



## **Manifesto in Support of Protecting the Natural Heritage of the Coast of Matutuíne**

Civil society organisations, cooperation partners, academic institutions and others who are concerned about and work for the balanced development of Mozambique on 24 May 2017 joined members of the Foundation for the Conservation of Biodiversity - BIOFUND – to debate in a seminar the importance of the Natural Heritage of Southern Mozambique, particularly along the coast of Matutuíne.

The present manifesto has been drawn up as a result of this meeting. On the one hand, it reaffirms the unique characteristics of the geology, the morphology, the landscape, the flora and the fauna of the area in question, and on the other, it condemns the plans and initiatives that are a threat to the integrity and value of that area of the country.

Recognition of the importance of this part of our natural wealth results from a variety of scientific work undertaken by international specialists.

Similar studies have been made across the planet, resulting in the identification and classification of 36 places of extraordinary importance, given their biological diversity and high incidence of endemic species. They are also places over which threats hang which put at risk the survival of these species. This demands, on the part of the governments that possess these places, great effort and dedication in order to guarantee their defence and preservation, since these places are unique. Once they have been destroyed, the whole world will be the poorer.

The Matutuíne coast is part of an area considered one of these great landmarks of biodiversity at planetary level. We are speaking about an ecological zone which extends from Port Elizabeth, in South Africa, to just North of Xai-Xai, in the Mozambican province of Gaza. This covers an area from the mountains of the Libombo chain, to the grasslands and to the beaches, and to the underwater riches. This is the area internationally known as the *Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Biodiversity Hotspot*.

In its terrestrial part, this zone has been recognised for many decades as a special area in terms of its fauna, with records of large populations of mammals such as wildebeest, other species of antelopes, zebras, buffalos and elephants. Based on this wealth of wildlife and the tourism potential, on the Mozambican side the Special Elephant Protection Reserve was set up in 1960 (the name was changed in 1969 to the Maputo Special Reserve).

In the 1990s, studies showed that there is an impressive diversity of endemic species of plants in that zone, with more than 2,500 species. The Licuati Forest Reserve was established in recognition of the existence of a type of vegetation that is unique in the country and in the world. This decision enabled Mozambique to add this southern region of the country to the United Nations List of Centres of Plant Diversity. Furthermore, in 2005 the Mozambican government took the decision not to authorise a major eucalyptus plantation project that was projected for that area.

The marine area of the Matutuíne coast is regarded as one of the 8 areas in East Africa of global importance in terms of biological diversity. The coral reefs are considered the best in Mozambique and with unique characteristics in the world, given their location. As we know, corals are an important refuge for fish, and in this area more than 400 species of fish have been identified.

The virtually untouched beaches on this coast do justice to the Mozambique brand as a world class tourist destination. In addition to their natural beauty, it is on these beaches that turtles come ashore to nest. Here on these beaches is the greatest density of leatherback and loggerhead turtle nesting sites in the entire country. These beaches are thus the preferred breeding ground for these charismatic and globally threatened species of turtle.

These characteristics of the Matutuine coast offer an unparalleled opportunity to promote an international level tourist development.

We thus have the possibility in this region of promoting actions that seek greater sharing of the benefits from biodiversity and the ecosystems services provided comparable to what happens on the South African side of this same *Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany hotspot*, as we were informed by the representative of the iSimangaliso reserve, one of the speakers at the 24 May seminar, mentioned above.

But we are also aware of the idea of building a deep water port on the Matutuíne coast, with an industrial complex, a housing area and a transport network. It is a gargantuan project of doubtful economic sustainability, and one that will inevitably have a damaging effect on the natural heritage of the Matutuine coast.

According to the preliminary studies, the enormous tourist potential of that region, if exploited appropriately, with an investment that would be only a fraction of the cost of the megalomaniacal project for an artificial deep water port, may generate, in the long term, overall income not much less than what it is imagined the port would produce – with the advantage of not destroying nature.

Our natural heritage is an asset of priceless value which our forefathers knew how to look after for centuries, and which it is our obligation to leave to future generations.

The choices that we make – and those that we do not make – build our identity as individuals, as a community and as a country.

The Mozambican conservation community feels it has the duty to inform the highest decision making bodies of the country of its vehement and unanimous “NO!” to the project for a deep water port and any other projects that endanger the conservation of our invaluable natural heritage.

Given the attitude that the Mozambican government has taken towards conservation, and above all because of the many public statements that President Nyusi has made about the matter, which have greatly encouraged us, we are certain that our appeal, which has broad international backing, will merit all due consideration.

Maputo, 25 June 2017