

As the first ever Africa Protected Area Congress draws to a close, WWF welcomes the increased political will shown by African governments towards the more than 8,600 protected and conserved areas on the continent.

The conference in Kigali this week aimed to drive greater awareness of the key role these areas play in safeguarding the continent's iconic species, delivering vital ecosystem services, driving sustainable development and conserving Africa's cultural heritage. In the newly published Kigali Call to Action, WWF was heartened to see government leaders from across Africa recognise the importance of PCAs in protecting the health and wellbeing of their people, who depend on nature for food, crop pollination, seed dispersal, clean water and more.

Marco Lambertini, Director General of WWF International, said: "The large participation of African leaders and conservation practitioners at the first ever African congress on protected and conserved areas has sent a clear and strong message that Africa is owning its conservation agenda and is committed to protecting its natural heritage and capital as a foundation for sustainable economy and development. African leaders have also clearly indicated their commitment to increase domestic resourcing to protected areas, and to ensure that expansion and effectiveness in management is promoted through inclusive governance and fair benefit sharing with Indigenous Peoples and local communities."

WWF is aligned to the Kigali Call to Action and committed to support it through its efforts in supporting effective and inclusive management of protected and conserved areas in many African landscapes, as well as the implementation of environmental and social safeguards, free and prior informed consent process. The organisation believes that empowering people and putting them at the centre of conservation efforts contributes to their livelihoods and to lasting conservation efforts, ultimately crucial to addressing global climate change and biodiversity loss and advancing sustainable development.

Alice Ruhweza, WWF Africa Region Director, said: "WWF lauds the Kigali Call to Action as a highly significant outcome of the APAC which moves us in the right direction – towards a future where people and nature are at the heart of Africa's sustainable development journey. African governments, conservation organisations, private sector, civil society, and society at large must build on the enthusiasm, energy and momentum we have generated here in Kigali to ensure the call to action is fully implemented. In particular, recognising the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to their land and resources is central to achieving this ambition."

WWF also welcomes the Call to Action's appeal for increased and coordinated funding for protected and conserved areas, which throughout the week's discussions has been noted to be insufficient and wildly inconsistent.

Lambertini added: "APAC represents a great opportunity for Africa to embrace a sustainable agenda and build a carbon-neutral and nature-positive society, and to make nature everyone's business. We urge African leaders and society to bring this strong commitment into the ongoing negotiations of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal where the world has the opportunity to agree a Paris-style agreement for nature."