

THE SHIMABARA DECLARATION

The 5th International UNESCO Conference on Geoparks was held from 11-15 May 2012 in the Unzen Volcanic Area Global Geopark, Japan, and attended by 593 delegates from 31 countries. After deliberation, the delegates hereby affirm that:

1) Tohoku earthquake-tsunami and geopark

Facing the huge disaster from the tsunami generated by the earthquake of magnitude 9.0 in Tohoku, Japan, on 11 March 2011, the experience of local communities and the destruction generated by the disasters shall be utilized by the geopark community as a tool for the education of people living in geohazard-prone areas of the Earth for minimizing disasters caused by geohazards.

2) Role of geoparks in natural disasters

Our Earth brings us blessings including natural resources and beautiful, inspiring landscapes. However it can also occasionally generate large disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, and floods. Education about our dynamic planet in geoparks is a most effective way to help our local communities understand how to coexist with nature which occasionally generates geohazards.

3) Role of Geoparks in Climate Change debate

Today, society is facing a time of unprecedented change in global climates. Our geoparks hold records of past climate change and, as such, we must be at the forefront of the debate on climate change with our local communities and stakeholders. We should be educators on climate change and we should strive to become known for a best practice approach to utilizing renewable energy and employing the best standards of "green-tourism."

4) Role of Geoparks in Natural Resource Management

Geoparks have a role to play in informing about the sustainable use and need for natural resources, whether they are mined or quarried or harnessed from the surrounding environment, while at the same time promoting respect for the environment and the integrity of the landscape.

5) Conservation and utilization of geopark heritage

By linking to various bodies charged with governing and conserving our geopark heritage (geological, natural, tangible cultural, and intangible cultural) and by building high quality facilities and providing high quality education programs we aim to value the brand of the Global Geoparks Network and to continually strive to increase awareness of it.

6) Establishment of cooperation among geopark-related communities

Intimate cooperation among local people, scientists, the tourism industry, municipalities and nations is indispensable for geoheritage conservation, education, tourism and management in the geoparks. It results in the real sustainable development of our geoparks and of our local communities.

Geoparks encourage a strong bottom-up approach where local communities, especially indigenous communities, are fully engaged, develop a strong sense of ownership over their geopark and are able to be fully involved in the development of it. This is specifically important in those areas of the world where interest in geoparks is growing rapidly including Africa, Latin America and South and South-East Asia.

7) Networking and sustainable development

Multi-disciplinary approaches, exchanges of information, techniques and personnel are essential to strengthen geoparks in various levels of network activity. Exchanges of scientific knowledge on tangible and intangible heritage among those levels can promote, raise and maintain the high values of our geoparks. Recognition of geodiversity through knowledge exchange becomes one element for sustainable development of geoparks.

8) Geoparks for future

A Geopark should be a real territory of ideas and, through a masterplan, implement a strategy of sustainable development that is innovative, integrated, and respectful of local traditions and desires. We, the international geopark community fully endorse current efforts by UNESCO to consult Members States on finding ways to improve cooperation between UNESCO and the GGN and to examine the feasibility of establishing a possible future UNESCO Geoparks programme or initiative.

Unzen Volcanic Area Global Geopark
15 May 2012