

Communiqué on Resolution 372 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, applaud the new resolution of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, (Res 372) for the protection of Sacred Natural Sites.

We acknowledge and congratulate the African Commission on this landmark step towards recognising a core element of original African traditions, namely sacred natural sites and their customary governance systems. This Resolution demonstrates that the African Commission is at the vanguard of human and peoples' right globally, as the first regional body to recognise sacred sites and related customary governance systems. We encourage African governments to implement and embed this Resolution 372 in national policies and legislation.

As civil society organisations, we work directly with custodian communities of sacred natural sites and territories, and the appeal for this Resolution came from the custodians themselves. Sacred natural sites are the foundation of Africa's identity, heritage and well-being, which are at the core of the vision of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. We will continue our efforts in working with custodians in reviving and protecting their ancestral traditions and territories, and we believe this Resolution will assist them to better navigate a development path that respects and protects Africa's diverse cultural and natural heritage.

Further, this Resolution marks a positive step towards implementing 'A Call for Legal Recognition of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories and their Customary Governance Systems'¹. In that call, custodian communities and civil society organisations from Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda, emphasised that:

- Sacred natural sites and territories play a critical role in protecting biodiversity, essential for building climate change resilience for the ecosystems on which food systems depend.
- Custodian communities, who maintain customary governance systems to protect sacred natural sites and territories, play an essential role in preserving the traditional values of Africa, and require legal recognition and support to do so, given their growing vulnerability to increasing pressures from the different forms of land grabbing and extraction.
- Sacred natural sites and territories are the bedrock of customary governance systems, which are not able to flourish without legal protection.
- Recognition of customary governance systems, as part of plural legal systems, forms an essential component of respecting the essence of Africa, as set out in the African Charter.
- Sacred natural sites and territories should be recognised as no-go areas for mining and other destructive or extractive activities, in alignment with growing international recognition and threats.

We celebrate this occasion and the work of the African Commission, and look forward to continuing to work with you in achieving the vision of the African Charter.

¹ A Call for Legal Recognition of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories and their Customary Governance Systems (2015). The full report can be downloaded from: www.africanbiodiversity.org/CalltoAfricanCommission | www.gaiafoundation.org/CalltoAfricanCommission

