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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WildlifeDirect CEO, Dr. Paula Kahumbu Named Rolex National Geographic Explorer Of The Year

Nairobi, June 15th, 2021: WildlifeDirect is excited to announce that Dr. Paula Kahumbu has been recognized as the Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the Year for 2021. This prestigious award recognizes the cutting edge work that Dr. Kahumbu has been pioneering for more than a decade at WildlifeDirect. The award was announced today at the National Geographic Explorers Festival, an invite-only event hosted by the National Geographic Society, held on June 15th – 17th, 2021.

In a statement, WildlifeDirect CEO, Dr. Paula Kahumbu said, *"I am truly humbled and grateful to Rolex and the National Geographic Society for naming me the Explorer of the Year today. This is a huge honor that I never dreamed I could attain. As a child, my heroes were people who protected wildlife. The challenges to our wildlife are escalating and we stand to lose over one million species including rhinos, Grevy's Zebras, cheetahs and giraffes in the next 30 years. We cannot save these wild species and places unless all Africans want to save them which is why our work in raising awareness about the crisis is so vital, but I never imagined I would be making wildlife documentaries. I am very excited about the potential power of our partnership with National Geographic to change hearts and minds in Africa. My dream is to see Wildlife Warriors on the Nat Geo channel so that young children across Africa and the world can learn how they too can be great explorers of the natural world. To save our extraordinary wildlife and wild spaces, we need many more wildlife warriors."*

The Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the Year Award is given to an individual whose actions, achievements, and spirit push the boundaries of leadership in exploration, and who shows a commitment to share this knowledge with the world. Through WildlifeDirect, Dr. Paula Kahumbu launched the [Hands Off Our Elephants Campaign](#) with the First Lady of Kenya, Margaret Kenyatta, which mobilized the citizens, organizations and the Kenya Government to fight for the country's elephants. This campaign raised awareness about the seriousness of wildlife crime, and the wanting state of law enforcement, This led to the review of wildlife legislation, effective handling of wildlife

crimes, and training of judicial officers. The campaign saw the Kenya Government make major reforms in wildlife crime enforcement, leading to the arrest, prosecution and jailing of Feisal Mohamed. Today, Kenya boasts one of the best wildlife laws in the world, with some of the most serious penalties. This work was funded by the Whitley Fund for Nature, The Amarula Trust, and Save the Elephants and has been replicated across Africa. Wildlife in Kenya is no longer threatened only by poaching as major threats now include habitat loss and destruction, as well as human-wildlife conflict. WildlifeDirect is campaigning for justice for wildlife and people. Major efforts include supporting initiatives to prevent human-wildlife conflict and securing land for wildlife by stopping large scale developments such as avocado farming in wildlife dispersal areas.



First Lady of Kenya, Margaret Kenyatta with Dr. Paula Kahumbu and Katito Sayialel in Amboseli during the beginning of the Hands Off Our Elephants Campaign © Wilburn Njuguna

With support from the Wild Lives Foundation, USAID through the US Department of Interior, The Great Plains Foundation and the National Geographic Society, plus in-kind support from many conservation organizations and tour companies in Kenya, Dr. Kahumbu launched Africa's first wildlife documentary series made by Africans. Wildlife Warriors Season One launched in April 2019 and has been seen by over 50 percent of Kenyans via Citizen TV. It has also been aired in 26 African countries and is currently available on the Waterbear Network. Wildlife Warriors Season One is about to be launched on Kenya's public TV Channel, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC).



*Dr. Paula Kahumbu with the Wildlife Warriors TV Crew from Vivid Features; Steve Waguwa, Evode Muhire and Loita Laban
© Bianca Otero*

Dr. Kahumbu is currently working on completing Season Two of Wildlife Warriors which is set to launch in August 2021. The series shines a light on African conservation heroes and the amazing species that they are saving. A preview of the series can be watched here <https://vimeo.com/507900821>.



Dr. Paula Kahumbu with Wildlife Warriors Kids at the Ivory Burning Site in Nairobi National Park © Alex Mbaiyo

With support from Safaricom PLC, Dr. Kahumbu spearheaded the creation of a powerful children's movement, Wildlife Warriors Kids, which has enabled thousands of school children to watch wildlife documentaries like Wildlife Warriors, visit parks, and participate in practical hands-on conservation activities including camping expeditions, hiking, citizen science, and habitat restoration projects. WildlifeDirect aims to mobilize a generation of Wildlife Warriors in Africa: - empowered young people who defend and protect wildlife and wild places in Africa.

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Notes for editors:

For more information or interviews please contact Trish Sewe at psewe@wildlifedirect.org. Images and videos are available on request.

About WildlifeDirect:

WildlifeDirect (WLD) is internationally recognized as a high impact Kenyan based organization. WLD seeks to change hearts, minds and laws so that Africa's wildlife endures forever. The mission of WildlifeDirect is to connect people to their wildlife and nature and inspiring them to treasure it and act to conserve it.

The strategy of WildlifeDirect is organized around three pillars of work:

1. Legal - Defending the integrity of protected areas, seeking justice for wildlife and people, and campaigning to secure critical wildlife buffer zones, dispersal areas and corridors. We work to ensure that every citizen can use their right to public participation in matters related to wildlife and the environment.
2. To change the narrative of conservation in Africa by producing African positive films, and developing the capacity of African storytellers. To inspire our own people, we produce Wildlife Warriors, a popular wildlife TV series about our wildlife heroes and heroines, and the animals that they are saving. We aim to transform and catalyze the wildlife film making industry in Africa.
3. Education and Outreach, through Wildlife Warriors Kids Clubs in schools. We partner with schools to give children hands-on knowledge, life-changing experiences, and opportunities to make a difference.

WildlifeDirect is a bold and forward-thinking organization that achieves its goals through direct action and strategic partnerships. Our people are professional, courageous, passionate, forward-thinking and determined. Visit us here <http://wildlifedirect.org>.