



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

OFFICE OF THE JUDICIARY

MEDIA RELEASE

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OFFICIAL INAUGURATION OF THE MAGISTRATE COURT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES IN OTJIWARONGO

Windhoek, Namibia—The Office of the Judiciary is pleased to announce the official inauguration of the new Magistrate's Court for Environmental Crimes in Otjiwarongo. This significant development is set to take place on 19 August 2024, marking a crucial step forward in our justice system's efforts to combat environmental crimes.

To this end, Her Excellency, the Vice-President of the Republic of Namibia, Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, will grace the historic event as the keynote speaker.

Wildlife crime has escalated alarmingly in Namibia over the past decade. While the public focus has largely been on rhino poaching, illicit exploitation of Namibia's natural resources is much more sweeping and complex. It has become a massive challenge, not only for law enforcement but also for a broad spectrum of affected parties. Impacts range from direct effects on biodiversity to community repercussions to impacts on livelihoods, the national economy, and the workings of government.

The criminal justice system has come into particular focus—between the start of 2015 and the end of 2023, 2,567 wildlife cases were registered; only 958 were finalised. The courts have struggled to cope with the sheer number of cases they are being inundated with, a challenge that we acknowledge and are working to address. The escalating number of cases is due to increasing wildlife crimes and Namibia's law enforcement agencies' collective effort to investigate wildlife crime.

The escalating poaching and trafficking have spurred a wide range of countermeasures by the government, NGOs, international funding partners, private industry, and the general public. The Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT), an interagency collaboration between the Namibian Police Force and the Intelligence and Investigation Unit of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, was initiated in 2018 as the focal point to coordinate investigations into high-value-species crimes.

The BRTT works closely with the Namibian Defence Force, the Financial Intelligence Centre, the Namibia Revenue Agency, and the Environmental Crimes Unit (ECU) of the Office of the Prosecutor General (PG). The regional units of these agencies play a vital role in ensuring a country-wide network of law and order, instilling hope for a collective effort to combat wildlife crimes.

All correspondence must be addressed to the Executive Director

The Permanent Environmental Crimes Court is located in Otjiwarongo, where existing government buildings have been renovated, with additional, pre-constructed facilities assembled on site. Construction has been completed, and the final furnishings and state-of-the-art equipment have been installed. The court is scheduled for inauguration in mid-August.

The Permanent Environmental Crimes Court is a legacy investment that will make a lasting contribution to countering wildlife and broad environmental crime in our country. It will help address several long-standing challenges, including the problem of drawn-out cases and court-case backlogs. For everyone involved in countering wildlife crime and the law-abiding citizens of our country, this is a bright beacon of hope that can close the circle of protecting wildlife and the broader environment, investigating and prosecuting crimes, and giving convicted perpetrators appropriate punishments.

Combatting wildlife crime, particularly at a regional level, requires a multi-agency approach and the imperative of sharing information across a trusted coalition of law enforcement agencies. Thus far, several significant interventions have been implemented across Namibia, and adopting special courts, such as the new Environmental Crimes Court, is a much-needed intervention.

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ISSUED BY THE OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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About Office of the Judiciary: (www.judiciary.na)

In line with Article 78 (5) of the Namibian Constitution, Namibia has made the monumental move to establish an independent body of the Judiciary that separates it from the Ministry of Justice, named the 'Office of the Judiciary', a juristic body by the Judiciary Act, 2015 (Act No. 11 of 2015) which is administratively and financially independent. The Office of the Judiciary is the administrative arm of the Judiciary, which includes the Supreme Court, High Court, and Lower Courts (Regional and District) within Namibia.