

DECLARATION ON THE PROTECTION, MANAGEMENT, AND RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHTS OF RIVER ETHIOPE, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

Participants at the Second Stakeholders Workshop for Protection, Management, and Recognition of River Ethiope Basin, Delta State, Nigeria,

Acknowledging that River Ethiope provides a unique combination of spiritual, cultural, health, safety, recreation, and subsistence benefits to the 1.7 million people who live within its territory, as well as to all of Nigeria;

Considering the intrinsic value that River Ethiope provides through its special characteristics and the vital role of all rivers in supporting life on Earth;

Inspired that River Ethiope springs, miraculously, from the Earth through the roots of an ancient cotton tree at Umuaja, a natural wonder and a sacred place of great spiritual worship and cultural significance that demonstrates the people's inseparable bond with Nature.

Inspired also that the river's spring-fed waters are naturally crystal clear and pure, giving humans a rare view into the living world beneath the water's surface, and are understood to promote health, healing, and mental clarity;

Grateful that because of its unique depth and downstream breadth, River Ethiope provides an invaluable natural bridge, uniting the people along its banks through travel and commerce;

Knowing that River Ethiope also benefits people by providing a wetland buffer against flooding; bolstering the state and national economies; supporting sustainable farming, fishing, food production, and other livelihoods; allowing for diverse recreational activities; and enhancing tourism due to its natural beauty and the abundant biodiversity;

Recognizing with sadness and alarm that River Ethiope is becoming threatened, unhealthy, and degraded by pollution, unsustainable development, floods, and drought dangers intensified by climate change and by the lack of coordinated management and oversight of river usage;

Recognizing also that further degradation is inevitable without prompt intervention, and that the threat to the river is a threat to all life, including humans, all other organisms, and their descendants;

Understanding that the worldwide threat to rivers and their ecosystems has arisen partly because western legal paradigms have failed to respect and protect Nature and have, instead, perceived and classified Nature as mere human "property" under national law to be exploited for short-term economic gain;

Respecting the United Nations General Assembly’s determination through its resolutions on Harmony with Nature that countries should strive for a life in harmony with Nature and thus recognize the rights of Nature in the promotion of sustainable development;

Appreciating that a growing number of rivers around the world, as well as their ecosystems and watersheds, have already been recognized as living entities with legal rights, which afford protection against pollution and help restore their health, including in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, India, and New Zealand;

Believing that recognizing River Ethiope’s rights would, likewise, better protect it from further degradation and would also reflect and honor its special significance to the people of Delta State, Nigeria, and visitors from around the world; and

Believing also that by respecting and protecting River Ethiope through formal recognition of its legal rights, Delta State can protect the welfare of its people—including all children, grandchildren, and other descendants—whose well-being is inseparable from the river’s own health; and

Recognizing River Ethiope as the first African river with legally recognized rights can provide a model for recognition of the rights of other rivers in Delta State, Nigeria, and all of Africa.

ACCORDINGLY, the participants in the Second Stakeholders Workshop for Protection, Management, and Recognition of River Ethiope Basin hereby declare their support for legal recognition of the Rights of River Ethiope and respectfully call upon their elected representatives to incorporate such recognition into the laws of Delta State of Nigeria.

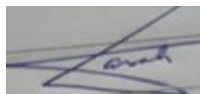
Signed:



**Prince Irikefe V. Dafe, President River Ethiope Trust Foundation
Convener of the Conference**



**Dr. Mathew Eduvie, National Water Resources Institute Kaduna
Chairman of the Conference**



**Prof. Stephen A. Abah, Trustee, Africa Center for Watershed Protection
Rapporteur of the Conference**

This 31st day of January, 2020. On Behalf of Participants Listed Below