



"Africa's rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, but it is more than that. It is the common heritage of humanity."

-President Nelson Mandela

The future of Africa's Past

TARA - TRUST FOR AFRICAN ROCK ART
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TARA is registered as a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organisation in the USA

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Cover image:
Life-size Giraffe engravings in
Dabous, Niger





Main Image: Rock paintings Kondoa, Tanzania.

Right: President Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General (2005).

Inset: Detail from a Bushman/San painting, Brandberg, Namibia.

Bottom: Libyan site recently vandalized with black spray paint. 7,000 year old paintings irreparably damaged.



KOFI ANNAN STATEMENT

“The rock art of Africa makes up one of the oldest and most extensive records on earth of human thought. It shows the very emergence of the human imagination. It is a priceless treasure. And it is irreplaceable.

But Africa’s rock art is not just about the distant past. It is about today and tomorrow as well. Scientists, historians, artists and students must be able to study and understand its significance for decades and centuries to come.

Africa’s rock art is the common heritage of all Africans and all people. It is a cultural gift from our ancestors that can bring diverse people together - with pride and a common commitment to share it and preserve it.

Yet, today, Africa’s rock art is severely threatened. Its future is uncertain. Perhaps the greatest threat is neglect. A lack of resources, combined with a lack of official interest, has left too many rock art sites unguarded against vandals and thieves.

It is time for Africa’s leaders to take a new and more active role. We must save this cultural heritage before it is too late. Two initiatives are especially critical: educating our children, and engaging local communities.

To Africa’s children I would like to say, You are the future of Africa. Study your proud history, and protect Africa’s rock art.

I would also like to ask private businesses, foundations and individuals to contribute their expertise and resources. We at the United Nations will continue to do our part.

Finally, I am pleased to join my dear friend Nelson Mandela in supporting TARA, the Trust for African Rock Art, in its work to preserve this vital cornerstone of our world’s cultural heritage.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General United Nations (2005)

MISSION

Create greater global awareness of the importance and endangered state of African rock art; survey sites; monitor status; be an information resource and archive; and promote and support rock art conservation measures.

TARA - TRUST FOR AFRICAN ROCK ART

TARA was founded in 1996 by photographer David Coulson under the patronage of renowned archaeologist, Mary Leakey, and author/conservationist, Laurens van der Post.

Based in Nairobi, Kenya, TARA is committed to surveying Africa’s rich rock art heritage, right across the continent, to making this information widely available and accessible and, to the extent possible, safeguarding those sites most threatened by both humans and nature, no matter how remote.

TARA achieves this through survey and conservation work, documentation, exhibitions, publications and community projects. TARA has documented rock art in 16 African countries and digitised 10,000 images that are now available online. It is estimated that over one million people have visited TARA’s exhibitions in 12 countries. The organisation works closely with communities in areas where rock art is found in order to raise awareness of rock art as a fragile heritage resource, and to improve the lives of people in those communities. TARA also works with national and international heritage bodies, including the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to achieve its missions.

“Africa has the greatest variety of rock art of any continent on earth and some of the oldest.”

-Dr Mary Leakey



WHAT AND WHERE IS THE ART?

Africa has the greatest diversity of rock art of any continent, with some of the world’s oldest art. Paintings of animals on stones excavated in Namibia have been dated to around 27,000 years. It is estimated that there are over 10 million painted and engraved images in Africa. Rock art occurs in most African countries but the biggest concentrations of art are found in the Sahara Desert and in southern Africa. There is also important rock art in East and Central Africa.

WHY IS THE ART IMPORTANT?

Rock art provides the first evidence of human imagination. It is all that remains of mankind’s earliest visual communications and artistic expressions. Rock art is part of our heritage: who we are and where we come from. It provides evidence of the ways our ancestors saw their world and gives us glimpses of the origins of modern beliefs.

HOW IS ROCK ART THREATENED?

Ancient rock art is fragile and increasingly threatened by vandalism, theft, uncontrolled tourism, expanding populations and national development projects such as roads, reservoirs, mining and industry. Within 50 years much of the art may be damaged leaving little for future generations to enjoy and study.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO PROTECT IT?

TARA encourages study of the art to date it and discover what the images may mean and why they were made. TARA works with communities throughout the continent to engage them in the valorisation and protection of this heritage. It is the responsibility of everybody to respect the art and save it for the future.