

# **RADICAL RHINO RESCUE PLAN**

## **How could rhino poaching be stopped immediately?**

A plan to save all rhino species worldwide from extinction

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14 November 2011

### **Executive Summary :**

Current statistics indicate horrendous downward tendencies in rhino populations world wide. Poaching of animals is beyond control in all african and asian countries that still harbour rhino. Crime syndicates collaborate with corruptable stakeholders from all walks of the industry like government officials, police, game wardens, even game farmers and professionals. International and local conservation authorities argue at length and in circles with no palpable positive outcomes to be expected in due course. The current situation is rapidly developing into the long feared complete holocaust of all rhino species on earth fired by greed on the one hand, and the inability of conservation bodies on the other hand to find solutions to the dilemma.

South Africa is the most pertinent and successful custodian of rhinos in the world today. South Africa could demand, on the ground of its phenomenal rhino conservation successes, to be the leading force in international rhino policy making. Due to the fact that it is extremely cumbersome to play requests and presentations regarding rhino (eg legalisation of horn trade) past clumsy organisations like CITES and IUCN, time has arrived for concerned and informed individuals and organisations to start thinking laterally and creatively. It is therefore proposed that the South African Government should enter into an independent treaty with asian countries whereby rhino horn will be donated en masse to flood the market aimed at killing the value of horns, which in any event today is senseless and artificial. In exchange asian authorities must guarantee that horn products will reach the end consumer free of charge, and that covert or open instigation and financing of poaching in all rhino harbouring countries be stopped with immediate effect. Asian authorities should also concurrently allow intensive information and education actions to be launched in their countries in long term programmes to finally drive home the message of the obtuseness of the belief in the remedial properties of rhino horn.

### **Introduction**

Speakers who addressed stakeholders at the recent Rhino Symposium organised by WRSA (Wildlife Ranching South Africa) Private Rhino Owners' Association at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria (12 November 2011) on the issue of rhino poaching, brought the public's attention to, amongst others, the following facts:

- Rhino horn has been used in oriental medicine for nearly 2 000 years.
- The current wave of poaching started around 2000, initially with low numbers, and will reach an annual record of close to 400 rhinos by the end of 2011. Almost 1 000 rhinos have been killed in southern Africa since 2000.
- The current rate of extinction is one rhino every 21 hours.
- Calculations indicate that if the current trend continues, rhinos will be extinct by the year 2023.
- The value of horns on the black market has escalated dramatically and consumers apparently pay up to \$60 000 per kilogram for this product.
- The market value of rhino horn is so high that poor people (i.e. the foot soldiers who commit the massacre in the field with guns and drugs) will risk their lives in an effort to get their hands on rhino horn.
- In the 'value chain' a host of professional and unprofessional entrepreneurs have hitched the wagon, with the result that a labyrinth of underground crime cloacas have

developed, which has become a nightmare for the SAPS (South African Police Services). Anti-poaching operations, techniques and networks are just being countered by more sophisticated poaching techniques and networks, rotation of battlefields, bribery of officials, death threats, murder and escalating corruption on every possible and conceivable level.

- University research in America has shown that rhino horn has no medicinal value and that it is similar in its chemical composition to the raw material of horses' hooves.
- Several speakers pointed out that it will be very difficult to change ancient oriental traditions, but that an educational task, starting with the youth in China and other countries, may bring long-term solutions.
- The current crisis in southern Africa leads to increased bureaucratic red tape, increased litigation and court procedures in a South African legal system already overfed and ineffective, all factors that are deadly for finding solutions to the problem quickly.
- A major discussion point is the influence of the international agreement between 175 countries, namely CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) on the idea of self-regulation of the South African conservation authorities and private rhino owners in their highly successful attempt to date to save the African rhinos from extinction. Trade - whether or not - in rhino products is a very hot topic of debate worldwide, of which the results of both are not easily determinable.

In light of the foregoing it is clear that to find a solution to the problem of rhino poaching seems to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, and that we will soon find ourselves in the same position as at the end of the nineteenth century regarding rhino numbers.

### **What is the solution?**

There is a very simple solution to the problem of the seemingly inflated market value of rhino horn: destroy the value once and for all. This can be done through the following strategy:

1. Donate all rhino horn to the Eastern communities who value it.
2. Let the donation be a great gesture as a state gift from the Republic of South Africa (and other countries that have horns stored) to the Republics of China, Vietnam, Thailand, Yemen, South Korea, and whoever else wants horns. The donation must be a mere gentleman's gesture to the Eastern countries and there may be no commercial aspects linked to the donation agreement. The relevant Asian governments should, as main condition, undertake to do absolutely everything in their power to allow the monitoring of grants and the conditions of donations to the satisfaction of those who initiated the project.
3. First use only the horns stored in safes and provide as many horns as possible as soon as possible to these Oriental countries to create a dramatic, almost stupefying effect as a result of the mere incredibility of the gesture. The Chinese and other governments should distribute these horns for free, but in a controlled manner, to their state health departments and doctors, who in turn should give these to their patients free of charge (courtesy of South Africa and other donor countries). This aspect should be the single largest condition for the donation treaty in order to prevent corruption, unlawful favouritism and individual enrichment in the oriental setup.
4. Once all horns from safes are donated, a process of harvesting the horns of living rhinos in national, provincial and private reserves in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya should be started to supply a steady stream of horns for the foreseeable number of years. This harvesting process is a transitional measure aimed at creating a state of homeostasis or equilibrium, where, over time, there will no longer be a need to donating horns, because the demand had disappeared.
5. Parallel to these donations, the following strategic actions should be implemented:
  - a. Information and education campaign of all Orientals who believe that rhino horn has a certain medicinal value through

## ~~Diplomatic actions~~

- ii. Social networks
- iii. The internet
- iv. TV shows
- v. Print media

The basis of the education task should be to demonstrate the uselessness of rhino horn to the modern world and to ridicule the ones who indeed use it.

- b. Security measures related to rhinos, the prosecution of criminals and intensified conservation efforts should receive continuous and even more attention through the existing channels locally and globally.

## **What should we achieve with this strategy?**

1. CITES, conservation authorities and rhino owners currently underwrite, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, the artificial and meaningless value of rhino horn by keeping them in safes, by making a big fuss about it and by holding expensive international conventions on the issue.
2. Giving the horns away for free will send the message that they have no commercial value whatsoever.
3. Once rhino horn is acknowledged by the end user through the globally orchestrated information campaign for what it really is, namely keratin bundles that are easily accessible - cheap or free - its worthlessness will be emphasised even more.
4. The result will be that the whole incentive to poach will fall into disrepair with the slash of a pen, i.e. no contracts or big money will be coming from China or elsewhere any longer, there will be no reason for middlemen, syndicates, traders and poachers to exist, no reason for corruption by government officials working with permits, docketts and prisoners, no reason to keep horns in safes and provoke armed robberies, no more shooting of poachers, conservationists and security officers, and no large amounts of money will be required for the protection of humans and animals against the attacks of the world of criminals, no more red faces and scandals among sneaky farmers, conservation officers, game capturers and veterinarians.
5. Currently, unparalleled suspicion exists among private rhino owners towards conservation authorities concerned with rhinos and the granting of permits because of the increasing unreliability and corruption of some officials involved herein. This is because of the fact that several poaching incidents were reported shortly after permits were issued for relocation of animals and the removal and storage of horns. With the proposed strategy, there will suddenly be no opportunity for corruption or any cause for distrust from owners and custodians, and consequently improved human relations in conservation and farming circles.

## **Effects of the strategy**

### **1. From a conservation point of view**

- a. Immediate cessation of rhino poaching once the information reaches ground level that the horns are worthless. This should happen all over the world and should also have a positive impact on other rhino species, such as the Javanese, Sumatran and Indian rhinos.
- b. Improved "rhino-economy" in South Africa and other countries where investors' risk will decrease drastically and much-needed preservation and growth of rhino populations can be resumed.

### **2. From the South African government's perspective**

- a. Proactive South African government action in the form of donations could be seen as preventative action against 'attacks' ('pre-emptive strike' in military language) and will result in large-scale improved diplomatic relations with currently 'suspect' countries.

- ~~b. The primary result will be a major diplomatic victory in the eyes of the world, because of the selfless and bold donations to uninformed Eastern cultures. If Asian governments would refuse to accept the donation or sign the treaty, for whatever reason, they would immediately set foot on the moral low ground and be liable for explanations on their official position on rhino conservation specifically, and conservation in general.~~

### **3. From an economic perspective**

- a. Stored reserves of rhino horns in possession of South African conservation authorities and private owners are estimated at billions of rands. By giving away these horns, one can argue that a lot of money will be lost, which could have been used for conservation. Current trends and analyses however predict an unsustainable picture of rhino utilisation, especially because of the growing demand from Asian countries, the unrealistic value associated with horns in the existing market and the rising trend of poaching.
- b. A sudden oversupply of horns at no cost and a simultaneous education campaign aimed at Eastern populations should break the market.
- c. The local rhino economy leaning on tourism and controlled trophy hunting will steadily start to grow again and will attract further local and foreign investment. As the population of these animals grows, animals could be relocated locally, to the sub-continent and internationally in sub-populations that could further develop and grow independently.
- d. Should there still be a demand for rhino from the East in the medium to distant future, it could be supplied at a price on a sustainable basis from secure, growing and sustainable rhino populations.
- e. The loss of income from not selling horns at current market prices, but instead giving them away, will comfortably be recovered over the long term on moral and even economic grounds and values, as the long-term survival of rhinos will be guaranteed, which means that they will be conserved, used and enjoyed for generations.

### **4. The CITES barrier**

The donation of rhino horns to Asian countries cannot be classified as trading, foremost because there will be no counter trade agreement with the Asian countries. Also, because Asian governments must provide guarantees that rhino horn will never again be traded in exclusive inner circles, such horn donations and accompanying treaties should not resort under the current jurisdictional reign of CITES. This means that processes could be finalised relatively quickly by obviating the need to wait for the tri-annual CITES conferences for discussions and decisions. As it stands at the moment, it will in any case take at least 6 years for CITES to come to a decision on legalization of horn trade, and by that time rhino numbers worldwide would already have crossed the survival barrier in their spiral nose dive to extinction. And what if CITES decides against legalization of trade in six years time? The disaster will be complete!

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that rhino poaching is based on misconceptions in Eastern cultures about the inherent value of horns, with the consequent immoral and gluttonous exploitation of rhinos and nature. South Africans now have the opportunity of a lifetime, unique in the history of the world, to help heal mankind from a deadly crime against nature. It is in South Africans' hands - for once and for all - to facilitate a drastic turnaround in the fate and survival of all rhino species on earth.

All conservation efforts by many individuals and institutions worldwide, including CITES, has so far been miserably unsuccessful, except in South Africa and some neighbouring countries like Namibia, where conservation authorities and committed individuals have accomplished the impossible. In the past month it was announced that the western subspecies of black rhino finally became extinct. The Javanese rhino is now extinct in Vietnam, and the mere 50 that are left in Indonesia, are in grave danger. The northern subspecies of white rhino was also waved goodbye forever.

The tentacles of rhino poaching come from the East and apply a stranglehold to any country and region where these prehistoric animals still survive. The effects of poaching are global, everywhere

~~simultaneously destructive and deadly. The results are irreversible and damning evidence against the morality and values of humanity.~~

The Southern African passion, expertise, generosity and courage in conservation matters should now be carried yonder with great power to the rest of the world. Perhaps 'Operation Rhino Horn' could become the flagship project to bring the entire world to other insights and actions about the way mankind treats and respects nature.

Unashamedly generous, and with the eyes focused on a harmonious future for all in a world where we live and let live: this should be the motto of Occidental, Oriental and African.

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3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012

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### CONSIDER THESE FACTS :

1. **Poaching rate escalates :**

- a. The mean annual percentage increase in numbers of rhinos poached in RSA over the last 3 years is approx 110%.

2. **Expected mortalities :**

Based on the percentage annual increase in poaching, the numbers to be expected killed by poachers will be as follows :

- a. End of 2012 : 945 animals
- b. End of 2013 : 1984 animals

3. **Killing rate :**

- a. Current rate of killings (2011) is about one rhino every 19 hours.
- b. Expected killing rate 2012 : approx one rhino every 9 hours
- c. Expected killing rate 2013 : approx one rhino every 4 hours

4. **Recruitment rate :**

- a. If the natural recruitment rate is taken as a 7% growth per annum, the current estimated population of 22,000 rhinos would yield approx 1540 calves per annum.
- b. It is therefore clear that within the next 18 to 24 months the mortality rate as a result of poaching could surpass the recruitment rate if current tendencies go unchecked, and that then would cause rhino populations sliding into a negative growth curve by the end of 2013.

5. **World wide tendencies.**

- a. Since the nineteen sixties the world has seen an approx 80% decrease in overall rhino numbers (all 5 species) despite extensive protection efforts by governments, NGO's, and national and international conservation organisations.
- b. It must dawn on us now that there is a *fatal flaw* in almost ALL the conservation strategies and protection measures we have seen so far.

## 6. What are the options ?

- a. Legalization of horn trade : CITES and the world are not likely to approve of this option, and with the outcome of the CITES decision not to be expected before six years from now, the mass destruction of rhinos in the meantime will be too ghastly to contemplate.
- b. Burning of horns : we don't see this as an option at all because the current value of horns will be upheld, in fact will be increased incalculably, leading to increased poaching pressure and the final onslaught on all free roaming rhino populations.
- c. Destruction of the value of horns by donating them to Oriental nations : an extensive plan is proposed in the accompanying document. It is the purpose of this document to elicit debate and professional input from experts from all walks of life, eg economists, psychologists, legal experts, politicians, ecologists, zoologists, geneticists, etc

## 7. What are the time frames?

- a. There is no time frame any more because disaster is upon us.
- b. What is called for is
  - i. IMMEDIATE ACTION,
  - ii. HEATED DEBATE,
  - iii. STRATEGIC PLANNING

because we are dealing with **CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

## 8. What constitutes this crisis ?

- a. Uncontrollable poaching while the world helplessly looks on.
- b. Uncontrollable and escalating corruption at all levels while the world helplessly sees crime pay.

## 9. How can the crisis be dealt with ?

- a. Evaluation of the 'Destruction of Horn Value by Donation Option', and all other options swiftly, but professionally.
- b. If the outcome indicates that the option is feasible, take it to the highest south african political authority for actioning.

## 10. What about the long term?

- a. The immediate concern is stabilization and renewed growth of all rhino populations on earth.
- b. Long term solutions might again include options like legal trade in horns, but only once the crisis has been weathered successfully and permanently.

## 11. Plea

- a. For experts to take leadership and action.
- b. For interested parties to convene soon in 2012 under current facilitation of WRSA, EWT, SANP, EZEMVELO KZN, DEA, etc.
- c. For a **STRATEGIC PLAN** to be tabled at highest level by mid 2012.

We wish all a prosperous and poaching free 2012. Please do take action now, whether private individual or government official. Much is at stake, and much can be achieved if we all cooperate.

