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## **UNESCO welcomes decision to halt oil exploration in home for mountain gorillas**



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

18 March 2011 – The United Nations today welcomed the decision by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to suspend oil exploration in Africa’s oldest national park, home to numerous endangered species, including the mountain gorilla.

This week’s halt to exploration in Virunga National Park “constitutes an important step in preserving Virunga, a remarkable site and unique natural habitat for endangered species,” said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) in a [statement](#).

“It is a very positive response to the concerns raised by the World Heritage Committee, the international community and UNESCO on the issue of oil exploration in the park. I hope that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will abandon all plans for oil exploitation within this World Heritage site.”

Virunga was enshrined on the World Heritage List in 1979 for the diversity of its habitats, including swamps, steppes and snowfields. It is home to one of the last remaining mountain gorilla populations. But in 1994 it was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, largely because of the impact of poaching of gorillas and ongoing conflicts in Africa’s Great Lakes region.

Announcing the decision to suspend oil exploration, the DRC's Environment Minister Jose Endundo Bononge said a strategic environmental assessment of Virunga is being undertaken, with the results due by the start of next year.

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