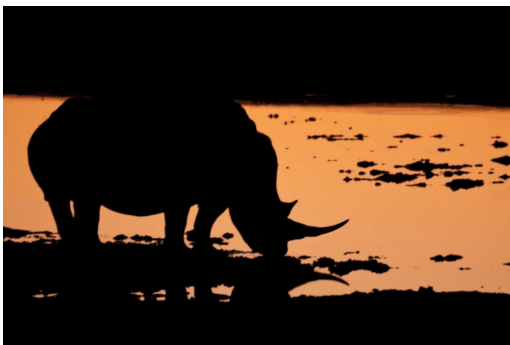




## CCS COMMENTARY:

### Asia needs to act on Rhino Protection

In late October, the Hong Kong *South China Morning Post* reported the last Javan rhino in Vietnam was found dead, killed by poachers for its horn. This Asian rhino species is now considered extinct in Vietnam. Only 40 to 60 Javan rhinos now remain in Indonesia, the last known living members of the species. In recent years, the killing of rhinos in the Asian and African continents has been on the upsurge due to the medicinal myths surrounding the horn. Several Asian cultures believe the horn can cure an array of ailments including fever and cancer, thus horns could now fetch up to US\$110,000 per kilogram. This news does not give good prospects for the rhino population globally.



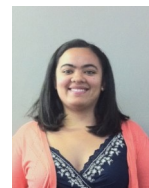
South Africa is home to most of the world's white rhino population, currently estimated at 20 140 rhinos. The number as such is a success story in conservation, as the white rhino once numbered as few as 50. Black rhinos are still considered to be critically endangered with only 4 880 alive, according to *Save the Rhino International*. South Africa is a key target for poaching. Recent reports from the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) have shown that South Africa has had a record number of rhino's poached in the country this year. Statistics from South African National Parks (SANParks) for 2011 showed that 341 animals have already been lost to poaching in 2011, compared to a record total of 333 in 2010.

In South Africa, the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the WWF and South African National Parks (SANParks) have been trying to alleviate the problem of poaching by assisting reserves and private farm owners with security in order to protect the rhinos. The DEA has also been trying to coordinate meetings with the Vietnamese and Chinese to discuss the situation. In September 2010 an official South African delegation visited Vietnam to meet with officials regarding the challenges South Africa were facing with the involvement of Vietnam nationals in illegal rhino horn and rhino hunting activities and to obtain a better understanding of the consumer dynamics in Vietnam. This however did not have much impact on the situation as a number of Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese nationals have been arrested in South Africa for alleged trafficking. In 2011, 165 people were arrested in South Africa in connection with rhino killings. Despite the high increase in rhino poaching in the past few years, "consumer states" such as China, Thailand and Vietnam have not prosecuted a single case says Joseph Okori, WWF Rhino Programme Manager.

China, Vietnam and Thailand are all signatories to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites), under which only South Africa's and Swaziland's rhino products can be traded, and then only with strict permit requirements. Poaching, however, has been supported by a vibrant black market trade in the Asian countries. The WWF said this has particularly pushed the three Asian rhino species to the brink of extinction; they are critically endangered. This will also concern the African rhinos. With every Asian rhino killed, the prices for African rhino horn increase.

What has come to the fore of recent reports regarding South Africa's record number of rhinos poached and the extinction of the Javan rhino in Vietnam is that the Asian countries need to intensify cooperation amongst themselves and with South African officials. South Africa has duly been taking serious action to protecting the rhino population, with a proud track record of successful rhino conservation. However, whilst the black market remains thriving and the Asian countries remain uncooperative, things could get ugly again.

Cites recently noted that rhino poaching and illegal trade in rhino horns is a phenomenon which is also occurring in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Mozambique, Nepal and Zimbabwe. It has to be noted that recently a Vietnamese delegation visited South Africa and agreed to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding on wildlife trafficking however the governments of Thailand and China need to do their part in reducing the illegal trading of rhino horn. In the wake of increasing environmental awareness and concern around the world, these "consumer countries" need to make increase public awareness and destroy the myths regarding rhino horn.



**Meryl Burgess**  
*Research Analyst*  
*Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS)*  
*at Stellenbosch University*

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