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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Mountain biodiversity gets world's attention**

*Montreal, 3 March 2003* – Specialists and officials from the 187 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity are meeting in Montreal from 10 to 14 March to assess the current status of mountain biological diversity, as well as the human pressures on mountain ecosystems.

“Many species that have become extinct in lowlands due to human activities are now surviving in mountain regions; others exist only in mountain areas, which harbour a richness of plant and animal species adaptable to various altitudes and climates. Therefore, we all should be involved in protecting mountain biological diversity. Overlooked for many years, the important role that mountains play, together with their inhabitants, in preserving this biodiversity, has now come to the world's attention”, said Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

“Mountain ecosystems are among the world's greatest sources of biodiversity. They provide food, water, fuel and livelihoods for many people. Due to globalization, urbanization and mass tourism, these ecosystems are seriously at risk”, said Hamdallah Zedan, the Convention's Executive Secretary. “The biodiversity in these regions guarantees continuous genetic adaptation and change, crucial for humans as current food crops face evolving pathogens and pests; they are a vital reservoir for underutilized crops, including genetic resources with incredible potential for agriculture and medicine.” he added.

Mountains also supply much of the downstream fresh water essential for drinking, domestic uses, agriculture, industry and hydroelectricity, in many cases transcending political boundaries. This makes mountains particularly important from a political perspective as well.

The degradation of biological diversity and the loss of cultural diversity of traditional communities in mountain areas are, at the same time, a result of unsustainable agricultural practices, combined with overgrazing and inadequate crop management and pest control strategies.

Recognizing the serious consequences that the loss of mountain biodiversity might bring to the world's biological diversity and food security, the United Nations declared 2002 the International Year of Mountains, in order to raise awareness and elicit action on this issue.

The role of the eighth meeting of the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) is to consider the current status of mountain biodiversity and major trends and specific threats. It will also propose elements for a programme of work on mountain

biological diversity and present measures taken for the conservation and sustainable use of mountain biodiversity as well as an indicative list of technologies relevant to its conservation and sustainable use and other related thematic areas and cross-cutting issues.

Other biodiversity issues, such as inland water ecosystems, marine and coastal biological diversity, dry and sub-humid lands biodiversity, biological diversity and tourism, will also be addressed by the meeting.

***Note to journalists***

The **Convention on Biological Diversity** (CBD) was opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992. It is the first global agreement to cover all aspects of biological diversity – genetic resources, species and ecosystems – and the first to recognize that the conservation of biological diversity is “a common concern of humankind” and an integral part of efforts to achieve sustainable development. The CBD is the main international instrument for policy-making and implementation relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. It fosters scientific and technical cooperation and the equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources, and the widespread use of environmentally sound technologies.

The Convention’s Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) advises the Conference of the Parties – the Convention’s top decision-making body. It also promotes international cooperation on biodiversity science, technical matters, and technology. It addresses a broad range of issues, including the natural and social sciences, data management, modern information technology, models, scientific assessments, the development of biodiversity indicators, and monitoring. In this way, the SBSTTA provides an agreed factual basis so that policymakers can take informed political decisions about the cross-cutting issues and thematic areas addressed under the Convention.

***For more information please contact:***

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*The meeting will be held at the ICAO building in Montreal (999, University Street)*

*Accreditation forms are available at: [www.biodiv.org/doc/press/](http://www.biodiv.org/doc/press/)*