Role of corruption in illegal trade

Rhino horn trafficking as a form of transnational organised crime 2012-2021

2022 GLOBAL THREAT ASSESSMENT
The Wildlife Justice Commission acknowledges the immense challenges facing law enforcement agencies that are investigating the transnational organised criminal networks trafficking in rhino horn. These challenges include legislative deficiencies, insufficient resources, mandate, technical capacity, intelligence sharing issues, and of course, the scourge of corruption. We also pay our respects to those officers and rangers who have paid the ultimate price and those who continue to risk their lives on the frontline preventing the poaching of rhinos and investigating these criminal networks.

The Wildlife Justice Commission is committed to continuing to support law enforcement agencies as they work to end the trafficking of rhino horn.

It is with this mission that we produce this threat assessment. It aims to share strategic intelligence that identifies and provides insights on present and emerging organised crime threats relating to rhino horn trafficking. It interprets and analyses intelligence holdings and information from open sources to build the global intelligence picture, propose hypotheses about the immediate or imminent threats, identify where intelligence gaps exist, and highlight vulnerabilities that could become potential threats in the future.

We hope that this assessment will go some way towards assisting law enforcement agencies working across the illegal rhino horn supply chain to maximise their response and impact in addressing this issue, and to continue to build on the important progress and achievements that are being made.

The full report is set out in 10 chapters covering key criminal elements of the illegal rhino horn trade.

Recognising the density of detail in the report, each chapter is written to be able to be read as a standalone topic with the aim of making the report more accessible and useful for policy makers, practitioners and researchers interested in a specific aspect of criminality. The stand alone publication focuses on the role of corruption in illegal trade.
Acknowledgements

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## Acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIS</td>
<td>Automatic Identification System</td>
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<td>ANAC</td>
<td>National Administration of Conservation Areas</td>
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<td>ASB</td>
<td>Anti-Smuggling Bureau</td>
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<td>CITES</td>
<td>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora</td>
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<td>DFFE</td>
<td>Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<td>EEFC</td>
<td>Environmental Enforcement Fusion Centre</td>
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<td>FRELIMO</td>
<td>Liberation Front of Mozambique</td>
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<td>HAWKS</td>
<td>Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation</td>
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<td>KLIA</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur International Airport</td>
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<td>OBK</td>
<td>Operasi Bersepadu Khazanah</td>
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<td>PDR</td>
<td>(Lao) People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>PERHILITAN</td>
<td>Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia</td>
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<td>RMB</td>
<td>Chinese Renminbi</td>
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<td>SANParks</td>
<td>South African National Parks</td>
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<td>SAPS</td>
<td>South African Police Service</td>
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<td>SAR</td>
<td>(Hong Kong) Special Administrative Region</td>
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<td>SERNIC</td>
<td>National Criminal Investigation Service</td>
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<td>TCM</td>
<td>Traditional Chinese medicine</td>
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<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
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<td>VND</td>
<td>Vietnam Dong</td>
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Rhino horn trafficking remains a severe problem that needs to be addressed with a new sense of urgency as transnational organised crime. Over the past 10 years, the illegal killing of rhinos and trafficking of their horns has grown as a global criminal enterprise, comprising multiple criminal components dominated by greed and the pursuit of substantial profits.

This threat assessment presents a comprehensive analysis of rhino horn trafficking during the decade from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2021.

It was compiled following analysis of 674 rhino horn seizure incidents collected from open-source reports that occurred globally during this decade, in addition to seven years of criminal intelligence and findings from Wildlife Justice Commission investigations into rhino horn trafficking conducted since 2015, and other open-source research.

This assessment aims to examine the driving forces behind the trade and changes in the criminal landscape. It also considers the threat to rhinos in 2022, with recommendations to help inform interventions to address this issue and ensure the global response is commensurate and appropriately targeted to current and future needs.
Corruption threatens, weakens, and undermines the regulatory and enforcement systems put in place to protect rhinos, and all other efforts to combat rhino poaching and illegal rhino horn trade will fail unless corruption is tackled. Criminal networks can apply sophisticated approaches to entrap officials or use threats or violence to coerce them into supporting their operations, making it very difficult to resist the pressure and financial temptation. This can only be countered by identifying and treating corruption risks effectively, to strengthen the whole system and make it more difficult for criminal networks to exploit.

1. Sanitised intelligence and findings from seven years’ worth of Wildlife Justice Commission investigations are interwoven throughout this threat assessment to provide context and insights into changes in the criminal dynamics of rhino horn trafficking. Where information is drawn from any other source, it is referenced with footnotes and acknowledged as such. Any non-referenced information, inferences or interpretation should be understood as being sourced from Wildlife Justice Commission intelligence analysis.
KEY FINDINGS

✓ Corruption plays a key role in facilitating criminal operations to acquire and smuggle rhino horn through the supply chain and creating favourable operating conditions for criminal networks.

✓ All other efforts to combat rhino poaching and illegal rhino horn trade will fail unless corruption is tackled.

✓ While some countries such as South Africa and China are taking important steps to address corrupt behaviour and treat corruption risks, there is a need to recognise and pre-empt corruption as a systemic threat enabling wildlife crime. The absence of cases in other key locations suggests a lack of focus and effort elsewhere on this important issue.

✓ Illustrative examples of corruption enabling rhino crimes include park rangers providing tip-offs to poachers, hunting permit irregularities, involvement of government officials in rhino horn trade, bribery for law enforcement “protection”, bribery to facilitate customs clearance, secure bail or release from custody, evade criminal justice, or release seized contraband, and the theft of official property or stockpiled horns.
Corruption facilitates criminal operations to acquire and move rhino horns throughout the supply chain. It can occur in any location and involve public or private sector actors. It also undermines the criminal justice system and creates a significant advantage in favour of criminal networks over law enforcement agencies who are investigating these crimes, as corrupted officials protect traffickers and hinder investigative efforts. Whether that support extends to warnings about law enforcement activities, payments for protecting or not prosecuting traffickers, selling back seized goods, or facilitating the movement of contraband across borders, all these activities have a corrosive effect on society and create an uneven playing field for law enforcement.
In the private sector, legitimate service providers may become willing participants in crime, actively choosing to work with criminal networks, or they could be unwilling actors, coerced into crime or unwitting facilitators of it.\(^2\) Legitimate businesses and front companies can be used to launder illegally obtained rhino horn, or to obtain permits and acquire horn through proper processes and then trade it illegally in contravention of laws and regulations.

In law enforcement, corruption can also create silos where intelligence is not shared due to a fear or perception (justified or otherwise) of corruption amongst other enforcement units. Rather than supplying intelligence and if operations run afoul then identifying the source of the leak, intelligence is not shared at all. In some countries, this has crippled any coordinated response and allowed key criminal actors to operate with relative impunity.

In the course of its investigations, the Wildlife Justice Commission has found that some criminal networks only engage in illicit trade after corrupting relevant authorities and gaining sufficient assurance of limited or no interdiction. It has also discovered that traffickers include the cost of bribes and corruption in the price of their products.

This chapter presents a series of examples to illustrate the role of corruption across the illicit rhino horn supply chain based on published cases and open-source information as well as intelligence and findings from Wildlife Justice Commission investigations. It also identifies areas of potential corruption risk and highlights areas where efforts are being made to tackle corruption issues.

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8.1. Corruption risks across the supply chain

Identifying where corruption risks exist in the rhino horn supply chain can help authorities to develop targeted strategies and actions to prevent or reduce the opportunity for corrupt behaviour. Corruption provides a source of resilience for criminal networks due to its enabling and facilitating role, but if the likelihood of corrupt practices can be minimised, then opportunities to engage in wildlife crime should also diminish.

Figure 1 broadly depicts the flow of rhino horn in licit and illicit supply chains from source country to destination country and the main types of activities that take place at each stage. It is primarily at the point of consolidating horns and preparing shipments for export that licit sources of horn can be diverted into the illegal supply chain, through the exploitation of certain vulnerabilities such as bribery of shipping companies or customs officials. Corruption risks at subsequent stages then support the ongoing movement of the illicit shipment through the supply chain. For wholly illicit horns that originate from poaching offences, there are corruption risks right from the very beginning of the process that can support those activities to take place, such as bribery and coercion of game scouts and rangers in protected areas to provide information on the location of rhinos, or to turn a blind eye or play an active role in poaching. Furthermore, some corruption risks exist at every stage of the supply chain, such as bribery of police, prosecutors, or judges to stymie investigations and trials in the event of arrest.

As the proverb says, sunlight is the best disinfectant, and it is important to recognise where positive efforts are being made to address corrupt behaviour and treat corruption risks. In South Africa, targeted investigations have resulted in growing numbers of arrests and convictions of police and park rangers in relation to rhino poaching and rhino horn trafficking. A recent example is a former police officer who was arrested after being found in possession of a hunting rifle with live rounds of ammunition, several hunting knives, and two freshly cut rhino horns, having just left the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. He was convicted in February 2022 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

South Africa regularly reports such arrests, including in the DFFE’s annual rhino management progress reports (for instance, 21 officials were reported arrested in relation to rhino poaching offences in 2017), and in the media, with at

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least eight cases involving the arrest of 13 officials reported in the three years between 2019 and 2021. Recent arrests of rangers on charges related to fraud, money laundering, and corruption also show the growing acknowledgement of the need to address corruption.

China has also arrested customs officers for facilitating the smuggling of rhino horn shipments into the country, and other government officials for accepting rhino horn products as bribery payments or for their involvement in purchasing rhino horn products. Analysis of Chinese court case judgements found at least 10 such cases between 2019 and 2021.

Meanwhile, open-source research identifies only a few sporadic arrests and convictions of corrupt actors in other countries along the illegal rhino horn supply chain, which suggests a lack of focus on corruption during investigations rather than a reduced incidence of corruption. For example, only one case was identified in Vietnam, when a customs officer who was caught stealing rhino horn and ivory from seized stockpiles in a customs warehouse and replacing them with fake products in 2017 was convicted on embezzlement charges and sentenced to 16 years imprisonment. One case was identified in Mozambique involving the theft of rhino horns from seized stockpiles in 2015 and the arrest of four security staff who were entrusted with looking after the storeroom. No relevant corruption cases were identified involving Malaysian or Hong Kong officials.

Image 1: Rodney Landela, pictured in 2014 on an anti-poaching patrol in Kruger National Park, was arrested in 2016 for allegedly killing a rhino and taking its horn. Source: James Oatway, Getty Images.

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7. According to open-source research conducted by the Wildlife Justice Commission.
8. https://www.sanparks.org/about/news/?id=58547
Figure 1: General representation of licit and illicit rhino horn supply chain flows, key activities, and potential corruption risks.
Corrupt acts include bribery (actively giving and passively receiving) in the public or private sector, embezzlement, abuse of office/position, and trading in influence. Related acts also include illicit enrichment, concealment, and money laundering of the proceeds resulting from corruption. Following are a selection of detected cases and intelligence to exemplify how these acts can occur in the illegal rhino horn supply chain and highlight vulnerable points that have been exploited by organised crime groups.

**Bribery: Park rangers providing tip-offs to poachers**

SANParks have acknowledged the severe threat that internal corruption and collusion presents to rhino populations, and various arrests have been made of park rangers found to be working with poaching networks and providing inside information on anti-poaching patrols and the location of rhinos. A recent example is two Kruger National Park field rangers who were arrested in April 2022 in relation to providing tactical information to rhino poaching syndicates in exchange for large sums of money, and were charged with fraud, money laundering and corruption. One of the rangers has already been dismissed from their job while the other ranger’s case is pending the outcome of the court process. Furthermore, analysis of a sample of SAPS records for 123 cases of rhino and elephant crimes found that law enforcement and conservation officials were implicated in at least 15% of the cases, either as the accused or as alleged to have aided the accused in committing the offences.

The Wildlife Justice Commission has collected intelligence on a major poaching coordinator in Mozambique who utilises corrupt connections with rangers in Limpopo National Park to provide counter-surveillance for rhino poaching incursions, and his social media account includes an image of him handing cash to a suspected park employee. Intelligence on the leader of another rhino poaching network in Mozambique indicates that he is working with corrupt rangers in Kruger National Park who forward him information on where rhinos are roaming, and he then arranges his poaching teams to deploy to those locations.

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Bribery: Hunting permit irregularities

In March 2013, the South African Environmental Affairs Minister was reported to have acknowledged corruption issues in the issuance of hunting permits in North West and Limpopo provinces, such as officials accepting bribes to cover-up pseudo-hunts and to ignore abuses in the hunting industry, and selling hunting permits “under the counter”. While the pseudo-hunting schemes prior to 2012 mainly involved Vietnamese and Thai hunters, between 2012-2014 the modus operandi evolved to recruit Czech and Polish hunters, as criminal networks adapted to the new requirements of tightened hunting regulations. During a three-year investigation, Czech authorities found as many as 180 people may have been implicated as financiers, smugglers, recruiters, and pseudo-hunters. In Poland, a 2019 inspection of 50 hunters found that none of them still owned their rhino horn trophy, suggesting that the hunters were used as proxies to legally export the horns to Poland for onwards trafficking to consumer countries. Similar irregularities in the volume of hunting applications from China, Slovakia, Russia and Ukraine were also observed during this period. In response, South Africa further tightened the hunting regulations in June 2014.


16. Ibid.
Abuse of office: Involvement of government officials in rhino horn trade

A long-serving nature conservation official and a former policeman were arrested in the North West province, South Africa in October 2021 on various charges linked to the illegal rhino horn trade. The conservation officer was said to have inappropriate relationships with several game farm owners in his district and records show that he previously attended a number of pseudo-hunts by Vietnamese, Laotian, and Thai hunters. The two men were arrested in the process of illegally transporting 17 rhino horns from a game farm in the Northern Cape to the North West province.

In December 2016, Wildlife Justice Commission investigators were referred to a suspect located in Cameroon who was trading in rhino horn and tiger skins. During the engagement, the suspect said he only worked by referrals, would only send photos of available products “at the right time”, and that he worked with a specific shipping agency that handled the clearing process and direct delivery of his products. He indicated he was currently in possession of 14 raw rhino horns and six tiger skins. Later in the conversation he explained that he was particularly cautious because he was a high-level government official in Cameroon operating a “back door” wildlife trafficking business. Four days later he sent an image of two rhino horns with a note with the investigator’s name and date on it, confirming his possession of at least two rhino horns. However, the intelligence on his government position remains unconfirmed.

In 2018, a Mozambican trafficker indicated he had high-level political connections, telling an investigator he has a “free walk” card that was given to him by FRELIMO party members to circumvent security checks at Maputo airport when carrying rhino horn shipments to China and Vietnam. He also said that on one trip during 2012-2013 he was arrested in China for illegal possession of rhino horn, and an undisclosed senior FRELIMO member had to negotiate his release with the Chinese authorities.

The incident did not prevent him from being able to continue to travel to China.

Also in Mozambique, intelligence suggests that a Vietnamese restaurant in Maputo could be involved in the illegal trade of rhino horn. Wildlife Justice Commission investigators have observed visits by Vietnamese government officers who are based in Maputo and known Vietnamese rhino horn traffickers, and it is suspected that Vietnamese embassy

The Wildlife Justice Commission is also in receipt of intelligence that this North West conservation official had supplied rhino horns from a government-owned reserve stockpile to Dawie Groenewald in 2021, who was subsequently arrested for illegal transportation of the horns.
officials have purchased rhino horn products from the restaurant owner or staff. A known Vietnamese rhino horn trafficker based in Maputo who regularly travels to Chokwe to buy horns has also been observed meeting with unknown individuals driving a vehicle with diplomatic registration plates.

Other instances of North Korean and Vietnamese diplomatic connections to illegal rhino horn trade in South Africa and Mozambique have been documented by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime.21

Bribery for law enforcement protection

In 2015, Wildlife Justice Commission investigators were told by a trader that Nhi Khe village in Vietnam was “a special place”, and all traders paid a monthly fee to local law enforcement officers in exchange for protection. This allowed traders to openly display and sell their illegal rhino horn and ivory products, while someone would leak operational information to give advance warning of inspections. In one instance during a meeting with a trader at a timber store, investigators directly observed a transaction occur when the police arrived, and the trader immediately started to negotiate the bribe payment.

Another trafficker at the Vietnam-China border also said she paid bribes to Vietnamese customs officers and border police every month to operate her smuggling business, but not the Chinese police because “they won’t accept the money.” She used a boat to smuggle goods across the river or to help people illegally cross from one side to the other and would watch the timing to avoid the Chinese police.

Intelligence indicates that this type of corruption allows higher-level traffickers with better connections to exert a greater level of control in the criminal operating environment, while smaller traders who cannot afford to pay as much in protection fees are more exposed to arrest. In 2016 when media attention, NGO reports and international pressure forced an increased police presence at Nhi Khe village, one prolific trafficker declared that “arrests are good, less competition,” and added that “too many people do this now.” Intelligence in 2021 suggests a similar scenario has also played out in Cambodia, where lower-level traders have been muscled out by high-level traders with better connections with police and government.

**Bribery to facilitate customs clearance**

A Malaysia-based trafficker has provided the Wildlife Justice Commission with extensive intelligence on his strategies and tactics to clear shipments through Malaysian airports. When referring to the type of officers he targets to work with him, he stated: *“We only get in touch with the middle and lower parts. We only say hi to the upper parts. The things are all done by the middle and lower the parts. The upper parts they don’t care. However the upper part changes, doesn’t matter to the middle and lower part...so no problem.”* He also said the ideal target is the “office head” and there is no need to go higher than that, *“as long as you take care of him, it would be fine.”* The trafficker has openly discussed the cost of this support, saying the customs clearance fee is USD 1,000-1,500/kg and he factors this in along with his own personal fee when charging clients for transportation services. Another important tactic he employs is changing the shipping documentation while the shipment is en route to Asia (such as changing the company name) to help ensure the safe arrival of shipments. He claimed in one instance when he was unable to get it changed in time, a container was seized while transiting through Hong Kong SAR.

A public prosecutor in Thailand was arrested in 2017 for his role in attempting to smuggle a shipment of 21 rhino horns weighing 49 kg into the country. The prosecutor was identified on CCTV footage appearing to escort two Thai women through customs at Suvarnabhumi Airport and tried to persuade and bribe customs officers to let their bags pass unchecked. The rhino horns were detected during the bag x-ray, and all three suspects were arrested. They were each sentenced to four years in prison in November 2018.

**Bribery to secure bail or release from custody**

A dramatic case in Zimbabwe involved a group of seven Chinese nationals who were arrested in December 2018 for the illegal possession of 20 kg of rhino horns, which police believed were poached in a neighbouring country and smuggled into Zimbabwe. The suspects were repeatedly denied bail as prosecutors argued there was a high likelihood they would flee the country before the trial concluded. The suspects appealed to the Bulawayo High Court and in April 2019 were granted bail with strict conditions. Some observers believe the bail was orchestrated through connections to the judge. Bail conditions were followed until September 2019, when the suspects escaped with the assistance of a Zimbabwean police officer who had recently returned from deployment to a post on the border with Mozambique. The group allegedly paid him a bribe and provided a stolen car (which was later identified as having been stolen in South Africa 10 days earlier and illegally registered in Zimbabwe)

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to travel to the border and cross into Mozambique, where they are believed to have escaped onto a Chinese fishing boat waiting at Maputo to sail back to China. The police officer was arrested as he crossed back into Zimbabwe but was eventually acquitted of all charges in February 2020.23

In 2021, intelligence from a Vietnamese trafficker who smuggles rhino horn over the border into Cambodia suggested he is not concerned about being detected and arrested in Cambodia, as he claims he can bribe his way out of any situation.

For many years in Mozambique, foreign traffickers are said to have operated with confidence that any arrest could be resolved by paying a fine or a bribe to the authorities. The cases of many Chinese and Vietnamese suspects who were arrested in flagrante delicto with rhino horns appear to have no known outcomes, such as a Vietnamese national who was arrested at Maputo International Airport in March 2018 in possession of 7.5 kg of rhino horn in his luggage,24 or two separate arrests at Maputo airport in October 2018 of a Vietnamese national carrying 10 rhino horns and a Chinese national carrying nine rhino horns.25 Despite conducting numerous arrests throughout the poaching crisis, the first successful prosecution and conviction of a foreigner for rhino-related crimes in Mozambique only occurred in August 2019.26 The ability of suspects to secure their release from custody over many years allowed Chinese and Vietnamese criminal networks to become deeply entrenched in Mozambique.

Bribery to evade criminal justice

High-level Zimbabwean poacher Dumisani Moyo is believed to be connected to rhino and elephant poaching in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia, and has been arrested at least five times between 2008 and 2017 for offences for which he has never been held accountable. In each instance

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he was released without charge, granted bail then absconded, or granted bail due to “procedural issues”. Moyo has also been linked to a poaching gang allegedly facilitated by a Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation officer and is said to have high-level connections that keep giving him “get out of jail free” cards.27

A Vietnamese trafficker provided intelligence on the arrest of an associate for possession of 0.6 kg of rhino horn. He claimed the associate only served five years of a 10-year prison sentence because he was able to “bribe the system”, and that even with long sentences offenders could be released early because “the public only cares at the time of the trial”.

In March 2019, it was confirmed that the President of the KwaZulu-Natal Regional Court in South Africa had been suspended and was the subject of an internal inquiry, after allegations that he was a key player in a group of corrupt magistrates, prosecutors, and police officers who were paid by a criminal network to act leniently in the cases of rhino poachers and other criminals.28

### Bribery to release seized contraband

A Malaysia-based trafficker claimed to be able to retrieve wildlife shipments that are seized in Malaysia by making payments to his customs connections, but he could not save those seized at other points along the trafficking route. Wildlife Justice Commission operatives observed him meeting with a group of prominent Vietnamese traffickers in Vietnam in 2018, discussing options to salvage a shipment of 50 rhino horns weighing 116 kg that had been seized by authorities at Kuala Lumpur International Airport two days prior. It is believed that the shipment had been destined for Hanoi and belonged to the Vietnamese group present at the meeting. At that time, it was the largest rhino horn seizure ever made in Malaysia. The seizure was not made public until one week later.29

In 2016, another Malaysian trafficker claimed that when Malaysian Customs made a wildlife seizure, they would declare and display part of the seizure for media publicity but quietly sell the rest via close contacts such as himself. During conversation with a Wildlife Justice Commission operative on 24 July 2016, he described an ivory shipment that had been intercepted by Customs officers at Kuala Lumpur International Airport three days earlier. He alleged that Customs officers had contacted him to

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27. [https://oxpeckers.org/2021/01/perfect-rhino-crime/](https://oxpeckers.org/2021/01/perfect-rhino-crime/)
ascertain whether the shipment belonged to him, and when he confirmed it did not, they went ahead with the seizure. He said he acts as an agent to find buyers for Customs seizures, and he was able to obtain access to 500-600 kg of ivory from that particular shipment. Media articles on the seizure were not published until 1 August 2016, where it was reported to be one tonne of ivory.30

In another case, a Vietnamese national was arrested at Maputo International Airport in late May 2012 when boarding a Kenya Airways flight to Nairobi, carrying seven rhino horns in his luggage. However, he was apparently able to negotiate his release along with the contraband, as he was reported to have been arrested again a few days later at Bangkok Airport with the seven rhino horns in his luggage, while in transit on a Kenya Airways flight from Nairobi to Hanoi.31

**Embezzlement: Theft of official property, stockpiles**

In May 2015, Mozambique made what was at that time its largest ever wildlife seizure, when police seized 65 rhino horns and 1.3 tonnes of ivory tusks from a residence in Maputo and arrested at least one Chinese national. The confiscated products were moved to a police storeroom that was secured with three padlocks, but less than two weeks later, 12 horns were found to be missing and the arrested suspects were reportedly released by the public prosecutor. Police said six people were arrested in connection to the theft of the horns, including four security staff who were entrusted with looking after the storeroom, and two civilians who were involved in making replicas to replace the stolen rhino horns using bull horns.32

Eight rhino horn samples were also said to have been stolen from the luggage of a Vietnamese delegation in May 2015 that was bringing them to South Africa for DNA analysis. The delegation was headed by the Director of Vietnam’s CITES Management Authority and had travelled via Kenya and Mozambique to South Africa. According to the CITES permit, there should have been a set of 24 rhino horn samples, but only 16 samples were received in South Africa.33

In Vietnam, a customs officer who was responsible for supervising the arrival, storage, and withdrawal of confiscated goods at a customs warehouse used his position to steal 6.1 kg of rhino horns and

32. https://oxpeckers.org/2015/05/maputo-police-speak-on-rhino-horn-theft/
240 kg of ivory over several months. He worked with a civilian associate to find buyers for the products and to purchase fake replacements. The two men were arrested in September 2017 and in August 2018 convicted on embezzlement charges and sentenced to 16 years imprisonment.

Money laundering

In March 2022, a woman was sentenced to five years imprisonment for money laundering linked to the illegal rhino horn trade in South Africa. An undercover investigation identified her to be laundering large sums of cash through the casino on behalf of a criminal network dealing in rhino horns in Gauteng province.

The Wildlife Justice Commission has also collected intelligence on a Chinese national operating in Maputo who is laundering money for all the Chinese customers of a major rhino horn trafficker in Mozambique. She is known to exchange funds from China into Mozambican or South African currency, or vice versa, sending money in either direction along the supply chain as necessary to fund poaching and trafficking operations in Africa or to send payments back to China.

Law enforcement and legal experts fighting transnational organised wildlife crime.