

## **Name and contact information of official local institution/agency**

### **Richtersveld Community Conservancy**

Management Committee, Richtersveld Community Conservancy  
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South Africa  
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## **Statement of Outstanding Universal Value**

The Richtersveld has the highest botanical diversity and rates of endemism of any arid region representing more succulent flora than any other part of the world with plants exhibiting unique ecological techniques to enable them to survive in such an extreme environment, and a cultural landscape encompassing the two thousand year old transhumance pastoral livelihood of the Nama people and their sustainable use of and relationship with the environment of the Succulent Karoo Biodiversity Hotspot.

These factors together converge to present a unique environment of one of the world's most important sites for the conservation and study of succulent flora and the preservation of a livelihood which was once a common way of life throughout the world.

### **Justification**

The recognition of the Richtersveld Community Conservancy's biological importance by international conservation bodies is wide and strong. The Succulent Karoo, of which the Richtersveld Community Conservancy is a core area, is one of only 34 Biodiversity Hotspots, as recognized by Conservation International. It is one of only two to exist in a desert. It is one of only two to be based entirely on high floral richness, endemism and degree of threat. It is a cold mountain desert adorned with thousands of succulents which, under spring blossom, turn an arid expanse into a multi-coloured wonder. Endemic to the Richtersveld, almost all of the world's population of *Aloe pillansii*, a flagship species for the region growing up to ten metres high, exists inside of the Richtersveld Community Conservancy. It is a threatened species and one of few species believed to be decreasing as a direct result of climate change. But the most significant ecological feature of the Richtersveld is its succulent species numbers and endemism. It is well documented that the Gariep Centre of Plant Endemism has the richest variety of succulent plants (primarily the *Mesembryanthmaceae* family) on earth and the Conservancy is considered a central part of the Centre. 60% are known to be endemic just to the region, and estimates of species numbers and endemism rates are regarded as

Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape World Heritage Site Nomination 9 conservative, since new species are being found and large areas remain unstudied. In years to come, it is certain that new species will be uncovered. The Gariiep Centre and the Richtersveld are also considered important to science in regard to evolutionary processes, with many succulent groups in states of active speciation.

From a cultural standpoint, the Richtersveld Community Conservancy is the last refuge of Nama people living a transhumance lifestyle. This occurs no place else in South Africa. It is also one of the few places in South Africa where the language of Nama remains widely spoken. It is the only place remaining where the Nama still reside in intricately constructed portable rush domehuts called |*haru oms*. It is also the only place left in South Africa where pastoral people reside in large communal traditional lands. What exists in the Richtersveld Community Conservancy is an outstanding representation of human interrelationships with the environment, in this case a fiercely harsh environment, and a lasting testimony to a way of life – transhumance. The Nama’s pastoralist lifestyle is one of the earliest forms of livelihood where humans have control over the environment. The traditional management systems have over two thousand years conserved through sustainable use of the grazing resource a large area of Succulent Karoo vegetation.

The details of these attributes – cultural and natural – of the Richtersveld Community Conservancy are highlighted in numerous documents pertaining to “filling the gaps” in the World Heritage list. These documents, by IUCN, ICOMOS and UNEP, reveal the Richtersveld Community Conservancy as a landscape, both naturally and culturally, which has several characteristics which are underrepresented in the current World Heritage list, and support the justification of this nomination.

### **Criteria under which the property is nominated**

#### **Cultural criterion (iv)**

The landscape of seasonal movements spanning back millennia illustrates effectively a period of time when the environment, the climate and the seasons determined largely where humans lived and how they lived. This has not changed

Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape World Heritage Site Nomination 10 for the Nama who today must move home, livestock and family from high-country winter grazing areas to lower summer areas. The ancient gravesites, relicts of former livestock posts, migration trails, wells, petroglyphs and legend and oral myth attached to mountains, sinkholes, springs and, not least, the !Gariiep (Orange) River all make up a cultural landscape that has been active for two thousand years. The Cultural Landscape of the Richtersveld demonstrates well the ability of the Nama to

maintain traditional pastoral livelihoods without adversely impacting on the environment. This is especially important, perhaps more so than in other regions, in light of the status of their environment as a Biodiversity Hotspot. Additionally, the |*haru oms* is a form of architecture not reproduced by any other group of people except the Nama. Recognized as one of 100 endangered sites by World Monuments Watch, the |*haru oms* requires an intricate construction process and indigenous knowledge which has been largely lost in other Nama areas outside of the Richtersveld. The |*haru oms* in the Richtersveld Community Conservancy remain a part of the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Nama pastoralists.

### **Cultural criterion (v)**

As ancestors of the earliest inhabitants of southern Africa, the Nama of the Richtersveld have maintained a cultural tradition that is wholly unique in its customs and lifestyle. The Nama traditional transhumance land use of pastoralism bear the only surviving testimony to a way of life that formerly spanned amongst their KhoiKhoi ancestors from the Cape of Good Hope to current day Namibia and amongst other African peoples throughout the country. Despite the survival of this land use and age-old relationship with the environment, the Nama have faced and continue to face enormous pressure. Colonialism and institutionalized racism of Apartheid sought to eradicate cultural identity and tradition, often denouncing Nama ways as primitive and worthless. Today, the Nama identity and tradition endure and are seen most strongly in the Richtersveld Community Conservancy.

### **Natural criterion (ix)**

An unusual convergence of several extreme environmental factors in the Richtersveld Community Conservancy area has resulted in biodiversity that has

Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape World Heritage Site Nomination 11 evolved specifically in order to survive. Flora, in particular, have developed a wide variety of species and families which have speciated to exist in highly specific microenvironments. The methods used by plants for conserving water, shielding from the sun and protecting from high winds are seen in the physiology, range and relationship between species and their specific microenvironment. In some species such as the *Aloe dichotoma* the population densities differ between summer and winter rainfall zones. The Conservancy exists in the transition between these two rainfall zones and as such is a living laboratory of the *Aloe dichotoma*, as well as the *Aloe pillansii*, a near endemic to the Conservancy, and many other species.

### **Natural criterion (x)**

The Succulent Karoo Region is a Biodiversity Hotspot, due to its extraordinary

diversity and endemism rates and is home to an estimated 6,356 species of plants of which 2,439 are endemic. A 38.4% endemism rate is one of the highest in the world; 40% of the world's 10,000 species of succulents are found in the Succulent Karoo; and over 63 genera of the Mesembryanthemaceae are endemic to the Succulent Karoo Region. The Richtersveld Community Conservancy represents the core of the biome's Gariiep Centre, which is regarded as the richest with over 2700 species and with 80% of its endemics being succulents. The Richtersveld Community Conservancy provides a transition between the summer and winter rainfall areas and a diversity of environments including mountains, quartz fields and valleys enabling a wide range of species to exist. It also serves as the refuge for nearly all of the known specimens of *Aloe pillansii*, a large, impressive and protected plant thought to be decreasing in numbers as a result of climate change.