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## Rescuing DR Congo's natural heritage focus of upcoming UN meeting



Virunga National Park is notable for its active volcanoes and greatest diversity of habitats of any park in Africa

5 January 2011 – The United Nations and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will hold a meeting next week to discuss ways of better protecting five sites from the vast African nation that are inscribed on the [List of World Heritage in Danger](#).

The five [sites](#) in danger are Virunga, Garamba, Kahuzi-Biega, and Salonga National Parks, and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, which are home to a unique range of flora and fauna including the Mountain Gorilla and the Okapi – a forest giraffe only found in DRC.

The sites have suffered from political instability in the Great Lakes region over the past two decades, according to a news release issued by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)).

“The continued insecurity due to the presence of armed groups and the proliferation of arms as well as a general break down of law and order have lead to massive poaching,” states the Paris-based agency.

Among other things, the Northern White Rhino, which had its home in the Garamba National Park, is feared to have been hunted into extinction, while the numbers of the Okapi and elephant populations are seriously declining.

The 14 January high-level meeting will take place in the capital, Kinshasa, and be chaired by the Prime Minister of DRC, Adolphe Muzito, and UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

Participants, which will include representatives of government, non-governmental organizations and donors, will examine the state of the sites, reinforce the commitment to their restoration and safeguarding by Congolese authorities, redefine support provided by the international community and adopt a plan of action to strengthen protection.

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