



African Rhino Specialist Group

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Tribute from the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) in memory of Anton Mzimba on World Ranger Day, 31 July 2022

As we salute rangers for their disciplined hard work and determination protecting wildlife areas, the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) pays special tribute to Anton Mzimba, head of Ranger Services at Timbavati Nature Reserve beside Kruger National Park, South Africa, who was murdered and his wife critically injured in an attack at their home this week.

There must be a concerted effort to find, arrest and prosecute Anton's killers. Increasingly violent attacks on rangers and law enforcement officers protecting wildlife and investigating the criminal networks involved cannot go unpunished. Failure to do so risks everything that people like Anton worked and died for and will only embolden the syndicates involved in poaching and other crimes in and around conservation areas. And it will have a chilling effect on the men and women we ask to stand up against poachers and form the thin green line in protected areas.

There have been reports that Anton was receiving threats from a criminal syndicate after rebuffing their efforts to corrupt him. Rangers need protection. Poaching syndicates – often living in the same communities - actively target them for recruitment and try to corrupt them. The incorruptible become targets for threats, violence and even murder. It is vital that these threats are taken seriously and that rangers like Anton are supported and protected in every way possible.

Like so many of his colleagues, Anton knew his life was in danger. "[N]ot from the Big Five or snakes," [he said in an interview](#) earlier this year, "but from heavily armed poachers". And he was keenly aware of the challenges facing communities in conservation areas and passionate about addressing the inequality he saw around him.

"There is a high level of unemployment ... It makes people do what they must to survive. But the rhino poacher is different. He is after financial gain to buy whatever he wants. Greedy people just want money. If we want to uproot poaching, we must share the resources around the protected areas to villagers in a workable way, rather than just a few benefiting."

He saw his work as far more than saving a single species from extinction. "Everything that exists is interconnected, [he said in another interview](#). "If one day the rhino goes extinct, the elephant, the lion, the hyenas, everything [will follow], and then man will be the last thing to go extinct as well."

Anton's impact in the 25 years of his life that he gave to the Timbavati reserve was immense. A brave, passionate, and dedicated leader with a real affinity for wildlife and people, his death leaves an enormous void. He was the best of the best. In protecting wildlife in the Greater Kruger, he inspired and motivated his fellow rangers, their families, and villagers in the surrounding areas. His death has sent shockwaves around the world. His legacy must continue to inspire new generations of rangers and conservationists. And his words must be heard.

The IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) is one of the more than 140 Specialist Groups (SGs) of the IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC). The largely volunteer – based network of experts across disciplines represents and works on behalf of the SSC to further rhino conservation in Africa.