

Interpol advises on rhino poaching

JOHANNESBURG: Countries across Africa need to work together to combat rhino poaching, says the International Police Organisation (Interpol). The body also stressed that it is only through the exchange of information that the scourge can be eradicated.



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The United National Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Interpol are assisting member countries in Africa to come up with innovative policing strategies to combat environmental crime which Interpol says is now one of the most profitable forms of organized crime. The illegal ivory trade alone is estimated to be worth up to R100 billion a year. Latest figures from South Africa's environmental Affairs Department show that more than 825 rhinos had been poached since the beginning of the year. But South Africa is not the only African country battling with the problem.

Kenyan authorities agree that poaching has reached crisis levels. "Kenya stands at a crossroads in as far as environmental criminality is concerned. In the past few months we have seen the wanton destruction of elephants and rhinos. One hundred and ninety elephants were killed this year. For us, this a crisis of unmeasured proportions," says Kenya's Attorney General, Githu Muigai. Kenya also lost 35 rhinos to poachers this year, significantly less than the number killed in South Africa but the country has already taken drastic measures to curb this crime.

The Kenyan authorities have set up a crack paramilitary unit to hunt down poachers and are tightening up legislation to tackle the problem. However, these criminal networks often operate across borders with impunity and that is where Interpol is hoping to assist member countries. The organisation says fighting wildlife crime is a priority as it often occurs hand in hand with other offences like human trafficking and drug smuggling.

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