

Committee: UNESCO

Issue: Are Natural World Heritage sites a universal common good?

Author: South Africa

The Republic of South Africa strongly believes that the natural heritage of humanity is indeed a universal common good. As a nation known for its rich biodiversity, cultural diversity, and commitment to sustainable development, South Africa is acutely aware of the importance of preserving our natural heritage for the benefit of all nations and future generations.

South Africa recognizes that natural heritage transcends national boundaries. The unique ecosystems, wildlife, and landscapes that make up our planet are shared by all nations, and as such, preserving them is a shared responsibility. Our collective actions or inactions in safeguarding this heritage impact not only our own nations but also the global community.

South Africa believes that the natural heritage is a fundamental component of sustainable development. We have witnessed firsthand how our natural resources, such as the Kruger National Park, Table Mountain, and the Cape Floral Kingdom, not only contribute to our national identity but also play a crucial role in our economy through tourism and biodiversity-related industries. Sustainable management and responsible tourism are critical to ensuring the longevity of these assets.

Natural heritage holds immense cultural and spiritual significance for people around the world. In South Africa, for instance, the Table Mountain is a revered site for the indigenous KhoiSan people and is integral to our cultural heritage. Similarly, many Indigenous communities worldwide rely on natural resources for their spiritual and cultural practices. Preserving these sites is proof of our respect for diverse cultural expressions.

Natural heritage sites often serve as crucial carbon sinks and play a significant role in mitigating climate change. Moreover, they contribute to biodiversity conservation, which is essential for ecosystem resilience. Recognizing natural heritage as a universal common good compels us to take collective action to address environmental challenges, including climate change and biodiversity loss.

South Africa acknowledges the importance of international cooperation in preserving natural heritage. We support initiatives such as the World Heritage Convention and encourage capacity building in developing nations to better manage and protect their natural treasures. We also advocate for equitable sharing of benefits derived from these sites.

In conclusion, South Africa firmly asserts that the natural heritage of humanity is a universal common good. It is a shared legacy that transcends borders, cultures, and generations. As custodians of this heritage, we must adopt a responsible and cooperative approach to ensure its conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. By recognizing the universality of our natural heritage, we strengthen our commitment to sustainable development, cultural preservation, and environmental protection on a global scale. South Africa stands ready to collaborate with fellow nations within UNESCO and the United Nations to safeguard common goods and promote its significance in the international community.