

## Newsflash: African Commission Passes Resolution on Sacred Natural Sites

14th June 2017

Dear &lt;&lt;First Name&gt;&gt;,

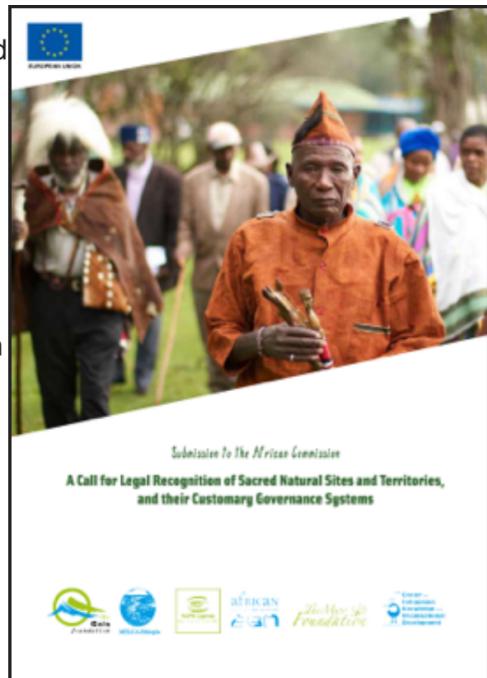
Great news to share! The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has passed a resolution, at its 60th ordinary session, held in Niamey last month, on the protection and recognition of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories. The full text will be released soon, in English and French.

### **A great step forwards for indigenous rights and traditional conservation in Africa**

Melakou Tegegn, Expert Member of the Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), commented, "History has been made through this resolution by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories in the continent". It is the first of its kind to be passed by a regional treaty body. The resolution calls for African governments and authorities to recognise and protect Sacred Natural Sites and Territories, being both central to the indigenous peoples' governance systems, and to protecting vibrant biodiverse areas that have been conserved for generations.

"The WGIP is happy to have worked on this landmark Resolution and be at the vanguard of indigenous peoples' rights in Africa.", says Commissioner Soyata Maiga.

Gaia has been working alongside the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and partners such as GRABE-Benin, MELCA-Ethiopia, CIKOD-Ghana, NAPE-Uganda and Earthlore Foundation in South Africa, for over a decade. Together, we have been accompanying custodian communities to decolonise the law and conservation in Africa, and assert the need to recognise plurilegal systems. Our joint report for the African Commission, released in 2015, is centred around a statement by custodians from six African countries on the common customary laws for the protection of Sacred Sites and ancestral lands.



When the report, 'A Call for Recognition of Sacred Natural Sites and their Customary Governance Systems' [\[link\]](#) was launched in Uganda, ACHPR Commissioner Med Kaggwa said that the report "contains an urgent plea to governments to play an active role in the most important responsibility of all, namely towards Mother Earth – the source of life for all."

Since then, we have been working with the Commission, Working Groups and advisers for the key recommendations of our report to be drafted into a new resolution. It builds also on resounding success at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress, where our draft motion was approved as

Recommendation 102 calling for SNS and other Protected Areas to be No-Go for development.

Professor Rachel Murray, a welcome advisor to Gaia and the ABN in this process, comments "The African Commission is an established and important authority for the continent. Having such a Resolution passed by it is a vital step towards supporting and protecting Sacred Natural Sites and their custodial governance systems across Africa."

Nigel Crawhall, Director of Secretariat, IPACC, has added his enthusiastic response: "This is a huge achievement. Currently only Benin has legislation on Sacred Natural Sites (with Ethiopia having a cabinet memo) and this will be a great opportunity for the IUCN, African Commission and other groups to get laws and policies adopted nationally and regionally. This will also serve as a springboard for the CBD to adopt binding language on Sacred Natural Sites conservation and stewardship".

We look forward to the release of the final text, and to continuing to work with custodians, the African Commission and its Working Groups. As Sulemana Abudulai, Chair of ABN, has said, "Working with the African Commission and other regional bodies is essential in challenging industrial interests and standing up for Mother Earth, Indigenous Rights and future generations."

More news coming soon!



*Working together, to strengthen the African Earth Jurisprudence movement.*

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