

HOW 17-YEAR-OLD MASTERMINDED SH36B CAR THEFT RACKET



CRIME | SUSPENSE | INTRIGUE

BY SIMON MASABA

A 17-year-old footballer from South Sudan has been arrested in Uganda over a \$10m (about sh36b) alleged fraud linked to an international syndicate.

The youthful player, identified as Guot Deng Wol, is also allegedly involved in a vehicle theft racket currently under investigation by Interpol Kampala. The youngster played for a top local football club based in Kampala before his arrest.

He was taken into custody after Interpol impounded two luxury sport utility vehicles (SUVs): a Jeep Wrangler and a Mercedes-Benz G-Wagon. Both cars have South Sudan registration number plates.

The vehicles are believed to have been brought to Uganda by a wider network involved in smuggling stolen high-end cars from abroad.

Officials at the International Police (Interpol) Kampala Bureau confirmed that a joint operation is underway to dismantle what they described as a "sophisticated international racket trafficking stolen vehicles, particularly SUVs such as Range Rovers, BMWs and Toyota Prados."

These cars, investigators said, are routinely driven by Kampala's socialites, senior government officials and soldiers, many of them using foreign number plates.

Sources revealed that the teenage footballer lived an extravagant lifestyle, including hiring musicians for exclusive performances at his residence in Bunga, Makindye division, which raised suspicion in security circles.

Wol had reportedly recently

remodelled his rented apartment and is said to have spent lavishly on furnishings and renovations.

"Even after his arrest and before deportation arrangements began, he was reportedly reimbursed \$50,000 (about sh180m) in rent and renovation costs for the apartment," the source said.

Investigations have further revealed that the player had altered his age. This was discovered after Interpol recorded a statement from his mother, who visited him following his arrest early this month.

HOW HE WAS NETTED

Wol's luck ran out when he allegedly paid \$100,000 (about sh360m) to two brokers, who promised to introduce him to international football star Cristiano Ronaldo, the Portuguese national team captain currently playing for Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr Football Club.

According to investigators, while in Riyadh, the brokers presented the South Sudanese player to Ronaldo as an orphan, a claim that was untrue.

Moved by the story, Ronaldo reportedly posed for a photograph with him at a restaurant where the Portuguese star was having breakfast at the time.

The image was later posted on Wol's social media pages and quickly went viral across platforms. The photo caught the attention of a senior South Sudanese official, a general in the army, who raised a red flag, prompting Interpol Kampala to track and arrest Wol.

Investigators suspect that the brokers who connected the young footballer to Ronaldo took advantage of his limited understanding of Arabic and referred to him as "the black orphan" to gain Ronaldo's sympathy and complete their ploy.

For the past three weeks, officials from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Attorney General, Interpol Kampala and South Sudan authorities have been engaged in discussions over Wol's fate.

The Weekend Vision has learnt

Two luxury vehicles; a Jeep Wrangler and a Toyota Hilux pick-up truck under investigation by Interpol Kampala



SILVER NOTICE

In a bid to expand its capacity to fight financial crimes tied to illicit cross-border deals, Interpol Uganda has adopted the Silver Notice – a tool introduced by Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France, to trace and recover criminally acquired assets hidden abroad.

The tool is also being deployed in an ongoing investigation targeting senior government officials accused of orchestrating a sh60b theft from the Bank of Uganda.

The Silver Notice helps Interpol to identify and freeze assets, such as offshore bank accounts, luxury apartments, and companies used to launder stolen wealth. The goal is to complement vehicle recoveries with broader asset seizures linked to organised crime syndicates.

Over the past year, Interpol-led crackdowns have led to the arrest of 2,400 suspects across Africa, seizing or freezing illicit flows worth over euro 126m (about sh525b).

A portion of this money is believed to be tied to stolen vehicles smuggled and sold in Uganda. Some of the money was recovered after syndicates offloaded high-end cars in Kampala through underground markets.

Interpol data shows that vehicles are only one part of a complex criminal web stretching across drug trafficking, cybercrime, financial fraud, and terrorism financing.

that a decision has since been reached to have Wol deported to South Sudan, where he will face trial.

"The suspected stolen cars were first serviced at a fuel station in Bunga, before they were driven to South Sudan. They had spent over three months at the Interpol head

offices in Kololo, Kampala," a source told *The Weekend Vision*.

CARS SEIZED

The stolen SUVs, some of which have been seized and parked at the Interpol Kampala head office, are mostly stolen from Europe, especially the UK and are smuggled into Uganda through South Africa.

From here, they are driven by road via Tanzania before they enter the country under the cover of fraudulent documentation and diplomatic influence. Another senior Interpol officer said the theft of motor vehicles, which is linked to an organised crime syndicate, has a financial implication on insurance companies and damages the reputation of car manufacturers.

"Stolen vehicles are frequently trafficked for use in other criminal activities, including human trafficking and international terrorism," the officer said.

The source added that the illicit market in spare parts also fuels the theft of these SUVs. In recent years, the use of the Internet has contributed to a dramatic increase in the resale of illicit vehicles and their spare parts.

BONDS RAIDED

In an ongoing crackdown, Interpol, working with the Uganda Revenue Authority, raided three bonded warehouses in Nakawa division early this year, leading to the seizure of several SUVs.

In 2014, Interpol shipped 65 stolen luxury vehicles back to the UK as part of a similar recovery operation.

The annual Police crime report indicates that a total of 54 cross-border motor vehicle theft cases were registered in 2024. Of these, 48 were vehicles, five were motorcycles, while one was a tricycle.

Out of these, 21 were recovered – all within Uganda, according to Interpol Kampala director Joseph Obwona. Interpol has urged

Ugandans to verify the authenticity of vehicles through official channels before making purchases.

"One can submit a chassis number to Interpol Uganda for cross-checking at a fee of sh60,000. We issued 495 vehicle verification certificates, collecting sh29.7m in the process," Obwona said.

He urged the public to demand original documentation and match engine and chassis numbers physically so as to avoid purchasing stolen vehicles, especially cars with foreign number plates or without proper customs clearance.

Besides tackling vehicle theft, Obwona said Interpol Kampala issued 152,955 certificates of good conduct last year, earning the Government sh11.6b in revenue.

SHIPPING STOLEN CARS

In an operation last year, Interpol, working with URA's Non-Intrusive Inspection team, uncovered two posh 2020 Toyota RAV4 vehicles concealed in a container originating from the Port of London Gateway.

Once they reached Kampala, officers inspected the container and discovered altered chassis numbers covering the original ones.

"The logbooks were fake," Moses Wanjalo, the former head of the Joint Port Control Unit, said, adding: "We traced the real chassis numbers using Interpol's i24/7 Data System and confirmed the vehicles were reported stolen in the UK."

The recovered vehicles were held at DAKS Courier's bonded warehouse located in Mukono. Wanjalo said such crimes damage Uganda's global reputation.

"Importing stolen vehicles makes Uganda appear complicit, even when the state is not. It drives away credible car dealers and invites more scrutiny from international policing bodies," he said.