

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF NON-HUMAN HOMINIDS

In response to UNESCO's concern through the Great Apes Survival Society (GRASP) dedicated to ensuring the long-term survival of chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and gorillas and their habitats in Asia and Africa, and in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), enormous protection efforts are underway, including World Heritage status for 16 sites with non-human hominid populations, including Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tai National Park in Côte d'Ivoire, and Unung Lauser National Park within the tropical rainforest heritage of Sumatra (Indonesia). These World Heritage sites are home to some of the most fragile populations of great apes, including mountain gorillas, Grauer's gorillas and Sumatran orangutans, all of which are listed as critically endangered. The Tapanuli, a recently discovered species found in northern Sumatra and the ancestors of the other two orangutan species (Sumatran and Bornean), are found in unprotected territory and are on the verge of extinction.

The great apes are also found in 21 biosphere reserves in 15 countries, including the Rwanda Volcanoes Biosphere Reserve, the Upper Niger Biosphere Reserve in Guinea and the Croker Ranger Biosphere Reserve in Malaysia. Some of these sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List.

UNESCO spares no effort in protecting the sites inscribed on the World List, but many great ape populations remain outside of protection, with alarming reductions in their populations, and others in protected areas are being degraded as their habitat is destroyed and their populations dwindle due to the increasing extraction of natural resources.

It is for all these reasons that the General Assembly,

Guided by the purposes of conservation and protection of the great apes with which we share a common ancestor,

Affirming the commitments acquired in the Kinshasa Declaration and the agreement decided with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) within the framework of GRASP, in which some European countries such as Italy, Spain, France, the United Kingdom and the countries of the great apes' range participate,

Also stating that during the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), held in 1997 in Zimbabwe, it was decided to eliminate the family of the Pongids (the great apes from now on non-human hominids), to include them in the family of the Hominids, together with humans and their extinct ancestors,

Affirming further that in 2003, an analysis of 97 chimpanzee genes revealed a 99.4% similarity to humans, for which US geneticists, including Morris Goodman

(1925-2010), father of molecular biology, requested that the chimpanzee and the bonobo should become part of the human genus,

Reaffirming that non-human hominid populations in the wild are important for the study of human evolution itself and the development of human behavior as stated by numerous biologists and anthropologists in 2003,

Concerned about the threat of extinction of non-human hominids, in 2005 the United Nations issued a warning predicting that 92% of their habitat would be destroyed by 2050, describing it as a bleak scenario, publishing the "Atlas of the great apes and their conservation" and detailing the existing populations and their serious dangers, which today have increased in a frightening way,

Acknowledging the genetic research that shows that the biological evolution between chimpanzees and bonobos and humans was similar in both species until a million years ago,

Recognizing also that Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP from 1998-2006, declared that we were one minute away from the fatal hour of the disappearance of non-human hominids and if we lose any one of their species, we will have destroyed a link in the chain that binds us to our own origins and, therefore, a part of our own humanity,

Declaring Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO from 1999-2009, that non-human hominids are an exceptional link in the natural universe and that the forests inhabited by these species are a vital resource for humans worldwide, while for local populations they represent an essential source of food, water and medicine because they are gardeners of the forest, and that saving them and protecting the ecosystems where they live is not merely a matter of conserving the natural heritage, but a major action in the fight against poverty,

Pointing that in 2005 the first study of the complete genome of the chimpanzee was published, which once again proved that humans share 99% of the DNA, and later the genome of the bonobo was carried out, proving the same genome similarity with our species, with chimpanzees and bonobos being genetically closer to us than to gorillas and orangutans,

Also emphasizing that the similarity of blood parameters between chimpanzees and bonobos with humans has been proved, thus strengthening the need to be part of the genus homo itself,

Considering that all hominids (humans and great apes) have such long, rich and interesting lives, and so many plans and expectations, that we are robbed of something very valuable if our lives are taken away, having also such intense affective bonds that our death will torment family and friends and being sentient, social, curious and cultural beings,

Acknowledging the statements of Kofi Annan (1938-2018), Secretary General of the UN between 1997-2006, in which he stated that non-human hominids are relatives of ours and that like us they transmit knowledge, have social life and make tools, take natural medicines, communicate with people and recognize each other, and that, nevertheless, we have not treated them with the respect they deserve,

Affirming that Richard Leakey (1944-2022), world-renowned anthropologist who asked Jane Goodall, Biruté Galdikas and Dian Fossey to study non-human hominid populations in the wild, made it clear in his legacy, that we should extend to our brothers, the chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas and bonobos, basic rights to close the gap that should never have existed,

Emphasizing that Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), one of the founders of modern bioethics along with numerous philosophers, offered an exhaustive and well-known list of fifteen attributes to define human personality: minimal intelligence, self-awareness, self-control, sense of time, sense of the future, sense of the past, ability to relate to others, concern and care for others, communication, control of existence, curiosity, change and capacity for change, balance of reason and feelings, idiosyncrasy and activity of the neocortex,

Whereas all of the above attributes are met by non-human hominids to varying degrees,

Considering also that numerous studies indicate that chimpanzees and bonobos have entered their stone age period and even cave-dwelling populations as did their human hominid ancestors,

Bearing in mind that non-human hominids share numerous cognitive abilities with humans and that they have even been able to learn language. They are able to use sign language, invent complex words, talk to their caregivers and teach this language to their own,

Bearing in mind also that they possess capacity for knowledge of the body schema and notion of death; capacity for communication at the emotional level, capacity for cooperative activity, food distribution, care of the helpless and teaching of the young; capacity to maintain stable family and lasting relationships; personality; strong photographic and numerical memory; non-promiscuous sexual relations, avoidance of the primary incest (mother-child); capacity for aesthetics and curiosity; capacity to deceive, joke, laugh like humans; capacity to learn a human language of signs or symbols; capacity to perfectly understand human language; sadness, depression, anguish and pain; capacity to plan actions in advance and looking for concrete objectives; suffering and pain due to the death of a friend or relative and due to family separation, being able to die of sadness,

Affirming that non-human hominids and humans come from the same common ancestor,

Acknowledged and reaffirmed by the scientists who deciphered the genome of chimpanzees and the rest of the non-human hominid species that: the situation of non-human hominids should be reviewed; provide better and more humane treatment; preserve them with respect for social bonds, offering the opportunity to develop physical, intellectual and social activities for those in captivity; prohibit euthanasia as a method of population control; provide them with a safe, healthy and humane environment; call on researchers and States to improve the care and respect for captives,

Recognizing that the status of free-ranging populations of non-human hominids face imminent extinction within several decades as recognized by UNEP, where more than 3,000 non-human hominids, usually infants or young, are being removed from their habitat for captivity, not to mention the extermination of their families in order to take the young,

Having declared the Director General of UNESCO at the beginning of September 2023 that the situation of the great apes is critical and that the international community must strengthen its defense as soon as possible if we do not want to prevent some species from disappearing forever and that protection of “these cousins of the human being, from which barely 2% of our DNA separates us, is a collective responsibility,”

And taking into account the report presented by Daniel Stiles, an independent researcher, in which he denounces that the trafficking of great apes is being silenced by the existing corruption in the countries of origin and by the existing mafias of Species Trafficking in the falsification of CITES ,

Believing that the present Declaration of the Rights of Non-Human Hominids has the purpose of establishing the norms to protect them wherever they are, either in freedom or in captivity, guaranteeing their rights, as well as to promote their well-being, to provide them with care, good treatment, protection of their habitat, housing conditions, natural development, health and to avoid mistreatment, torture, cruelty, slavery, suffering,

Solemnly proclaims the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Non-human Hominids, with the presented text below, as an ideal common goal that must be pursued in a spirit of solidarity and respect for both the populations in the wild and the safeguarding of their habitat, as well as those in captivity, putting an end to trade based on their abusive exposure as human entertainment or their use for experimentation of any kind due to our genetic closeness:

Article 1

The non-human hominids (chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans and their subspecies) from now on called HNH have the right to the full enjoyment of their freedom in their habitat and those in captivity must be taken to sanctuaries.

Article 2

Attention must be paid to the habitat where the HNH live, in order to protect them, avoiding deforestation or exploitation of resources of any kind that may have repercussions on the census of their populations.

Article 3

For conservation projects, help should be given to the countries where they live and above all to the local human populations and native people, so that protection will be integral.

Article 4

In those areas where the HNH inhabit, educational projects will be carried out to the human populations in order to make known the importance of our evolutionary brothers and sisters and to contribute to their protection and respect, avoiding poaching.

Article 5

Support communities, associations and local groups that make efforts in the conservation of the biodiversity of their country and in the protection and custody of tropical rainforests.

Article 6

Encourage the construction of sanctuaries where captive HNH can be taken to live in peace away from the centers of business and exploitation of their lives.

Article 7

That this Declaration of their rights turns to be an indispensable tool for countries to enact laws in favor of HNH.

Article 8

To put an end to the forced transfer of HNH from one business center to another for reproduction or collection, breaking family ties and forcing the birth of new captives in order to be an attraction for their exploitation.

Article 9

To put an end to captive breeding as an excuse to save the species, since they can never be reintroduced and where we must work to protect the HNH species is in the habitat itself.

Article 10

The use of HNH in circus shows should be prohibited, as well as their use in advertisements, programs, films or television series or in any other digital media for commercial exploitation.

Article 11

Improve the facilities where they are held captive while waiting to be taken to sanctuaries as their final destination.

Article 12

Support projects aimed at the conservation of HNH populations in the wild, ensuring their protection and support for local communities.

Article 13

End invasive or psychological experimentation with HNH, taking into account that there are already other safe methods that are cheaper, faster and safer without the use of primates or any type of living being.

Article 14

End to the so-called Endangered Species Programs, since it has been demonstrated the nullity of these programs and that they only serve as a screen to continue with the business, since there are no independent scientists behind these programs for HNH.

Article 15

Poaching, which decimates HNH populations, must be stopped and more rigorous control by the States where they live as well as those where they are taken for captivity must be enforced.

Article 16

The HNH will not be able to be property of any person, institution or administration, except those that enter sanctuaries that will have to be taken care of until the end of their days.

Article 17

The captive NHH have the right to live in an appropriate environment, in sanctuaries that have sufficient spacious areas for rest and recreation and where they can freely and spontaneously develop their personality, satisfy their ecological needs in harmony with nature, as well as have free and interior spaces without being observed by the public to guarantee their privacy if they believe it is necessary.

Article 18

Being social beings like humans, they have the right to coexist with their own kind. Any arbitrary interference that causes them stress or anxiety should be prohibited.

Article 19

HNH in captivity have the right to medical care, which shall contemplate the prevention of diseases and provide timely professional and specialized attention when necessary.

Article 20

HNH have the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel or degrading treatment, without exception. In no case shall they be subjected to situations in which their physical or emotional well-being is compromised.

Article 21

The intentional death by any means of a HNH, except in circumstances of self-defense, shall be considered as murder and therefore punishable by criminal law.

Article 22

HNH shall not be arbitrarily deprived of their liberty or subjected to commercial exploitation.

Article 23

HNH have the right to non-interference by the State or individuals with the foregoing rights. Nothing in this declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person the right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms here proclaimed.