

Traveller jailed for smuggling rhino horns (with photo)

A traveller who smuggled rhino horns and was convicted for violating the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance was sentenced to imprisonment at the District Court today (October 24).

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that the 21-year-old male passenger arrived on June 17 from Beira, Mozambique, via Johannesburg, South Africa, and Doha, Qatar. About 3.1 kilograms of rhino horn cut pieces were found in the baggage of the passenger by Customs officers.

Subsequent to follow-up investigations, the AFCD charged the man with illegal import of specimens of listed species in Appendix I to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). He was convicted on October 19. Today, the court handed down 12-month imprisonment as the starting point for sentencing. The defendant was sentenced to eight months behind bars after one-third reduction as he pleaded guilty.

Rhinos are listed in Appendix I to the CITES and regulated under the Ordinance in Hong Kong. The penalties under the Ordinance have been amended and drastically increased since May 1 this year. Any person importing, exporting or possessing specimens of endangered species not in accordance with the Ordinance will be liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years. The specimens will also be forfeited upon conviction. Members of the public are urged not to break the law.

To enquire about the control of endangered species or to report suspected irregularities, the public can call the AFCD on 1823 or visit the website www.cites.hk.

