

CITES awards South Africa with Certificates of Commendation

South African law enforcement authorities have been awarded Certificates of Commendation by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) for combating rhinoceros-related crime.



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The multi-sectoral team comprises the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), supported by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife. The certificates were accepted by the Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, at a CITES ministerial dialogue for key states concerned with the illegal trade in rhinoceros horn in Geneva, Switzerland, on 13 February 2015.

The Certificates of Commendation, issued at the discretion of CITES secretary-general John E. Scanlon, are in recognition of outstanding examples of enforcement related work whose outcomes serve as an example to the wider law enforcement community and further the aims of CITES in preventing illegal trade in wildlife.

The South African team has been acknowledged for their participation in Operation Whisper, an undercover operation targeting organised crime groups involved in rhinoceros poaching and the illegal international trade in rhinoceros horn.

Suspects arrested

The multi-faceted operation resulted in a significant number of arrests of suspects involved in the illegal killing of rhino in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as the trafficking of rhino horn between KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

In attendance at the dialogue were senior officials responsible for implementation, oversight and enforcement of the Convention as well as members from the CITES Secretariat, the World Customs Organisation (WCO), Interpol and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which form the Consortium International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC).

The parties assessed progress and current initiatives that are under way to tackle the illegal trade in rhino horn and identified specific priorities for short and medium-term action, both those that need to be delivered nationally as well as those that require co-operative action, including support from the ICCWC partners. They also discussed various interventions to address rhino poaching and the illicit trade in rhino horn, including the abuse of trophy hunting provisions to obtain rhino horn.

"Rhinoceros poaching and illegal trade in rhinoceros horn continue to be among the most structured criminal activities faced by CITES. Deep and ongoing international cooperation is critical in combating these crimes. This dialogue has secured further political commitment from key states to enhance their cooperation and commitment to work together on tangible short and medium-term actions," Scanlon said.

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