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#StopTheKillings Petition Launched

Petition calls for action following the largest incident of vulture killings in the world

27 May 2020 Nairobi, Kenya - A coalition of international conservation organizations has today launched an online petition dubbed #StopTheKillings, calling for action to address the unprecedented mass killings of vultures in Guinea-Bissau through poisoning. These killings, the largest incident of mass vulture deaths in the world, are a big blow to conservation efforts to save Africa's vultures.

More than 2000 Critically Endangered Hooded vultures are reported to have died, following deliberate poisoning with an agricultural pesticide, which is highly toxic for vultures. Vultures play a vital role in our environment keeping it free of decaying carcasses, yet these majestic birds have experienced catastrophic declines around the world, with populations of all African vulture species plummeting by 70-97% over the last 50 years. In the Guinea-Bissau case, initial investigations indicate that this mass killing of vultures is being driven by belief-based use. It is erroneously believed that vulture heads and other body parts have special powers and can bring good luck to users. Widespread killing of vultures in Guinea-Bissau through poisoning – the leading cause of vulture mortality in Africa, threatens to wipe out stronghold populations of these Critically Endangered birds.

The #StopTheKillings petition launched by BirdLife International, Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), The IUCN Vulture Specialist Group, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), The Peregrine Fund and The Organization for the Defence and Development of Wetlands in Guinea-Bissau (ODZH) is calling on the Guinea-Bissau government, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the global community to take urgent action to halt these mass killings by bringing to account those responsible for these atrocities, and enforcing measures to safeguard vultures.

“The large scale poisoning of vultures in Guinea-Bissau represents a major blow to vulture conservation efforts in the West African region and in Africa at large. We are urging the Guinea-Bissau government to address these mass killings urgently to safeguard Guinea-Bissau's vulture populations”, notes Francisco Gomes Wambar, Executive Director of the Organisation for the Defence and Development of Wetlands in Guinea-Bissau (ODZH).

The petition is also calling on the global community to support interventions aimed at halting the persecution of vultures in Guinea-Bissau and across Africa.

“As a long-time amateur ornithologist I have come to admire birds' life cycles and conservation needs. The mass deaths of vultures in my country highlights the dire vulnerability of Africa's vultures and the need to urgently save these rapidly disappearing birds, while involving local communities in these interventions”, notes Professor Carlos Lopes, retired UN Under-Secretary General and current Professor at the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, University of Cape Town.

“Poisoning of vultures in Guinea-Bissau is being driven by demand for vulture body parts used for superstitious purposes such as ritual charms. Changing this trajectory will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders, most importantly local and national authorities and civil society organizations. Halting the killings and urgently putting in place measures to protect vultures should be a priority”, says Rebecca Garbett, Vulture Conservation Manager at BirdLife International.

– Ends –

Notes to Editor

About BirdLife

BirdLife is the world’s largest conservation partnership with over 10 million members and supporters. The partnership strives to conserve birds, their habitats, and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. <https://www.birdlife.org/>

About the Vulture Conservation Foundation

The Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) is an international NGO committed to the conservation of Europe’s vulture species. The VCF has extensive experience in captive breeding, reintroduction and restocking of vultures, and protection and conservation of vultures in their natural habitats, and is involved in many large-scale vulture conservation projects across Europe, from Portugal and Spain to the Alps, and throughout the Balkans to Greece and Cyprus. www.4vultures.org

About the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group

The IUCN Species Survival Commission’s Vulture Specialist Group’s membership consists of more than 110 vulture conservationists and scientists from across the world and aims to advocate and create greater awareness of the plight of the world’s vulture species and help to coordinate effective conservation activities to their benefit.

About the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The **RSPB** is the UK's largest nature conservation charity with over 1.1 million members and 1,800 full-time employees. Protecting threatened birds and wildlife and managing 200 nature reserves in the UK, but also having an international remit, which includes a major ongoing programme for threatened vultures in Asia.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/>

About The Peregrine Fund

Founded in 1970, The Peregrine Fund worked to save the Peregrine Falcon from going extinct in North America. Today the Peregrine Fund changes the future for nature and humanity by conserving birds of prey worldwide. Whether the threat is poisoning, habitat loss, human persecution, or any other cause, we use sound science to tackle the most pressing conservation issues head-on. We accomplish high impact results by preventing raptor extinctions, protecting areas of high raptor conservation value, and addressing landscape-level threats impacting multiple species. As a catalyst for change, we inspire people to value raptors and take action, and we invest in tomorrow's conservation leaders. By working with communities around the world to protect the wildlife and habitats on which they depend, we are able to create lasting conservation results while improving people's ways of life. Support for our work comes from individual donors, corporations, foundations, and government grants. <https://peregrinefund.org/>

About the Organization for the Defence and Development of Wetlands in Guinea-Bissau

The Organization for the Defense and Development of Wetlands (ODZH) is a non-governmental organization of Guinean civil society dedicated to the conservation and restoration of Wetlands. Our knowledge base and advocacy enables action to safeguard and restore wetlands, and to use them in sustainable ways. We empower civil society with knowledge and skills to more effectively engage with governments and the private sector, and use our knowledge and experience to stimulate governments and companies to develop and implement effective policies at all scales, from local to global. Today ODZH has 250 members.

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