

## Press Release: Indigenous Peoples and local communities formalize a pan-African Alliance for Community Conservation at the first-ever Community-led Conservation Congress

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*More than 300 representatives of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, governments, donors, and NGOs from 47 African countries gathered last month in Namibia to collectively develop a strategy for community-led and people-centered conservation in Africa.*

- Participants from 47 countries shared their lived experiences, lessons, and challenges around community-led conservation during the first-ever Community-led Conservation Congress held in Windhoek, Namibia on October 25-27, 2023.
- Participants discussed the preliminary findings of a forthcoming study on community conservation in Africa and devised a roadmap for a newly established Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa (AICA).
- The Congress provided an unprecedented space to discuss Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' priorities and strategies initiated at the IUCN Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) in Rwanda in July 2022.

**WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA (November 17, 2023)** — Following a historic convening in Namibia, the Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa (AICA) has released a communiqué that presents a unified call from Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) in Africa for a people-centered rights-based conservation agenda. [Read the communiqué here.](#)

The convening was the first Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Conservation Congress, co-hosted by AICA and Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) in collaboration with Southern Africa's Community Leaders Network (CLN); the Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT); and the Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations (NACSO).

**The former Prime Minister of Ethiopia and APAC Patron, H.E. Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn** said at the event's opening: *"Having taken the time to read through the impeccable IP and LC declaration at APAC and the recent strategy that you all played a part in putting together, I am reminded of the immense power custodians of our land hold in leapfrogging us to the next level and redefining what sustainable development means for Africa."*

**Hon. Royal Johan Kxao IUiloloo**, Deputy Minister for Marginalized Communities of Namibia, said: *"We should apply consultation, participation, and representation to every conservation policy,*

*because nothing about us without us. The rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities must be protected, celebrated, and respected.”*

At the Congress, participants made clear that across Africa, IPs and LCs—and especially the women and youth within these groups—have never been better positioned, organized, and coordinated to uphold and realize their land and livelihood rights.

**Jose Monteiro**, Executive Director of ReGeCom, Mozambique, said: *“This gathering was a sign that communities in Africa are in this together and working towards speaking with one voice... We need to build an institution that is not elite captured but built from the bottom up, and that is AICA.”*

The event was also presided by the Deputy Minister of Environment Forestry and Tourism of Namibia, Hon. Heather Sibungo and the Ethiopia’s State Minister for Irrigation and Lowlands, Dr. Endrias Geta.

**Malidadi Langa**, who represents Malawi in CLN and is the interim Chair of AICA, called the Congress a celebration of community-based conservation. *“As IPs and LCs, we have every reason to celebrate community-based conservation because from time immemorial, we have effectively conserved forests, ecosystems, and biodiversity through collective ownership, traditional governance, and ecological knowledge systems which continue to this day,”* he said.

Langa urged African governments to change the dominant conservation narrative by instead putting people at the center alongside nature.

*“The neo-colonial fortress model of conservation has been perpetuated and underwritten by externally-driven conservation funding models, narratives, and agendas. I call on our governments to change the narrative of conservation and natural resource sovereignty and put people at the center of conservation,”* Langa said.

In addition to participation by IPs and LCs from 43 countries, the Congress was also attended by policymakers and representatives of regional and international conservation organizations, including the IUCN; the African Wildlife Foundation; the Christensen Fund; the German Development Cooperation (GIZ); Nature Finance; the Packard Foundation; Conservation International (CI); Arcus Foundation; Rainforest Trust; Global Green Grants; and Miserior.

*“We believe that land is an important entry point for human rights and the environment. That is why, since 2018, we have readjusted our mission and vision to support IPs and LCs,”* said **Dr. Hassan Roba from Christensen Fund**. *“We have four programs that support African land rights. For us, conservation is about a holistic connection, a territorial integrity that supports people’s land rights, environment, and culture.”*

**Patrick Kipalu, RRI’s Africa Program Director**, said: *“We’re trying to turn the Kigali Call to Action into reality... IPs and LCs themselves organized this Congress, set the agenda, and led the*

*discussions. It was a space where decision-makers, NGOs, donors, conservation organizations, and communities came together to find common solutions.”*

He added: *“We want to work together with governments and policymakers to prevent communities from experiencing the same injustices and human rights violations of the past.”*

The program closed with an address by **Hon. IUiloloo**, who concluded: *“Indigenous Peoples and local communities close to conservation areas are among the poorest people. I say that it depends on our respective countries to change this reality. We, as the government, are listening to you, and we need your support and expertise in this path.”*

## **What’s Next?**

To advance rights-based approaches to conservation on the continent, RRI will publish a study in 2024 on community-led and rights-based conservation approaches in Africa. The study’s preliminary results demonstrate that secure tenure for communities is key to community-based conservation practices in Africa and should be sought where degradation is tied to a lack of local ownership. However, legal rights recognition must also be accompanied by effective implementation to be truly effective.

As a next step, AICA and its partners will begin to establish a mechanism to implement the outcomes of the Congress at the national and regional level and provide updated data to inform current and future conservation discussions. This continental Community Conservation Congress will continue to be held every three years, with the next one taking place in the Central African region. It will also serve as AICA's engagement forum for future IUCN international conferences around protected areas.

Read [the final communiqué](#) and [daily summaries from the Congress here](#).

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**The Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa (AICA)** is an independent Indigenous- and local community-led and centered Pan-African alliance that harnesses and amplifies the collective voice these communities have and to prioritize their engagement in all policy arenas relevant to their land and land-based resources, territories, and conservation. AICA is integrated by 18 community-led networks of Indigenous Peoples and local communities from over 43 African countries\*. The Alliance also receives technical support from more than 10 international organizations including RRI. For more information, please visit [www.aica-africa.org](http://www.aica-africa.org).

The **Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)** is a global coalition of 21 Partners and more than 150 rightsholders organizations and their allies dedicated to advancing the forestland and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-

descendant Peoples, local communities, and the women within these groups. RRI's members capitalize on each other's strengths, expertise, and geographic reach to achieve solutions more effectively and efficiently. It leverages the power of its global coalition to amplify the voices of local peoples and proactively engage governments, multilateral institutions, and private sector actors to adopt institutional and market reforms that support the realization of their rights and self-determined development. RRI is coordinated by the Rights and Resources Group, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit [www.rightsandresources.org](http://www.rightsandresources.org).

\* Some of the existing networks that integrate AICA are: The Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC), The Community Leaders Network (CLN), Pastoralist Forum of Ethiopia, Eastern & Southern Africa Pastoralist Network, AYBN, The Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization's Forum (PINGO's Forum), Hunter - Gatherers Forum (HUGAFO), The Pastoralists Alliance for Resilience and Adaptation in Northern Rangelands (PARAN), IWO, The Indigenous Peoples' National Steering Committee on Climate Change (IPNSCCC), African CSCs Biodiversity Alliance (ACBA), The Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC), Tanzania Resource Forum (TRF), Forest watch of Ghana, African Biodiversity Network (ABN), Community Forest Conservation Network (CFCN), Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) and ICCA Consortium.