



INTERNATIONAL ANTI-POACHING FOUNDATION

**PRESS RELEASE**

**29 July 2021**

**Meet a Margaret Darawanda, a Dedicated Akashinga Ranger on World Ranger Day**

Ranger Margaret Darawanda has not looked back since she joined the all-female Akashinga conservation program which is expanding its footprint across southern Africa protecting the natural world.

The International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF), founded by former Australian special forces soldier Damien Mander, is inching closer towards its goal of deploying 1,000 Akashinga rangers across 20 reserves throughout the region by 2026.

Last month 25 new rangers graduated from basic training, and in early September they will be joined by 46 more, enabling three reserves under IAPF management to begin receiving full and regular patrols.

Ms Darawanda, 24, who was part of the first intake of Akashinga rangers to start patrolling Phundundu Wildlife Area in the Zambezi Valley in Zimbabwe in 2017, said: "I think it's a special thing protecting something that cannot protect itself."

After completing her training, Ms Darawanda, soon found her stride patrolling, collecting and keeping records, tracking and arresting poachers, investigating and educating the local community about the importance of wildlife.

She has also become the proud breadwinner for her entire family who live in the nearby village of Nyamakate – her widowed mother, her two-year-old daughter and her four siblings, some of whom have families of their own.

The opportunity came to become a ranger when the IAPF moved into her area just after she completed high school, and while she acknowledges with her role as a ranger there are hardships, it can also be very rewarding.

"I just loved that day when we rescued a lion from a snare ... it was not that badly hurt as it only had its leg caught but because it was not able to free itself we had to help it. It had been there a day."

She has also been amazed at the amount of wildlife that has returned to the area since the Akashinga began patrols – it was unheard of to see elephant, leopard and hippo four years ago, but now they are regularly sighted.

“It’s very different from when we started. You’d see maybe old elephant dung, or old animal spoors meaning there were not a lot of animals active in the area, and we would only see a few of the smaller antelope.”

Mr Mander said rangers formed the first and last line of defence for nature and at a time when Covid-19 had brought civilization to its knees as a direct result of the way that humanity treats the natural world, the importance of a ranger and the role they fulfil in society had never been more prominently highlighted.

“We need to be giving an increased amount of focus as a global community into the protection of nature and rangers are at the front of that fight,” Mr Mander said.

“For the IAPF every day is World Ranger Day as we deploy hundreds of rangers out protecting nature in some of the most remote and hostile locations on the African continent,” he said.

“But for the rest of the world today is a day to come together and celebrate the hard work and often thankless task that these rangers perform on behalf of all of us.”

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**Image Caption: Akashinga ranger Margaret Darawanda (right) on patrol in Phundundu Wildlife Area, Zimbabwe.**

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### The International Anti-Poaching Foundation

The International Anti-Poaching Foundation, established in 2009 by Damien Mander, operates two programs – Akashinga and LEAD Ranger. Akashinga is a community-driven conservation model, empowering disadvantaged women to restore and manage large networks of wilderness, alongside their local communities. The first armed, plant-based, all female anti-poaching unit is revolutionising the way wildlife is protected – and arresting poachers without firing a single shot. They currently protect eight nature reserves - or 230,000 acres of wilderness - in Zimbabwe, but the goal is to expand to 1,000 female rangers by 2026, protecting a network of 20 reserves under IAPF management across the region. The LEAD Ranger program, based in Kenya, delivers tailored training, long-term support and mentoring to develop wildlife crime enforcement leaders and instructors who remain based in the ecosystems they are protecting.

### Damien Mander

Founder of the International Anti-Poaching Foundation, Damien Mander is an Iraq war veteran, having served in the Australian military as a naval clearance diver and special operations sniper, who travelled to Africa in 2009, in search of a new adventure. Instead he discovered “a purpose amongst chaos” when he came across a buffalo trapped in a wire snare, her pelvis ripped in half through her three-day struggle to escape, and after she was euthanised she started to give birth to a still born calf. In some sort of way this was a rebirth for Damien. In that moment, his life changed forever and a powerful, passionate and highly skilled animal advocate was born. Damien is the winner of the 2019 Winsome Constance

Kindness Medal, prestigious international recognition of services to animals and humanity, featured in the documentary *The Game Changers* produced by James Cameron, and partnered with National Geographic and Cameron again in *Akashinga: The Brave Ones*.