

Civil Society Call for Community-Led World Heritage Assessment of Lake Victoria

We, the undersigned **116 civil society organizations and 3 individuals from over 35 countries**, call upon the Governments of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, with support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Heritage Committee, the East African Community, and international partners, to use the [48th Session of the World Heritage Committee](#) as an opportunity to **begin a transparent, community-led process to assess Lake Victoria for eventual UNESCO World Heritage nomination**.

This process should recognize Lake Victoria as a living cultural landscape worthy of fuller study, community consultation, and transboundary protection. It should build on the existing UNESCO Tentative Listing entries for geometric rock art in the Lake Victoria Region and examine the lake, its watershed, islands, shorelines, wetlands, tributaries, cultural sites, and living cultural landscapes. The appropriate boundaries and nomination pathway, whether cultural, natural, or mixed cultural-natural, should be determined through [consultation](#) with resident communities and Indigenous Peoples, scientific assessment, cultural mapping, ecological and hydrological analysis, livelihood studies, and expert review.

Lake Victoria is Africa's largest freshwater lake and the second largest in the world by surface area, shared by Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. Its watershed includes wetlands, rivers, tributaries, islands, shorelines, cultural sites, fishing communities, and ecosystems that [sustain millions of people](#). Because Lake Victoria feeds into the Nile River system, its protection matters beyond Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, including for downstream countries such as South Sudan, Sudan, and Egypt, and for wider Nile Basin countries like Ethiopia.

For communities around the lake, Lake Victoria is not simply a body of water. It is a source of food, water, culture, memory, livelihood, and spiritual identity. It is known by names that carry deep meaning, including Nalubaale, meaning "Mother of the Gods" among the Baganda, and Nam Lolwe, meaning the "Endless Lake" among the Luo. Around its shores and islands, communities have developed fishing practices, oral traditions, rituals, ecological knowledge, and cultural relationships over generations.

The Lake Victoria region is also home to important archaeological and cultural heritage. In 2024, geometric rock art sites in [Uganda](#), [Kenya](#), and [Tanzania](#) were included on the UNESCO Tentative List through coordinated transnational entries by the three countries. This was an important step, but the rock art should not be treated as isolated heritage sites. It is part of a wider cultural landscape shaped by Lake Victoria, and any protection effort should also consider the lake, islands, shorelines, wetlands, communities, traditions, and ecosystems that give that heritage its meaning.

That wider landscape is now under growing pressure. Lake Victoria and the African Great Lakes region face threats from pollution, invasive species, overfishing, illegal fishing, deforestation, wetland loss, climate change, and fossil fuel infrastructure. We are particularly concerned about the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) and associated oil development. The pipeline route [passes through](#) the broader Lake Victoria Basin and through wetlands, rivers, watersheds, and landscapes connected to the lake and to communities that depend on it. Harm does not need to occur inside the lake's waters to threaten the lake. Damage to tributaries, wetlands, catchments, and connected ecosystems can flow downstream and

create cumulative, long-term impacts on fisheries, drinking water, food security, cultural sites, biodiversity, and livelihoods.

Protecting Lake Victoria is not only about preventing harm. A community-led process to assess Lake Victoria's unique values would also help [make space for better forms of investment](#) that are not rooted in extractive industries. Exploring the concept of protecting Lake Victoria as a potential World Heritage site involves a deeper exploration of sustainable alternatives such as sustainable fisheries, wetland restoration, clean water systems, community-led conservation, cultural heritage documentation, nature-based tourism, renewable energy, climate resilience, research, and support for local livelihoods. Lake Victoria's future should be shaped by the communities who have lived with and cared for the lake across generations, and by public institutions willing to protect one of Africa's most important freshwater systems for present and future generations.

Any process to consider Lake Victoria for World Heritage nomination must be community-led, rights-based, and grounded in free, prior and informed consent when Indigenous Peoples are affected, and consent-based consultation as a best practice for local communities. It [must protect](#) customary livelihoods, recognize [Indigenous](#) and local knowledge, respect women's roles in fish economies, support youth leadership, and include safeguards against displacement, exclusionary conservation, or restrictions imposed without community consent. Before, during, and after the World Heritage Committee meeting, governments and UNESCO stakeholders should meet with civil society and community representatives, support further study of the site and alternative forms of development, and avoid new fossil fuel threats to Lake Victoria and connected freshwater systems.

Signed by organizations working on environmental protection, cultural heritage, Indigenous and local community rights, climate justice, biodiversity, youth leadership, and human rights:

From East Africa:

1. Action for Climate and Environmental Justice (ACEJ)
2. Activists For Climate Justice Initiative (A4C)
3. AFRICAN WOMEN ECO ACTION NETWORK
4. Amazon Theatrix Ensemble
5. Anglican Development Services Kenya
6. Brands On A Mission
7. Catholic Justice and Peace Department (CJPD)
8. Center for Conservation and Ecoenergy Initiative (CCEI)
9. Centre for Citizens Conserving Environment & Management (CECIC)
10. Centre for Environmental Research and Agricultural Innovations (CERAI)
11. Community Action For Health & Development (CAHED)
12. Community Climate and Energy Shield Initiative (CCESI)
13. Earthwise Women Empowerment Foundation (EWEF)
14. Eco Roots Organization
15. Environment Governance Institute
16. Fem Earth Organisation
17. Foundation for Ecological Preservation Uganda (FEPU)
18. Foundation for Environmental Management and Campaign Against Poverty (FEMAPO)
19. Fridays for Future Uganda (FFFU)

20. Friends with Environment in Development
21. Green Conservers
22. Green Culture Community Initiative (GCCIAFRICA)
23. Green Faith Uganda
24. Indigenous Wisdom for Freshwater Conservation (IWFC)
25. Initiative for Green Planet (IGP)
26. Jamaa Resource Initiatives
27. JPIC Franciscans Africa
28. Jukwaa la Wadau wa Mazingira-Tz
29. Kampala Archdiocese Youth Apostolate
30. Kenya Marine & Fisheries Research Institute
31. Kenya Scouts Association
32. Kijiji Yeetu
33. Laudato Si' Animator – Kenya
34. Laudato Si' Movement – Kenya
35. Laudato Si' Movement – Uganda
36. Liberty ProBono Initiative (LPI)
37. Manyatta b fairness and sustainable environment cbo
38. Medical Mission Sisters
39. Migori Environmental Movement
40. National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)
41. Nature Talk Africa (NaTA)
42. Now And Beyond Organisation
43. Nyakach CBO
44. Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)
45. Osiepe Sango Rescue Team
46. Pathfinder International
47. Pathways Policy Institute (PPI)
48. Population Services International Uganda
49. Strategic Response on Environmental Conservation
50. Support The Needy Initiative - SUNI
51. Tieng Adhola cultural union
52. Turkana Indigenous People action for Development (TIPD)
53. Ulinzi Africa Foundation
54. Women for Green Economy Movement Uganda
55. Women for Green Nature
56. Women On Environment Mission
57. Youth for Green Communities

From Africa:

58. AbibiNsroma Foundation
59. Association de Développement Agricole Éducatif et Sanitaire de Manono
60. Community And Family Aid Foundation
61. Diocese of Kalemie
62. Federation of Environmental and Ecological Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and Human Rights (FEEDAR & HR)
63. Forum des Engagés pour le Développement Durable (FORED)

64. Foundation for Environmental Rights, Advocacy & Development (FENRAD) – Nigeria
65. Front Commun pour la Protection de l'Environnement et des Espaces Protégés (FCPEEP)
66. Green Advocates International
67. Green Anglicans
68. Greenleaf Advocacy and Empowerment Center
69. Innovation pour le Développement et la Protection de l'Environnement
70. INTERFAITH FORUM FOR PEACE, JUSTICE & DIALOGUE
71. Laudato Si' Movement – Cameroun
72. Les Amis de la Terre – Togo | Friends of the Earth – Togo
73. Mother Earth Sustainable Agricultural Association (MESAA-Africa)
74. Public Interest Law Center
75. Quest For Growth and Development Foundation
76. Rural Women Action For Environment (RuWAE)
77. Society for Women and Youth Affairs (SWAYA)
78. Strong Roots Congo
79. Syndicat Chrétien des Travailleurs du Congo

Internationally:

80. Anglican Communion Environmental Network
81. Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE)
82. Biodiversity Conservation Center
83. Brighter Green
84. Buoyant Foundation Project
85. Campax
86. Christians for Future
87. CSI Department of Ecological Concerns
88. Debt for Climate
89. FirecircleTT To End ALL Forms of Abuse
90. Forum Ökologie & Papier
91. Friends of the Earth US
92. GegenStrömung / CounterCurrent
93. Green Network
94. Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
95. ICOMOS - USA
96. Inclusive Development International
97. Instituto de Abogados para la Protección del Medio Ambiente (INSAPROMA)
98. International Coalition of Sites of Conscience
99. International Rivers
100. International Youth Council-Yemen (IYCY)
101. IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands
102. Laudato Si' Movement – Global
103. Lowlander Center
104. MiningWatch Canada
105. OurWorldHeritage Foundation
106. Oyu Tolgoi Watch
107. Pakaid
108. Rivers without Boundaries Coalition – Mongolia

- 109. Rivers without Boundaries International Coalition (RwB)
- 110. ROYM-Nepal
- 111. Soul Family eV
- 112. United for Climate Justice
- 113. Waterkeepers Bangladesh
- 114. Women Faith and Climate Network
- 115. World Heritage Watch
- 116. Youth Negotiators Academy (YNA)

Individuals:

- 1. Álvaro Gómez-Ferrer Bayo, President of the Spanish Committee of the ICOMOS (1986-1997), ICOMOS
- 2. Dr. Gail Bradbrook, Co-Founder, Extinction Rebellion
- 3. Vibeke Vandrup Martens, Associate Professor and Researcher at NIKU—Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research