

Daneil Pieterse: Game Ranger/Conservationist – member of: The Field Guiding Association of South Africa (FGASA)

I am not here today to support any organization for or against the ban of Ivory or rhino horn.

I am here as a human being. A human being who has been entrusted with the wellbeing of all the world's creatures, great and small. I am here as a member of the public that has had the blood of these innocent giants on my hands. I am here to ask you for a few brief minutes of your time. I would like to offer my personal experience having bared witness to this tragedy.

On the 2nd of March 2012 my life was changed forever. Three Rhinos were brutally attacked at Kariega Game Reserve (in South Africa), their horns were hacked off and they were left for dead. One rhino died and two others were left desperately fighting for their lives. The people who watched these animals grow, myself included, were and are still forced to watch them suffer.

Two of these majestic creatures, a rhino called Themba (meaning "Courage" in isiXhosa), and another Thandiswa ("Hope"), were friends of mine. I was with Themba from the beginning to the end. I watched as he came into this world and as he was taken from it for the sake of greed. The three Rhinos, Themba and Thandiswa included, were all shot with a dart containing the powerful and paralyzing drug, M99. They were left immobile but aware, as their horns were removed with a machete.

Sadly after 23 days of struggle and several operations, Themba died in my arms at a watering hole in the early hours of the morning. Thandiswa survived and has given birth to a miracle, a baby boy, born in January of 2015.

For the second time in my life, the survival of a species is in our hands. Without awareness the killing will continue, without political pressure the poaching will continue. The reason I stand here today, is inspired by the struggle I experienced on a day to day basis. In South Africa alone, every 11 hours we lose one more precious rhino. At this rate, in just seven short years all rhino will be extinct. This is not only a challenge faced in Africa, but one of global importance.

We are all here today to decide on the value of an animal that was gifted to us. What right do we have to decide which species are worthy of life? We have a responsibility to our children and our children's children. This is our heritage that we are leaving for generations to come. I hope we can all find it in our hearts to make the right decision here today.

Thank You,

Daneil Pieterse