority, and other relevant national and provincial authorities. This centralized approach will finally bring down the transnational syndicates operating in South Africa by streamlining information through an independent, uncorrupted core team whose ultimate authority is unequivocal.

However, these syndicates can only be brought down if the systemic corruption that has infiltrated the country's conservation, enforcement, and judicial institutions is finally eradicated. In January, the Department of Environmental Affairs announced that 21 officials were arrested in 2017 on poaching-related charges, and other reports continue to surface alleging police, rangers, and protected area officials are in fact working with poaching gangs to kill the very wildlife they have pledged to protect.

Corruption has allowed rhino poaching and trafficking syndicates to terrorize local communities near public parks and private reserves without consequence, and anyone who stands up to the syndicates is threatened along with their families. The incessant crime precludes indigenous communities from realising employment and investment opportunities that could otherwise be derived from wildlife-based industries.

There have also been disturbing allegations that a complex web of corrupt magistrates and attorneys in KwaZulu-Natal has been preventing known poachers, traffickers, and other dangerous criminals from facing justice. Many cases brought against high-level members of poaching and trafficking syndicates throughout South Africa have remained bogged down in the courts for years with no progress in sight.

We appreciate the efforts South Africa has made thus far to stem the tide of the poaching. However, until corruption is finally eradicated and the criminal syndicates are dismantled, South Africa's rhinos will continue to be poached and the lives of honest rangers, police, prosecutors, magistrates and their families will continue to be threatened by those who profit from the absence of law and order.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to publicly denounce the syndicates responsible for South Africa's rhino poaching crisis and allocate adequate resources to investigate and prosecute these criminals to the full extent of the law. By taking swift action South Africa can overcome the immense challenges threatening the continued survival of the rhino and once again save this species from the brink of extinction.

May we kindly ask for your representative to acknowledge receipt of this letter via email? Please contact Amy Zets Croke at the Environmental Investigation Agency at amyzets@eia-global.org or via telephone +1 202-483-6621. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with your representative.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Thornton, OBE
President
Environmental Investigation Agency

On behalf of:

Amy P. Wilson, Director and Co-founder, **Animal Law Reform South Africa** (South Africa)
Jill Robinson, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, **Animals Asia Foundation** (Hong Kong)
Smaragda Louw, Director, **Ban Animal Trading South Africa** (South Africa)
Drew Abrahamson, Director and Founder, **Captured in Africa Foundation** (South Africa)



Sarah Uhlemann, Senior Attorney & International Program Director, **Center for Biological Diversity** (USA)

Rob Brandford, Executive Director, **The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust** and **iWorry Campaign** (Kenya)

Karen Botha, Chief Executive Officer, **The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation** (United Kingdom)

Ofir Drori, Founder and Director, **The EAGLE Network** and **The Last Great Ape Organization** (Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Senegal, Togo, Uganda)

Andrea Crosta, Executive Director, **Elephant Action League** (USA)

Brett Mitchell, Chairman, **Elephant Reintegration Trust** (South Africa)

Dr. Marion Garaï, Chairperson, **Elephant Specialist Advisory Group** (South Africa), and Trustee, **Space for Elephants Foundation** (South Africa)

Dr. Michael Chase, Founder and Director, **Elephants Without Borders** (Botswana)

Michele Pickover, Director, **EMS Foundation** (South Africa)

Christine Mullholland and Stephanie Hill, President and Vice President, **Generation Awakening** (USA)

Rosemary Alles, President and Core Strategist, **The Global March for Elephants and Rhinos**

Audrey Delsink, Executive Director, **Humane Society International – Africa** (South Africa)

Michael O'Sullivan, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, **Humane Society of Canada** (Canada)

Masayuki Sakamoto, Executive Director, **Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund** (Japan)

Bool Smuts, Director, **Landmark Foundation** (South Africa)

Yvette Taylor, Executive Director, **Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization** (South Africa)

Zak Smith, Wildlife Trade Initiative Director, **Natural Resources Defense Council** (USA)

Barbara Mackraz, Founder and Executive Director, **OliveSeed Foundation** (USA)

Kim Da Ribeira, Spokesperson, **Outraged SA Citizens Against Rhino Poaching** (South Africa)

Carl Thornton, Founder, **Pit-Track K9 Conservation and Anti-Poaching Unit** (South Africa)

Daniela Freyer, Chief Executive Officer, **Pro Wildlife** (Germany)

Thomas Töpfer, Chairman, **Rettet die Elefanten Afrikas e.V.** (Germany)

Alexia Abnett, Director, **South African Fight for Rhinos** (South Africa)

Dr. Trevor Jones, Director, **Southern Tanzania Elephant Program** (Tanzania)

Ann Michels, Executive Director, **Species Survival Network**

Peter Knights, Chief Executive Officer, **WildAid** (USA)

Belinda Wright OBE, Executive Director, **Wildlife Protection Society of India** (India)