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116 Organizations from Over 35 Countries Urge Community-Led World Heritage Assessment for Lake Victoria

Busan, Republic of Korea / Kampala, Uganda – One hundred and sixteen civil society organizations, joined by three individuals, from over 35 countries today called on the governments of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania to begin a transparent, community-led assessment of Lake Victoria for possible UNESCO World Heritage nomination and to shift investment away from fossil fuel expansion toward protection of the lake's fisheries, wetlands, cultural heritage, clean water, renewable energy, and sustainable livelihoods.

The call comes as the [UNESCO World Heritage Committee meets in Busan](#), Republic of Korea, where nominations, extensions, and other World Heritage matters are expected to be examined during the 19–29 July session. The [civil society statement](#) will be made public and sent to governments today, alongside a new report by the Uganda-based organization Strategic Response on Environmental Conservation (STREC), [Protecting Lake Victoria: A Call for Community-Led World Heritage Assessment](#).

"We have demonstrated that Lake Victoria's exceptional biodiversity, fisheries, wetlands, islands, sacred sites, cultural heritage, and traditional knowledge together represent an Outstanding Universal Value worthy of international recognition," said **Cirrus Kabaale, Chief Executive Officer at Strategic Response on Environmental Conservation (STREC)**. "By protecting the lake's wider landscape, we also protect the cultural and ecological systems that have sustained and shaped this remarkable heritage for generations."

Lake Victoria is Africa's largest lake by surface area and the world's largest tropical lake. It is shared by Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, with a wider basin extending into Rwanda and Burundi. Because the lake feeds into the Nile River system, decisions about its future matter beyond its immediate shores, including for regional water security, wetlands, pollution risks, and transboundary freshwater governance. For communities around the lake, Lake Victoria is also a source of livelihood, culture, memory, spiritual identity, ecological knowledge, and customary forms of care.

The statement says any World Heritage pathway should build from the existing UNESCO Tentative List entries for geometric rock art in the Lake Victoria Region, while leaving the final boundaries and nomination model to be determined through the assessment itself. It calls for a [rights-based](#)

[process that requires free, prior, and informed consent \(FPIC\)](#) where [Indigenous Peoples](#) are affected, uses consent-based consultation as a best practice for local communities, and includes safeguards against displacement, exclusionary conservation, and restrictions on customary practices imposed without consent.

“We are calling for a transparent, science-based, and community-led assessment that examines the lake, its islands, wetlands, tributaries, cultural sites, fishing communities, and living traditions before any nomination pathway or boundaries are determined,” said Bwengye **Rajab Yusufu, Executive Director at the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)**.

The statement also raises concern about the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) and associated oil development. Although the pipeline does not cross Lake Victoria directly, its route passes through the broader Lake Victoria Basin, where damage to rivers, wetlands, and watersheds could create risks for the lake and the communities that depend on it.

“Lake Victoria faces mounting environmental and social pressures. Our warning is that impacts can move through tributaries, wetlands, catchments, and connected ecosystems, affecting water quality, fisheries, cultural heritage, food security, and livelihoods,” said **Doreen Namara, Executive Director at Liberty Probono Initiative (LPI)**. “A community-led World Heritage assessment offers an opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation, environmental protection, and sustainable investment choices for future generations.”

The accompanying report calls on Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania to launch a transparent assessment process, establish a joint taskforce with community participation, strengthen lake governance, and apply a precautionary approach to oil, gas, and related infrastructure in the Lake Victoria Basin. It also urges UNESCO, international partners, and regional institutions to support community-led mapping, scientific review, rock art documentation, livelihood studies, and regional dialogue on protection of the African Great Lakes.

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Notes to Editors / Key Links:

- Civil Society Statement, [Civil Society Call for Community-Led World Heritage Assessment of Lake Victoria](#), July 20, 2026
- [Protecting Lake Victoria: A Call for Community-Led World Heritage Assessment](#), Strategic Response on Environmental Conservation, July 20, 2026
- [UNESCO 48th session of the World Heritage Committee](#), Busan, Republic of Korea, July 19-29, 2026
- [UNESCO article on the 48th World Heritage Committee session and new nominations](#), June 9, 2026
- UNESCO Tentative List entry, Geometric rock art in Lake Victoria Region of [Kenya](#), [Tanzania](#), and [Uganda](#), January and February 2024

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