

Deported doctor's unanswered questions

...Attempted to seek answers from Khama but failed

Ntibinyane Ntibinyane
BG reporter

To this day Dr. Clay Wilson claims that he doesn't know why he was kicked out of the country two years ago after President Ian Khama declared him a prohibited immigrant.

Narrating the events that led to his deportation in his recently released book "The Bushvet", Dr. Wilson said that sometime in July 2011 he received a letter from the then Minister of Environment Wildlife and Tourism Kitso Mokaila informing him that the government was terminating his services as the honorary game warden at Chobe National Park. "There was no reason provided as to why I was being given a (sic) sack. I hadn't asked to be made an honorary warden - it was National Park's idea as means of formalising the relationship under which I operated," he said adding that the decision devastated him. He said that three days later he was asked to report at the department of immigration in Kasane where he received a correspondence indicating that his VISA and work permit have been cancelled and that he had 30 days to get out of the country. He said that he tried to make sense out of



DEPORTATION OF A WILDLIFE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR... It looks like nobody will ever know why Dr Wilson was sent back to the USA after being in Botswana for some years.

the government's decision but could not come up with reason behind the reasons to be deported. Still battling with the questions as to why he was being asked to leave the country, Wilson travelled to Gaborone where he wanted to meet with president Khama face to face.

"I decided to try to deliver my letter to

the president and while I was there, find out from him why I was being kicked out of the country and banned from doing my job," he said.

At the office of the president Wilson narrated an almost nasty encounter with the president. He said that after he went through the security checks he was told

to go to office 301 to meet the private secretary to the president, but along the way he says he forgot the office number and he resorted to peeking into offices looking for the private secretary.

He said that when he reached one office through the anteroom he knocked and opened the door. "When I looked

inside I saw a boardroom type table with eight or nine people sitting around it and there, at the end with his neatly trimmed moustache and curly hair was president Khama, the president of the Republic of Botswana."

Before he could apologise for interrupting him Khama's bodyguards had already pounced on him, he said. "I clearly had the right guy but the wrong office - I heard a commotion behind me and felt hands grabbing me. The next instant I was on the ground, eating carpets and someone's knee was on my back as the door was slammed shut in front of me. My hands were wrenched up behind me," he said.

"I had been crash-tackled by the president's bodyguards, four guys who had been sitting in comfortable chairs in the foyer when I had ambled up to what was obviously the president's office. The goons had been off to each side, sitting against the wall closet to the lift so they could watch the president's door. I guessed they had been slacking off, and one of them really should have been watching the corridor, but they made up for their error by putting me down on the ground before I even knew what had hit me," he claimed.

Ghost of deported Dr. Wilson haunts Botswana

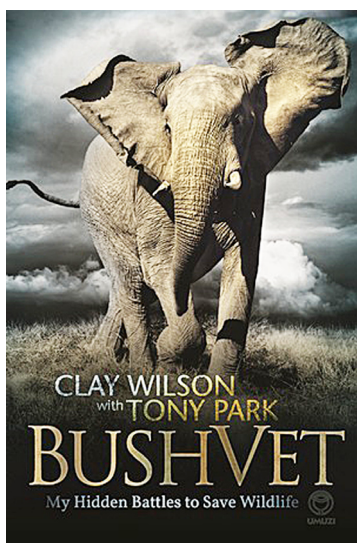
...Govt not worried by the book

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Two years after he was declared a prohibited immigrant by president Ian Khama, the American born Dr. Clay Wilson has penned a book in which he lays bare events leading to his deportation from the country that had initially welcomed him.

Dr. Wilson was deported through a presidential decree in December 2011 after staying in Botswana for more than five years where he also served as the only full time veterinarian and honorary game warden at the country's premier park, Chobe National Park. The 223-paged book co-authored with a well-known Australian author, Tony Park, was released in September this year. BushVet has since received raving reviews in the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa.

The reasons for his deportation remain unknown, but in his book Dr. Wilson suggests that it may have been orchestrated by some powerful figures in the government who did not see eye to eye with him. He however stresses that he still doesn't know the reasons for his deportation. After running a successful veterinary clinic in Florida, USA in 2007 Dr. Wilson sold almost everything that he had for a life in the bush in a country that would later declare him to be an undesirable element. "Botswana had a stable government and the people seemed happy, friendly and at peace with the world, I thought. If there was a paradise on Earth, then this was it," Dr. Wilson said in his book.



Dr. Wilson, who is born to an American father and a South African mother, said that through the assistance of friends in Chobe, he was able to move to Botswana to start a new career as a bush veterinarian. Welcomed by the department of Wildlife and National Parks, Dr. Wilson was soon engaged without pay as the Chobe National Park veterinarian. "The DWNP, the national parks authority, did not have its own vet in Chobe, and I felt I had a lot to offer. They agreed and offered to put me to work immediately. It became clear from the onset that the DWNP would not be able to pay me, but they later offered

me an appointment as an honorary game warden, which at the time was more important to me than any remuneration they could have offered," reads the book. During his five-year stay in the country Dr. Wilson would come across widespread poaching in the area, the outbreak of anthrax disease among elephants and the outbreak of distemper disease in dogs and wildlife. Perhaps he

says in his book that it was the way he responded to these challenges that earned him the wrath of government officials both in Kasane and Gaborone.

Government spokesperson Dr. Ramsay says that though he has not come across the book, the government is not worried by its contents. He says that Botswana's record in wildlife conservation is unrivalled. "Botswana is the envy of the world when it comes to wildlife conservation. No amount of bad publicity from him will change that," said Ramsay.

'Khama abused me'

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immigration officers who asked him to follow them to the immigration office in Kasane where he was given a faxed copy of an order declaring him a prohibited immigrant by president Khama. "It has been signed by the president himself, two days earlier and an official date stamp from the president's private office affixed. What a way to devastate a person's life, I thought. I wondered if he even knew what he was signing..." says Wilson in the book. From the immigration office, the immigration officers he says took him to Kasane police station in their bakkie. "I was in shock as they walked me in. I was told that I would be detained until I could be deported back from the country. I walked in a daze into the station, where I was fingerprinted, like a common criminal. I wasn't shouting or being outwardly emotional in any way, because there was nothing I could do." He says that after a brief stay at the police station the immigration officers took him back to their office where he was kept till 5pm. A police van arrived and he was taken to prison. "The cops took me to Kasane prison. I'd passed it hundreds, maybe thousands of times on my daily trips around town to go shopping or to treat animals, and I had never given the place or the people who resided within its walls a second thought. And now I was being through its gates," he says. Inside the prison he was forced to share a prison cell with 15 other men. "They were lying in rows, side by side, and the room was packed solid; all of the floor space covered. A couple of guys shifted, bunching up, and made small space. There was a bathroom at the end of the cell, but I was too scared even to think about going in there," he says. The following day the immigration officers wanted to take him to Gaborone in the back of a prison truck. His doctor advised otherwise by telling the officers that he had a heart condition and should not be transported like that, in a van with no air conditioner. Instead the doctor advised that he should be transported by air. He says that the immigration office reply was that the government did not have money to transport him to Gaborone. "To hell with it," he says he told them. "I'll pay for my own damn ticket"... All I wanted was to get out of jail and away from that place. Calls were made and a seat booked on the flight to the capital

that afternoon. I paid for the ticket," he says in the book.

Wilson says that he was escorted to the twin-engine Air Botswana aircraft, but to his surprise there were no guards on board with him. "Crazily I flirted with the idea of trying to give them all the slip when I reached Gaborone, but there was nowhere for me to run. In any case when the plane landed at Gaborone, there was a policeman and two immigration guys waiting at the foot of the stairs. They were big dudes and they took me across the tarmac and into the terminal to the second floor." At the second floor he was met by 10 officers - men and women all in uniform. He was then given an original letter of the deportation letter signed by the president. To his shock he was told that he would be remanded in prison for further seven days while the officials arrange flights. "That's nonsense". The façade of calm I had created to keep myself strong was starting to crack. It was hard for me to think straight, as I had no idea what was going on - I guess I thought that once I reached Gaborone I would be waiting in transit until they put me on another plane to South Africa and then back to the United States of America," he says.

From the airport Wilson was transported to Gaborone maximum prison. Because it was on a Friday he was not allowed to see a lawyer until Monday morning. Before he was taken to a holding cell he was given a piece of bread and a bottle of water. "In my angry, distressed state I was pathetically grateful for the small mercy of food and something to drink." When he entered the holding cells, he says inmates were whistling catcalls from slits in their cell doors as he walked in. "hey white man! What are you doing here? We'll have you for breakfast," he says in the book. He says that he was later taken into a cell with 18 men. He was nervous but kept a straight face. In the prison cell inmates gave him rules - not to touch other inmates' stuff and that he should sit down when he urinates. "I guessed the pissing rule was to minimise noise so as not to disturb the other inmates at night and not to mess all over the place." He says he later realised that he was locked with hardened convicts. "This was not some facility for some foreigners awaiting deportation or people waiting for their cases to be tried; this was hardcore, maximum,

and I, who had neither broken a law nor charged with doing so, had been left in with them unsupervised. I went into self-preservation mode. That night I did not sleep at all. I tensed at every rustle and watched the shadows for the movement of a man who might be on his way to gut me or slit my throat with a shiv [sic]," he says.

INNOCENT MAN IN CHAINS

After meeting his lawyer he decided to challenge his deportation at court but he lost. He says that on the day of his court appearance the warders put him in leg irons and handcuffs - all linked by a chain. "I hadn't been in irons before and they chafed at my wrists and ankles, scraping away some of the skin. They were bloody painful." The court later ruled that his deportation was in order as the president was acting lawfully. After 12 days in prison he says that he was taken to the immigration offices under supervision where he was fingerprinted and a mug shot taken. He was later whisked to the airport, where things now became casual. He says that things were so casual that at the airport he bought his lawyer, the cop and two immigration officials' cans of coke. He said that as he passed through an x-ray - he broke down. "I started crying for the first time since I'd left Laura (his girlfriend). It suddenly dawned on me as the flight attendant waited to scan my boarding pass that I was leaving the country I'd thought I would live in for the rest of my life. I had sold nearly everything I had to come here and to try to do some good for this country's wildlife," he says.

GETTING TO THE US

On the way to the US, for some reasons Wilson and the government officials who were escorting him became some sort of drinking buddies and they opened up to him about the job of escorting the deportees out of the country. He says that they told him that they often take people overseas who have been deported. One told him that he had been to England, Ghana and India. When they landed in Atlanta the officers who were already in drinking spree surprisingly wanted to come with him for a jaunt, but he refused. "The last I saw them they were heading for Miami Beach for some r-and-r (jaunt) probably at Botswana government's expense. As they left they kept on saying how difficult this job had been for them, but I didn't care what they thought or what they did."