



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**REMARKS BY H.E. DR. WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO,
CGH, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE
FORCES, DURING THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
CULTURAL HERITAGE AND AUTHENTICITY IN
AFRICA**

MAY 9, 2025

**THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE IN NAIROBI
(UNON) COMPLEX, GIGIRI**

**Dr Lazare Assomo, Director, World Heritage Centre,
UNESCO,
H.E. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General, UNON,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.**

1. It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you all to Kenya, the cradle of humankind. It is not by chance, ladies and gentlemen, that Kenya is globally recognised as the 'Home of Human Origins', a distinction rooted in the remarkable fossil discoveries of early humans found right here in our country.
2. In December last year, we marked 40 years since the discovery of the Turkana Boy, the most complete early human ancestor ever recovered at 1.6 million years old. This fossil, housed at the National Museums of Kenya, just a few kilometres from this UN Complex, underscores Kenya's status as a global centre of human history.
3. Kenya also stands proud as the custodian of eight sites inscribed on the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List. I am especially pleased to note that the Gedi National Monument became the latest addition following its inscription last year. Alongside Gedi, we have the Sacred Kaya Mijikenda Forests, Lamu Old Town, Fort Jesus, Thimlich Ohinga Archaeological Site, the Kenya Lake System in the Great Rift Valley, Lake Turkana National Parks, and Mount Kenya National Park/Natural Forest. Together, these extraordinary sites embody Kenya's invaluable contribution to humanity's shared heritage.



4. This conference marks the culmination of a journey that began in 1972 with the adoption of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Our presence here reaffirms our shared commitment to identifying, protecting, conserving, and passing on our cultural and natural heritage to future generations.
5. This distinguished gathering has drawn global attention, bringing together heritage experts, practitioners, diplomats, policymakers, scholars, and community leaders to exchange research, experiences, and insights. It has served as a dynamic platform for deep reflection on the many dimensions of heritage and authenticity, and their implications for the implementation and future of global normative frameworks such as the World Heritage Convention, particularly within the African context.
6. Ladies and gentlemen, the conceptual, intellectual, and practical foundation of this conference has been shaped by key instruments of the World Heritage Convention, including the Venice Charter (1964), the 1976 Nairobi Recommendation on Historic Areas, the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), and the Nara+20 Recommendations.
7. This conference is also the successful culmination of historic meetings on the African continent that have advanced the development of African cultural and natural heritage and informed the evolving interpretation of authenticity.



These include the Experts Meeting on African Cultural Landscapes in Tiwi, Kenya (1999); the Great Zimbabwe Expert Meeting on Authenticity and Integrity in an African Context (2000); and the 2003 ICOMOS General Assembly and Symposium.

8. Others include the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance adopted in Sudan in 2006, and the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, launched in Addis Ababa in 2015.
9. Ladies and Gentlemen, Africa's cultural and natural heritage and its listed properties under the World Heritage Convention are truly breathtaking and extraordinary. They range from Kenya's Historic Town and Archaeological Site of Gedi to Angola's Mbanza Kongo, the Royal Court of Tiébélé in Burkina Faso, and the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia.
10. Other notable sites include the Pleistocene Occupation Sites of South Africa, the Island of Gorée in Senegal, the Medina of Tétouan in Morocco, and Mosi-oa-Tunya/Victoria Falls on the Zambia–Zimbabwe border.
11. Yet, current heritage management approaches often fail to align with African cultural contexts, revealing a disconnect between international frameworks and local realities. Although Africa is home to 147 World Heritage elements representing just 12% of the global total, it also has the highest number of sites listed as World Heritage in Danger.



These disparities expose deep-rooted systemic and conceptual inequities shaped by longstanding imbalances in how heritage is defined, whose stories are told, and which cultural values are deemed globally significant.

12. At the heart of this challenge is the interpretation and application of the concepts of authenticity and integrity, core criteria for World Heritage inscription. Historically developed in academic traditions outside of Africa, these concepts, as codified in documents such as the 1964 Venice Charter and the 1994 Nara Document, tend to prioritise material continuity and original form. These assumptions often fail to reflect Africa's dynamic, spiritually infused, and living cultural landscapes.
13. Excellencies, the time has come to revisit and reimagine these concepts; to strengthen their meaning, and to deepen and diversify them. We must ground them in Africa's philosophical, spiritual, and cultural realities. These perspectives are consistent with the principles of the Nara Document on Authenticity, which affirms that judgments of authenticity must reflect cultural context. As emphasised throughout the 2025 Nairobi Conference, African heritage is plural, dynamic, and community-centred. In fact, its authenticity is derived from both the tangible and intangible, the movable and immovable, within places of cultural continuity, and with community custodianship at its heart.



14. Ladies and Gentlemen, this call, this conversation, did not begin today. But today, we have achieved what those who came before us envisioned. We must remain dedicated and focused to pursue this path for the continent, for our heritage, for our culture, and for our contribution to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.
15. Today, as we launch the Conference Outcome Document, I congratulate each and every one of you for your dedication, your scholarship, and your visionary contributions. The Outcome Document reflects the depth of African perspectives and sets a forward-looking agenda for enriching the global understanding of authenticity in heritage.
16. As we bring this landmark four-day International Conference on Cultural Heritage and Authenticity in Africa to a close, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Governments of Japan and France, as well as the African World Heritage Fund, for their generous support.
17. I am honoured to officially receive the Nairobi Outcome Document on Heritage Authenticity. May it guide us towards a more just, inclusive, and representative global heritage future.

I thank you.
God Bless Africa.

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