

DEVELOPMENTS IN VICTORIA FALLS RAISE MAJOR CONCERNS

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY – May 2022



The lovely painting (above left) by renowned international artist and Victoria Falls resident, Larry Norton, depicts the end of the rainy season when part of the swollen Zambezi river plunges over Devil's Cataract. *A cauldron of white water drops into the gorge below, partly obscured by heavy spray . A grey blue storm sky accentuates the wild power of the place. The scene is framed by heavy overhanging vegetation, unimpaired by buildings, development and human activity. It is what people pay substantial amounts to come and see, a natural phenomenon, shared by Zimbabwe and Zambia.*

But a tourism company has now apparently obtained access to the unspoiled **Cataract Island** (shown at centre left of the above aerial photograph of the Falls taken by Pete Roberts), and is advertising activities on the island. *Some years ago, says Larry, a petition drew over 17000 signatures in opposition to exploitation and commercialisation of this unique island.* The company involved at the time withdrew their proposal because of environmental and visual impact concerns.

Larry has now launched a new petition. See: [#KEEP VICTORIA FALLS WILD.](#)

This isn't all.

- Ground clearance is taking place on the banks of the Zambezi River just upstream of Devil's Cataract for a restaurant to be built adjacent to the fenced edge of the Rainforest;
- Investors are being sought for several developments within National Park land close to Victoria Falls, including a restaurant and jetty on a 13.,5 ha island on the Zambezi River;
- A hotel is proposed along 1 km of Zambezi River frontage between the Big Tree area and Elephant Hills Resort



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- The ongoing development of the huge Mosi-oa-Tunya Resort (pictured above) on the Zambian side of the Zambezi river only three kilometres upstream of the Falls resulted in a fact-finding visit by a joint UNESCO/IUCN reactive monitoring mission in February 2022. We await the result of their report to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.

In an [article for Victoria Falls Bits & Blogs](#), Pete Roberts writes: *A proposed development on the same sensitive site in 2006 also resulted in a monitoring mission and the subsequent implementation of a moratorium on all development within the World Heritage Site and surrounding areas until appropriate management plans and procedures were in place to adequately administer the site. The planned development received widespread negative publicity before being ultimately rejected by authorities as being unsuitable and dropped by the developers. The new project appears to have gone ahead without UNESCO being fully informed or aware of the scale of the development on the ground, which commenced in mid-2020.*

Zimbabwe's Parks & Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) has called an urgent stakeholder meeting in Victoria Falls on 9th May 2022 to discuss the above developments and other points of concern, including:-

- Clarification of the mapping of permanently protected zones in the Victoria Falls area
- Consideration of a moratorium on current developments and activities until clarity is achieved on their alignment with the Victoria Falls Master plan
- Clarification of the legal restrictions and controls on developments and leases in this sensitive area (to prevent developments being upscaled at future dates)

The Zambezi Society remains deeply concerned about the long-term effects of uncontrolled and unplanned developments in and around Victoria Falls. We have, on previous occasions, called for a moratorium on all development in the area until proper planning mechanisms have been put in place. We will do so again.

In Larry Norton's words: *Victoria Falls is the heritage of all Zimbabweans . It is in the immediate care of the authorities, stakeholders and the local community. If development is not carefully managed to prevent the fragile wild space in and around this World Heritage site from being taken up by short term development and activity, the essential natural elements that make this one of the 7 Wonders of the World could be lost.*

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If you would like to express your own views or have comments, questions or concerns on this issue, please [e-mail them to us](#) and we will ensure that they are forwarded for inclusion in the planning process as stakeholder submissions.

You can also sign Larry Norton's [PETITION: #KEEP VICTORIA FALLS WILD](#).