



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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on the occasion of
INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY
11 DECEMBER 2017**

“Mountains under pressure: climate, hunger and migration”

From a distance, mountain ecosystems appear solid, unchanging and resilient, with landscapes that seem timeless. But, climate change is having major impacts on the vulnerability of mountain ecosystems and mountain peoples. It is for that reason that this year, International Mountain Day is dedicated to understanding the challenges that mountain ecosystems and the people that inhabit them face in a world of changing climate.

The importance of mountains for human well-being cannot be overstated.

Home to nearly 1 billion people, mountains cover approximately 22 per cent of the Earth’s land surface and provide numerous and diverse sources of ecosystem services, with water supply one of the most critical. About 40 per cent of the global population depends indirectly on mountain resources for water supply, agriculture, hydroelectricity and biodiversity. Mountains are home to many traditional management practices and forms of subsistence agriculture.

These spectacular and vibrant areas host nearly half of the world’s biodiversity hotspots. Yet mountains are facing ever-growing challenges. Climate change, climate variability and climate-induced disasters are transforming these ecosystems in a way that increases the vulnerability of mountain peoples. Food shortages, produced by climate impacts, have led to the situation where currently, one of every three mountain people in developing countries is vulnerable to food insecurity. In rural mountain areas, this figure increases to one in two.

These increasingly vulnerable populations are migrating in greater numbers both across international borders and to urban centres. Because mountain communities have a wealth of knowledge and strategies accumulated over generations on how to adapt to climate variability, out-migration from mountain areas will result in an inestimable loss of cultural diversity and agrobiodiversity.

Biodiversity can contribute solutions to the challenges faced by mountain communities.



The protection and restoration of biodiversity allows for promoting resilience in the landscape. Maintaining and promoting crop and livestock diversity in mountains, for example, offers significant potential for adaptation to climate change, contributing to food security and improving livelihoods.

In addition, sustainable management, conservation and restoration of ecosystems, as part of an overall adaptation strategy, can reduce the vulnerability and enhance the resilience of fragile mountain ecosystems and their local communities to climate change impacts.

For example, to slow and reverse ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss in the Colombian Andes in the area surrounding Paramillo National Park, several strategies were adopted. Agreements were signed with indigenous councils to increase food security through the implementation of agroforestry systems, forest enrichment and the restoration of riparian forests. Communication groups and women's organizations were also strengthened. This provided the local communities the opportunity to manage projects and share their traditional knowledge on sustainably managing local ecosystems and adapting to climate change.

Importantly, the involvement of indigenous and traditional mountain communities is a prerequisite for sustainable mountain development. These communities understand that land, water and forests are not simply natural resources to be used; their well-being, sense of identity and their children's future depend on the careful stewardship of the environment.

In our celebrations of International Mountain Day, let us show our support to mountain peoples as they strive to maintain and strengthen their sustainable livelihoods, in a manner in keeping with the Programme of Work on Mountain Biodiversity, the achievement of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.
