

Kilimanjaro: UNESCO invests \$8 million to protect water resources

Dar es Salaam, 7 March 2025 – The Director-General of UNESCO has announced a new initiative to protect water resources and biodiversity in the Kilimanjaro region. This \$8 million project, combining scientific research and support for local populations, will benefit the more than 2 million people who depend directly on the waters of Africa's highest peak.

“The melting glaciers of Kilimanjaro, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, pose an imminent threat to more than two million people in Tanzania and Kenya. The international community must support the authorities and local populations to protect this vital resource. Our Organization will be investing \$8 million to this end over the coming years”, announced **Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO**, on the sidelines of a meeting with Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of Tanzania.

This major initiative, led by UNESCO in partnership with the FAO, will be financed by the Global Environment Facility. It will begin with increased support for scientific research: UNESCO experts will map the region's aquifer systems, with a view to giving an additional 100,000 people direct access to drinking water. The aim will also be to improve groundwater storage and supply during the dry season to benefit 615,000 people who are currently exposed to water shortages.

A scientific observation center will be set up to monitor water quality, groundwater levels and the health of ecosystems. It will be founded upon close cooperation between researchers in Kenya and Tanzania. An initial constitutive meeting was held this week in Arusha. UNESCO also plans to train a further 200 water professionals at the national and local level.

The central role of cloud forests

UNESCO will also support the restoration of ecosystems by reforesting 400 km² of cloud forests, which play an essential role in water retention as well as replenishing groundwater reserves. The Organisation will support local communities in developing sustainable economic activities to prevent further deforestation.

Today, the iconic ‘water tower’ that is Mount Kilimanjaro suffers from the combined pressures of climate disruption, deforestation and increasing water demand. The melting of its glaciers, which could disappear completely by 2040, combined with increasingly recurrent droughts, threaten the availability of water and the stability of ecosystems in Kenya and Tanzania. The initiative announced by Audrey Azoulay is part of the International Year of Glacier Preservation, led by UNESCO and the WMO. The first World Day for Glaciers will be held on 20 March.

Soon a dedicated centre for the Kiswahili language

During her meeting with the President of Tanzania, the Director-General of UNESCO also reaffirmed the Organization's willingness to support the country's authorities in the management and development of

Biosphere Reserves – a UNESCO programme aimed at restoring the balance in the relationship between human beings and their environment.

UNESCO will also continue to support Tanzania in safeguarding and promoting the Kiswahili language. National authorities plan to open a dedicated institute in the near future. UNESCO stands ready to contribute its expertise when the time comes by training professionals, networking with other language centres around the world and developing content linked to the General History of Africa.

About UNESCO

With 194 Member States, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization contributes to peace and security by leading multilateral cooperation on education, science, culture, communication and information. Headquartered in Paris, UNESCO has offices in 54 countries and employs over 2300 people. UNESCO oversees more than 2000 World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks; networks of Creative, Learning, Inclusive and Sustainable Cities; and over 13 000 associated schools, university chairs, training and research institutions. Its Director-General is Audrey Azoulay.

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” – UNESCO Constitution, 1945.

More information: www.unesco.org

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