The rhino population in South Africa was on the brink of extinction in the early 1960s. By the end of 2007, South Africa had conserved 33% of Africa’s black rhino and 93% of the continent’s white rhino. This is indeed a good story to tell about our 20 years of freedom and democracy. It speaks directly to South Africa’s successful conservation track record for this species.

Poaching remains the biggest threat to South Africa’s rhino. In our case, there has been an alarming increase in rhino poaching countrywide.

Poaching is part of a multi-billion dollar international illegal wildlife trade that presents a global challenge. Addressing this scourge is not simple and there is no single solution. We will continue to strengthen holistic and integrated interventions and explore new, innovative options to ensure the long-term survival of the species.

What kind of interventions or measures has the government put in place to help combat rhino poaching?

Last year Cabinet directed that we investigate the possibility of a proposal to the 17th Conference of Parties to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 2016 to legalise the trade in rhino horn as a potential intervention. No decision has yet been made to draft such a proposal. A Panel of Experts appointed by the Minister in January 2014 is engaging various stakeholders in this regard and is expected to report on its work in the coming months. The Government would like to urge all stakeholders to work together in ensuring that whatever position we adopt at CITES in 2016 is well researched and adheres to our sustainable utilisation principles.

Rhino poaching and other wildlife crimes have been elevated to the National Joint Security Committee (NATJOINTS). This has assisted in advancing the implementation of the Cabinet-approved National Strategy for the Safety and Security of Rhinoceros Populations and Horn Stocks in South Africa which calls for integrated action to combat rhino poaching.

The Government has introduced a number of legislative and policy amendments to address rhino poaching. A national moratorium on the trade of individual rhinoceros horns, any derivatives or products thereof, within South Africa was introduced in 2009, and will remain in place until further notice. A total of R103 million has been allocated to SANParks to combat rhino poaching from the 2014/15 financial year to 2016/17. A further R8 million collected by the Asset Forfeiture Unit during criminal proceedings against the member of a poaching syndicate was handed to SANParks. This is in addition to other financial assistance that SANParks continues to receive from the private sector through its fundraising initiatives.

The publication and implementation of the Norms and Standards for the marking of rhino horn and for the hunting of white rhino for trophy hunting purposes in 2009 have put in place stricter controls for the issuing of rhino hunting permits, hunting of rhino and transportation of the horn. The provisions of these norms and standards were revised in 2012, and now also apply to the hunting of black rhino for trophy hunting purposes.

A biodiversity management plan for black rhinoceros in South Africa 2011-2020 was implemented following publication in the Government Gazette in January 2013. In July 2013, the National Environmental Management Laws First Amendment Act (NEMLA) was signed into law. The NEMLA strengthens regulatory and enforcement provisions to prevent abuse of the hunting permitting system and includes enabling provisions to deter, suspend and cancel permits under certain circumstances.

The anti-poaching ability of the Kruger National Park, which bears the brunt of rhino poaching, has been enhanced through increasing the number of rangers, which bears the brunt of rhino poaching, has been enhanced through increasing the number of rangers. This has resulted in a 42% decrease in incursions by poachers into the Kruger National Park since January 2014.

At an international level, South Africa and Mozambique signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of Biodiversity Conservation and Management in April 2014. This is the third Biodiversity Management MoU to be entered into by South Africa with so-called rhino horn consumer and transit states since December 2012. The other two MoUs signed were with Vietnam in 2012 and the People’s Republic of China in 2013.

MoUs highlight cooperation in areas such as biodiversity law enforcement; joint technology innovation, development and enhancement; wildlife trade and community development through a biodiversity economy; cross-border security operations to arrest rhino poachers are under discussion.

The South African government gives the assurance that rhino poaching is being addressed at multiple levels. Every effort is being made to effectively address rhino poaching. The South African government gives the assurance that rhino poaching is being addressed at multiple levels. Every effort is being made to effectively address rhino poaching — not only in South Africa, but at an international level as well.