Title

The East African Court of Justice has stopped the construction of a road through the world famous Serengeti National Park in northern Tanzania. The First Instance Division of the East ruled on 20th June that the proposed tarmac road from Loliondo-Kleins Gate/Tabora B to Mugumu/Natta would have serious ecological impacts.

Significantly, the court said that construction of the road across the park - which is also a World Heritage Site and Important Bird Area - would be unlawful as it would contravene regional laws and international conventions. For example, the judges referred to concerns expressed by the World Heritage Committee that construction of the road ?could cause irreversible damage to the property?s outstanding universal value??

The case against the Government of Tanzania was filed by the African Network on Animal Welfare (ANAW) in December 2010.

?This is great victory for conservation in Tanzania and sends a strong message that future development cannot proceed in a business-as-usual manner,? said Festo Semanini, the Head of Programmes for the BirdLife International Tanzania Project Office. ?This permanent injunction underscores the importance to protect natural places in Tanzania, which are increasingly coming under threat.?

Dr Chris Magin, the Senior Partner Development Officer at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, BirdLife in UK) said the court decision demonstrates the need to respect international conventions. ?RSPB lauds this decision and encourages the Government to give priority to enhancing the ecological and touristic values of Serengeti, which is a global ecological gem?

The Government of Tanzania has previously been offered assistance to develop a southern alternative route by various development partners. ?All is not lost, the Government should take up the offer to build an alternative highway whose alignment would avoid Serengeti? said Ken Mwathe, the Policy and Advocacy Coordinator at BirdLife Africa regional office. ?The Government should also address other concerns raised in northern Tanzania, especially the proposed soda ash mining at Lake Natron.?

Dr Julius Arinaitwe, the BirdLife international Regional Director for Africa said regional treaties and protocols are critical in guiding sustainable development. ?The East African Community and the protocol on natural resources were critical in arriving at the Serengeti judgment.? ?Transboundary considerations must continue to inform how key ecosystems are managed across Africa,? he added.

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