

Diplomat nabbed over smuggled ivory

By Gerald Tenywa

Acting on a tip-off, a crack unit under the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) raided a private residence, where six elephant tusks and other trophies were recovered on Tuesday.

The reported owner of the premises in the city suburb of Kamwokya, Mohamed Hussein Elhusseiny, an employee of the Egyptian embassy in Kampala, confessed that he had six pieces of elephant tusks and other trophies that he bought at between \$8,000 (about sh29m) and \$10,000 (about sh36m).

Other items recovered from the house were five off-cuts of ivory, one moulded piece of ivory weighing 65kg, four pieces of animal horns weighing 18kg and two pieces of animal skulls weighing 4kg, according to a statement from URA.

The statement added: "The suspect wrote a statement, confirming that ivory was in his house."

Moses Ogutu, the operations officer at URA, undertook the verification of all the wildlife trophies before depositing them at the customs warehouse in Nakawa, Kampala.

According to a statement by the suspect at customs under URA, Elhusseiny is said to have confessed that he has been smuggling trophies out of the country for some time.

"The suspect seems to have been smuggling ivory out of the country for some time, as he buys ivory to decorate his house with," stated URA.

The suspect is being held by URA, pending reports from Uganda and Wildlife Authority (UWA) and prosecution. Yesterday, Ahmed Tanikhy, the media officer at the Egyptian embassy in Kampala, did not confirm or deny the matter. He demanded to have a copy of the statement from URA, but *New Vision* declined to give it to him.

New Vision is yet to establish the source of the ivory reportedly recovered in Elhusseiny's house.

Uganda is a key transit country for illegal trade in wildlife trophies. The trade is estimated to be worth \$600m annually.

Elephants are protected as they are categorised under endangered species and trade in them and their products, such as ivory, is prohibited. Uganda has a population of only 5,000 elephants, living in the large grassland parks; Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls and Kidepo Valley.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the African elephant population recorded its biggest drop in a quarter century last year, with an estimated population of 415,000 elephants; 111,000 fewer than a decade ago.