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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UWA TAKES RHINOS BACK TO AJAI WILDLIFE RESERVE.

Kampala January 07, 2026 - Uganda has made history with the first ever translocation of rhinos from one protected area to another within the country. Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has successfully moved 4 southern white rhinos from Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary to Ajai Wildlife Reserve in the opening phase of a national programme that will see 20 rhinos relocated to Ajai.

This initiative forms a key component of the National Rhino Conservation Strategy, which is dedicated to rebuilding and safeguarding Uganda's rhino population while restoring the species to parts of its historical range in northern Uganda. Although the southern white rhino is not an indigenous subspecies, in Uganda its introduction to Ajai Wildlife Reserve is guided by the principle of conservation equivalence. The native northern white rhino subspecies is now functionally extinct, yet both the northern and southern white rhino historically belonged to the same species prior to their separation. As such, the reintroduction of southern white rhinos provides an ecologically credible alternative for restoring rhinos to Uganda's landscapes.

The four rhinos are now under close observation as they adapt to their new environment. The second phase, involving the remaining 16 rhinos, will take place after successful monitoring and stabilisation of the first group.

Commenting on the milestone, UWA Executive Director, Dr. James Musinguzi, said that the translocation marks a new chapter in Uganda's conservation journey. "The return of rhinos to Ajai is a proud and emotional moment for Uganda. It reflects years of dedicated conservation work and a highly successful breeding programme at Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, where our rhino population has steadily grown under careful protection. This next step strengthens species recovery and restores an important part of our natural heritage for future generations."

Uganda once had both rhino species, the northern white and the eastern black. The northern white rhinos were confined west of the Albert Nile in the then West Nile district,

with their home in Ajai, while the Eastern Black was confined to the east of the Albert Nile and North of Victoria Nile, spanning the then Acholi, Lango and Karamoja areas. However, they were wiped out during the period of insecurity in the country due to poaching and habitat loss, the last rhino was killed in Narus Valley in Kidepo in 1983.

The systematic rhino reintroduction/introduction program started in 1997 with the establishment of Rhino Fund Uganda. Awareness began in 2001 with the importation of 2 rhinos from Kenya and their placement at the former UWEC. In 2005/6, breeding started at Ziwa with the importation of 4 rhinos from Solio in Kenya and 2 from Disney Animal Kingdom in Florida, USA. The six formed the founder population for the breeding program at Ziwa that grew to 49. In December 2025, an additional 8 southern white rhinos were imported from South Africa to supplement the Ziwa population in line with the National Rhino Strategy goal.

UWA appeals to neighbouring communities and the wider public to support this national conservation effort by reporting any activity that may threaten their safety. The success of this programme depends on our shared responsibility and pride in Uganda's wildlife heritage.

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