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Indonesia convicts trafficking accomplice in a Javan rhino poaching scandal

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- *Indonesia's Supreme Court has sentenced Liem Hoo Kwan Willy to one year in prison for facilitating communication in the illegal trade of Javan rhino horns, overturning his earlier acquittal despite evidence linking him to the transactions.*
- *The ruling is part of a broader crackdown following the 2024 exposure of organized poaching in Ujung Kulon National Park, where police linked up to 26 rhino deaths to coordinated criminal networks involving local and international actors.*
- *Conservation groups have raised concerns over flawed population data, with evidence suggesting rhino killings began as early as 2018 and continued despite official reports of stable numbers, while key suspects and evidence remain unaccounted for.*
- *Meanwhile, the recent identification of three new Javan rhino calves offers hope, credited to strict park protections and improved monitoring, even as experts warn that ongoing poaching threatens the species with extinction.*

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Indonesia's highest court has overturned the acquittal of an accused translator who facilitated transactions in the international trade of poached rhino horns.

The Supreme Court in Indonesia recently sentenced 72-year-old Liem Hoo Kwan Willy to one year in prison for helping communications between an Indonesian trader and a Chinese buyer in the trafficking of Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*)

horns. The ruling is part of a year-long crackdown by Indonesian conservation authorities on international wildlife trade that stemmed from the discovery in 2024 of [organized poaching of Javan rhinos](#) in their only habitat, Ujung Kulon National Park, Banten province.

The conservation director-general Satyawan Pudyatmoko [praised](#) the decision and the prosecutor's efforts, saying it reinforces Indonesia's commitment to protecting the Javan rhino by holding all parties in the illegal wildlife trade accountable.



Liem Hoo Kwan Willy has been found guilty in an illegal Javan rhino trade. Image by Donny Iqbal/Mongabay-Indonesia.

Willy was previously [cleared of all charges](#) by Banten's Pandeglang District Court despite evidence such as phone records and texts linking him to the transactions and renting the Chinese buyer a room in his house. The lead judge on the three-member panel overruled his colleagues, arguing that Willy didn't profit from facilitating the transactions of the rhino horns.

Meanwhile, the same district court in July 2024 convicted and sentenced Yogi Purwadi, the Indonesian trader whom Willy helped with translations, to [four and a](#)

[half years in prison](#). The court a month earlier had also [convicted and sentenced to a record 12 years](#) in prison Sunendi, a lead poacher of the Javan rhinos.

Under [the 2024 Conservation Act](#), anyone who trades, keeps, distributes or kills a protected species has committed a crime, punishable with imprisonment of at least three years and up to 15 years.

The Javan rhino poaching case came to light after Banten police received a May 29, 2023, report about [missing camera traps](#), which have been used for conservation and research purposes from [monitoring park activities to helping population census data](#). Footage from other cameras showed armed intruders in the park, apparently hunting rhinos. Police later identified two local brothers, Sunendi and Sahru, as leaders of separate poaching gangs active in the area.

A Mongabay Indonesia investigation also revealed signs that the gangs [received tipoffs about rhino movements from a park patrol insider](#). Between 2019 and 2023, the poachers may have killed [up to 26 rhinos](#), around a third of the entire population, according to Banten police.



Conservation activists have called on law enforcers to continue investigating, as four other suspects still remained at large, adding that the poaching operation was highly organized and likely involved international support, making it more than a local crime.

“This was a highly structured hunt, a patterned crime,” said Nanda Nababan, a coordinator of the advocacy group Indonesian Wildlife Crime Lawyers and Researchers Association (APKSLI), said. “If this is not promptly addressed, it could lead to new crimes.”

Nanda emphasized the urgency of securing key evidence, including weapons and sensitive rhino tracking data, to prevent further criminal activity. He also noted that the true scale of the poaching remained unclear, pointing out discrepancies between the number of rhino horns admitted by the defendants and the police findings of 26 rhinos killed.

Over the past decade, several Javan rhinos captured on camera traps in Ujung Kulon have mysteriously disappeared, with killings [believed to have started in 2018](#). A 2023 report by conservation NGO Auriga Nusantara [found](#) that 15 rhinos went missing and three were confirmed dead between 2019 and 2021, yet all were still included in the government’s official population data. The report also raised concerns about [flawed census methods](#) and a rise in poaching activity in the area.

Auriga’s estimate of missing rhinos [exceeds the government’s count of 11](#), though both are lower than police figures, which suggest 26 rhinos were poached based on suspect confessions.



Meanwhile, the Ujung Kulon National Park earlier this month reported [the identification of three new Javan rhino individuals](#) using camera traps and footprint analysis. The calves, two observed directly via camera footage and one through footprints, range in age from a few months to more than 2 years.

Officials attributed the discoveries to a fully protected area system that restricted human activity in the Ujung Kulon Peninsula, and to a spatially explicit monitoring system, involving systematic placement of camera traps across 35 clusters.

Still, the resurgence of rhino poaching and the possible loss of dozens of rhinos has raised alarms about the gap between official population estimates and the true number of these critically endangered animals. More significantly, recent evidence points to a declining population of Javan rhinos, contradicting the government's claims of stable growth.

"From the start, we observed that this case was quite complex. Many facts remain undisclosed," Nanda said.

This story was reported by Mongabay's Indonesia team and first published [here](#) on our [Indonesian site](#) on May 5, 2025.

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