

Arusha, 24 July 2024

Dear Dr. Sophie Justice,

Dr. Christian Ciobanu,

**Re: Complaint regarding ongoing UNESCO Mission to revalidate Ngorongoro-Lengai  
UNESCO Global Geopark**

We are writing on behalf of the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA) regarding your ongoing mission to assess and revalidate the Ngorongoro-Lengai UNESCO Global Geopark. We believe it is important for you to access all relevant information in order to conduct your work in a meaningful and credible way. Indeed, we are afraid you may not have received transparent and adequate information including on the human rights violations affecting the residents of Ngorongoro, Ngaresero and Longido living in the Geopark.

We would like to highlight a number of key issues you should seriously consider in your assessment:

- There was no information, consultation nor process of obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of Maasai and other Indigenous Peoples living in the Geopark when it was established in 2018. FPIC requires that the peoples affected by any development or activities should have knowledge and full disclosure of the effect and outcome of any development in their territory; in this case, no attempt have ever been made to address consultation to that effect.
- It is also our view that FPIC should be triggered before establishment and throughout the implementation and monitoring of the status of the Geopark; unfortunately, in this case, no prior information was circulated about the current mission that you are involved in, and civil society organisations (CSOs) and indigenous peoples and local communities who are right holders were provided with no opportunity to engage with you and share their complaints. We have experienced similar missions by UNESCO in the past, as Ngorongoro is also a [World Heritage Site](#) (see link and [attached](#)), and we reject such missions as totally controlled by the government and not respecting human rights standards around participation. As a result of our advocacy efforts, UNESCO has actually decided at the July session of the World Heritage Committee in Delhi to conduct a new legitimate and independent mission to Ngorongoro. It has to this date not released the report from its February 2024 mission because of serious complaints from the Ngorongoro Pastoral Council, Maasai CSOs, MISA and even the European Parliament. We are therefore extremely shocked that a new mission is being conducted using similar non transparent and non-participatory methods.

- We understand that one of the goals of the Geopark is to promote ecotourism, which might be a good idea in other contexts. However, in this case, residents are facing serious threats of displacement, land alienation and everyday discrimination and harassment, as the government is massively investing in and promoting large-scale and environmentally unsustainable tourism. As an indication, there were over 1 million tourists in July 2023–June 2024 in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) alone, and the government is now trying to increase the number of tourists to 5 million per year. Tourism is bringing zero benefits to the local communities, who have been deprived of any access to social services and emergency health services for the last three years. In addition, tourism is not providing any employment opportunities to Maasai local communities since 2018, as the government has issued a policy to ensure these go to non-Maasai only. Rather, tourism and fortress conservation are driving land dispossession.
- Some of the key features of the Geopark are sites with highly significant spiritual and cultural value for the Maasai, and we feel it is morally wrong to turn these sites into exclusive touristic destinations. This is particularly true of the Ngorongoro Crater and Ormoti, which are places used for rites of passage and where the government is promoting tourism and now planning to develop canoeing. Maasai pastoralists have lost access to the crater in 2016, despite its vital importance for grazing and saltlicks. It was taken away from the Maasai unilaterally by the government while hundreds of thousands of tourists go down to the crater every year. Oldoinyo Lengai is a spiritual mountain, which is where Enkai (God) lives, and it is now turned into a hiking destination without considering its spiritual dimension.
- We are highly concerned by the development and construction of new tourist infrastructure, hotels, museums in the area including with Chinese investment, as the UNESCO has repeatedly highlighted concerns around extended traffic, car-carrying capacity and dust, and we feel there should be no further infrastructure development to avoid any negative ecological and social impacts.
- We have received information from the local communities that are full of fear especially since the project is bringing international researchers and government officials more frequently without meaningful consultations or feedback to the very communities
- While NCA residents are facing forced eviction under the guise of a so-called voluntary relocation programme, the residents of Ngaresero and Longido are now facing the threat of land grabbing within the area delineated as Geopark. A leaked document dated January 2024 indicates plans by the government to turn this area into an exclusive trophy hunting area, totally ignoring the rights of Indigenous Maasai Peoples to stay on their land and exercise their pastoralist livelihood.
- We have reviewed the 2020 annual report by the Tanzanian Government and found serious and deliberate misinformation. The report states that three quarters of the Geopark is a protected area, while the 1959 Ngorongoro Conservation Area agreement guarantees coexistence between Maasai and wildlife. It is further stated that local communities are involved in the management of the Geosites, which is utterly wrong.

- In our view, the report contains an anti-pastoralist and anti-Maasai hate speech and does not do justice to the fact that Maasai have preserved their environment and wildlife since time immemorial. Part of that report states:  
*“Such areas are Laetoli World heritage site and Engaruka ruins where cattle, sheep and goats are dancing on these sites, so they speed up erosion or disintegrate the ruins arrangements.”*
- We have reviewed your assessment criterion and wish to clarify that
  - o The Maasai self-identify as indigenous people and are recognised as such by the African Commission for Human and people’s rights
  - o Maasai are not in any way involved in the management and implementation of the Geopark
  - o Maasai indigenous knowledge, practice and management practices excluded that limits possibility of a proper inventory for transfer of the knowledge to the future generations
  - o Maa language is excluded from Geopark materials which limits possibility of Maa language to be used in Geoparks Materials
  - o No co-management plan has ever been drafted and we feel Geopark does not help protect the landscape and does not help protect our cultural identity

We are available should you wish to meet with Maasai representatives during your stay in Tanzania or to have an online meeting with you after you return home to provide more information and clarity and to answer any question you might have about this complex situation. You can also find additional details in our monthly newsletters on the CELEP (Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism) [website](#).

We urge you to NOT revalidate the Ngorongoro-Lengai Geopark for three reasons:

- There are serious ongoing human rights violations in the area, and court cases ruled in favour of the Maasai have been ignored by the government.
- The Geopark label promotes and attracts tourism which, in this context, has already achieved mass levels that are unbearable for the people and the environment.
- Your recommendations will be used by the Tanzanian Government to justify displacement, as attested by the 2022 court documents showing that relocations of people from Ngorongoro are undertaken in response to UNESCO recommendations.

Yours sincerely,



Joseph Oleshangay

on behalf of Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA)