

5 September 2024

Re: Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark (Tanzania)

Dear voting members of the Global Geopark Council,

As you are aware, the status of the Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark in Tanzania is on the agenda of the 9th session of the UNESCO Global Geopark Council on 8-9 September 2024 in Vietnam. In July, a mission was conducted to assess the Geopark and make a recommendation on its revalidation. Upon learning about this mission through social media, we, representatives of the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA), wrote a letter to the mission experts on 24 July to complain about the lack of community involvement, inform them about serious ongoing human rights violations in the area and request a physical or online audience with them:

“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”.

Despite this request, there has not been to this date any response from the team assessing and revalidating **Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark** or the Geopark secretariat. We are enclosing the above mentioned letter so you can be informed about the key concerns we have about the human rights situation in Ngorongoro. The letter also contains a link to our newsletters with an abundance of documentation about ongoing human rights violations.

With this letter, we urge you not to vote in favour of the revalidation of the Ngorongoro-Lengai Geopark for the following reasons:

- The mission report does not include the views of the Maasai affected communities and is therefore not legitimate; the report claims that the experts met with representatives of all different Indigenous groups including the Maasai; however, our reading of the report indicates that none of the people consulted are local Maasai community representatives ; this is particularly problematic as a lot of the infrastructure developments and tourist attractions are planned in predominantly Maasai areas like Ngorongoro and Lake Natron;
- The experts never responded to our request despite acknowledging receipt of our letter in the report and despite us sending several reminders by email; their report indicates no effort was made to really investigate the extent to which Indigenous Peoples rights are respected and their participation is a reality;

- 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; the recommendation to conduct a carrying capacity study is not sufficient in our opinion; a clear strategy is needed to make tourism sustainable and beneficial for the people, including through co-management of wildlife and tourism activities;
- 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;
- NCA was included in the Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark in 2018 without obtaining the free, priori and consent of the Indigenous Peoples living in the area ; the people have until now not receiving information on the implications of the Geopark and future plans ; this is contrary to UNESCO policy and consent should be obtained before any further activity is undertaken;
- The World Heritage Status (designation of 1979 as Natural WHS, Cultural WHS in 2010) has already brought several negative impacts to the people living in the area. Ongoing human rights violations in the area are the direct outcome of the UNESCO World Heritage Status and past recommendations made by UNESCO; the level of social injustice in Ngorongoro is so high that over thirty thousand people organised a peaceful demonstration mid August 2024; they decided to block the Serengeti road and then sat peacefully for 5 days to demand their rights; a process of dialogue is ongoing with both UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee on how to meaningfully involved affected communities in decisions and in the management of the property;
- More than half of the management of Ngorongoro-Lengai Geopark is made up Presidential appointees not elected by any of the community within the Geopark area ; the conditions are not met for any form of meaningful community participation in decisions impacting the areas.
- The Pastoral Council chairperson has confirmed to us that, though he is required to sit in the Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark, he has not been invited in any matter related to it and neither did any community member attended including, the latest expert visit in July 2024.

In this context, we are asking you to reject the July 2024 mission report which we consider illegitimate and to request that a new independent and participatory mission be conducted. Please note that a similar request was approved recently by the World Heritage Committee in relation to a very similar situation regarding Ngorongoro World Heritage Site, and that we will be meeting with UNESCO representatives to discuss the objectives and format of such a mission in Paris on 16 September 2024. We are further asking you for an online meeting with us, representatives of the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance, to discuss our concerns and jointly find a way forward.

We thank you in advance for your consideration.

On behalf of MISA,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Oleshangay', written in a cursive style.

Joseph Oleshangay, Human Rights Lawyer

The Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA) is an international alliance standing in solidarity with the Maasai of Northern Tanzania. We bring together international faith-based organisations, human rights organisations, international aid and development organisations, as well as grassroots organisations, individual activists, researchers and lawyers representing the Maasai in several land cases. Our main objective is to put an end to the human rights violations facing the Maasai of northern Tanzania.