

## RESOLUTION #11



**TITLE:**  
**Recognising Networks of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories and the Customary Governance Systems of their Custodian Communities as a Distinct Category of Protected Area**

### WHEREAS

RECOGNISING that Sacred Natural Sites are places such as forests, caves, mountains, reefs and other marine and coastal features, rivers and other sources of water, which are of biological, ecological, geological, cultural and spiritual importance; and that they exist as part of an interconnected socio-ecological network embedded within territories, landscapes and seascapes, which may encompass all elements of the ecosystem including the vertical areas deep into the Earth such as the subsoil and minerals and up into the sky to the constellations;

ACKNOWLEDGING that networks of Sacred Natural Sites are holy places, akin to a church or temple, where spiritual practices and rituals take place by the custodian communities in order to maintain the health and integrity of the territory; and which are integral to the traditional knowledge, practices and customary governance systems of Indigenous Peoples, as well as to their identity, wellbeing and survival;

RECOGNISING that Indigenous Peoples, as self-defined or recognised by others as such, are custodians of some of these networks of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories, who have governed and protected these ancestral areas for centuries, and still continue to do so, in accordance with their customary governance systems, based on a relationship of deep respect and care for Nature and future generations;

RECOGNISING that religious institutions have sustained natural sites for pilgrimage purposes, sacred practices and for the intrinsic value of Nature, and that biodiversity conservation is an inherent and important aspect of the sacredness of these sites; and that these sites are often revered as such by local communities;

AFFIRMING that Indigenous Peoples have an inalienable right to self-determination and governance, which is recognised in legal instruments including the ILO Convention 169 (1989), and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)(2007); and furthermore the UNDRIP specifically recognizes in Articles 11, 12 and 25 the rights of Indigenous Peoples to the protection of their cultural practices and access in privacy to their sacred places, as well as their rights and responsibilities to maintain and transmit their spiritual relationships to their sacred lands and waters.

MOTIVATED by the importance of Indigenous and other Sacred Natural Sites and Territories and the customary governance systems of their custodian community for the conservation of biological and cultural diversity, and the protection of wilderness areas, as they contribute to the connectivity, resilience and adaptation of Earth's socio-ecological systems and functioning;

CONCERNED that Sacred Natural Sites and Territories are threatened by pressures including: extractive industries and mining, all forms of land grabbing for ‘development’, commercial agriculture and tourism, some forms of research and scientific activities, the activities of some religious groups/institutions, the impacts of climate change, and laws and policies, particularly at the national level, which do not recognise Sacred Natural Sites and Territories or respect indigenous communities’ right to self-determination, cultural and spiritual values, traditional knowledge, practices and customary laws;

ACKNOWLEDGING that those Indigenous Peoples who are committed to reviving and exercising their indigenous knowledge, practices and customary governance systems need special protection and recognition to be able to do so, as they are significantly pressured by multiple threats;

ACKNOWLEDGING the sacred, inter-generational, inter-species and scriptural duties of religious and spiritual practices and communities to protect creation, particularly habitats, species and ecosystems;

RECOGNISING that there is an urgent need to secure recognition of networks of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories as a distinct category of protected area, acknowledging that the definition, governance and protection of these areas, by the Indigenous Peoples, on their own terms, are an expression of their right to self-determination.

## **THEREFORE**

We, delegates of the 10<sup>th</sup> WILD conference, recognise the vital contribution of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories and the customary governance systems of their custodian communities to making the world a wilder place;

WE RECALL international recognition of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories in global agreements and instruments, including the Man and the Biosphere Programme (1970), Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), World Heritage Convention (1972), ILO Convention 169 (1989), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992), particularly Articles 8(j) on traditional knowledge and 10 (c) on customary use, Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)(2007); in Resolutions, Recommendations and Declarations of key international conferences [for example, Recommendations V.13: *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas* and V.26: *Community Conserved Areas* adopted and noted respectively by the Vth World Parks Congress (Durban, 2003), Resolution 3.049 *Community Conserved Areas* adopted by the 3rd International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress (Bangkok, 2004), Resolution 4.038 *Recognition and conservation of sacred natural sites in protected areas* adopted by the 4th IUCN World Conservation Congress (Barcelona 2008), Resolution 36: *Recognition and Conservation of Sacred Natural Sites in Protected Areas* adopted by the 9<sup>th</sup> WILD Conference (Mexico, 2009), Recommendations of the Global Indigenous Preparatory Conference for the United Nations High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (10 – 12 June 2013, Alta); and in key publications such as the CBD’s *Akwé: Kon Voluntary guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessments regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities* (2004); IUCN and UNESCO *Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines No. 16 on Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers* (2008);

WE NOTE in particular the importance of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories, and customary governance systems of Indigenous Peoples in relation to the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), especially Element 2 on “*Governance, participation, equity and benefit-sharing*”, and its role in fulfilling Aichi Target 11 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 which calls for ‘*other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes*’; the IUCN’s Recommendation 147 *Sacred Natural Sites – support for custodian protocols and customary laws in the face of global threats and challenges* (Jeju, 2012); and IUCN Best Practice in Protected Areas Guidelines Series No. 20 ‘*Governance of Protected Areas: From understanding to action*’ (2013);

WE AFFIRM that urgent action is needed by national governments, regional and international bodies and non-governmental organisations and others to recognise and to promote the understanding of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories, their related tangible and intangible heritage, and the customary governance systems of their indigenous communities.

## RESOLVED

- URGE RECOGNITION of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories as a distinct category of protected area, respecting that there is a plurality of Sacred Natural Sites’ systems that should be recognised each on their own terms as expressed by their custodian communities; and that this category should be recognised in international forums (such as those convened by the IUCN) and in legal instruments and policies, particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- URGE national governments to adopt and enforce appropriate laws, policies and programmes - with the full and effective participation of communities and organizations concerned for the recognition and protection of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories - according to their customary governance systems; particularly implementation of the IUCN-UNESCO Best Practice Guidelines No. 16 and 20, Resolutions and Recommendations, and previous WILD Resolutions, notably No. 30 and 36;
- CALL UPON governments and others to recognise the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including their customary laws and associated institutions, their right to self-determination, and their right to Free Prior Informed Consent, including the right to say no to mining and other development activities; and to ratify and implement ILO 169 and endorse the UNDRIP 2007;
- SUPPORT Indigenous Peoples to revive, practice and secure legal recognition of their customary governance systems on their own terms, in order to protect Sacred Natural Sites and Territories; and to form and collaborate as alliances of custodians of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories to strengthen the protection of wilderness; for present and future generations of all species;
- RECOMMEND the elaboration of best practices for the recognition of Indigenous and other Sacred Natural Sites and Territories and the customary governance systems of their custodian communities in forthcoming forums, particularly the Asia Parks Congress in Japan (November 2013); the 9th Pacific Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in Fiji (December 2013); and IUCN’s Vith World Parks Congress in Australia, November 2014.

## PROPOSERS

Name: Gathuru Mburu  
Position/title: Coordinator, African Biodiversity Network  
Country: Kenya  
Email: [gathurum@yahoo.com](mailto:gathurum@yahoo.com)  
Mobile telephone: +254 722643029

Name: Liz Hosken (Gaia Foundation)  
Position/title: Director, Gaia Foundation  
Country: UK  
Email: [llz@gaianet.org](mailto:llz@gaianet.org)  
Mobile telephone: +44 7768344096

## SECONDRS

Name: Joseph Itongwa  
Position/title: Executive Committee member for Central Africa, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee  
Country: Democratic Republic of Congo  
Email: [itojose2000@yahoo.fr](mailto:itojose2000@yahoo.fr)

Name: Nigel Crawhall  
Position/title: co-Chair, IUCN Theme on Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, Equity & Protected Areas  
Country: South Africa;  
Email: [nigel.tilcepa@gmail.com](mailto:nigel.tilcepa@gmail.com)  
Mobile: +27 825796868

Name: Felipe Gomez  
Position/title: Coordinator Oxlajuj Ajpop, National Council of Maya Spiritual Leaders  
Country: Guatemala  
Email: [mayavision13@gmail.com](mailto:mayavision13@gmail.com)  
Mobile: +50 222382745

Name: Robert Wild  
Position/title: IUCN programme Coordinator & Coordinator Sacred Natural Sites Initiative  
Country: Kenya  
Email: [robgwild@gmail.com](mailto:robgwild@gmail.com)  
Mobile: +44 7530736333

Name: Bas Verschuuren  
Position/title: Coordinator for the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative  
Country: The Netherlands  
Email: [basverschuuren@gmail.com](mailto:basverschuuren@gmail.com)  
Mobile telephone: +31 649393904