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International Year of Mountains Global Launch Highlights Need for Peace, Food Security, Research, and Mountain-Specific Laws and Policies



On 11 December the International Year of Mountains 2002 (IYM2002) was launched at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York. The global launch was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), The Mountain Institute (TMI), and the 15 member nations of the International Year of Mountains Focus Group at the UN. It was attended by world leaders, representatives of mountain people, mountain scientists, and many others who care about mountain people and ecosystems.

The 3-hour event was chaired by Adolf Ogi, former Swiss President. Several high-level participants made opening remarks, including Murari Raj Sharma, Acting President of the 56th session of the UN General Assembly, Kurmanbek Bakiev, the Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, and Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, who deliv-

ered a message from the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, delivered the keynote address, as the top representative of the UN lead agency for coordinating the International Year of Mountains. His speech touched on some of the key messages for 2002 and set the tone for the observance of the Year.

Other opening speakers included Alan Wagner, Ambassador of Peru to the United States and former Peruvian Minister for Foreign Affairs; Alberto Gagliardi, Under-Secretary-General of State for Regional Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, Italy; Gerard Pfanzelter, Ambassador of Austria to the UN; Louis Besson, Member of Parliament for and Mayor of Chambéry, and Member, IYM National Committee, France; Jack Ives, Representative of the United Nations University (UNU); and Adnan Amin, Director, New York Liaison Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

A debate on sustainable mountain development

Nitin Desai moderated a roundtable discussion on sustainability in

mountain development that featured the following participants:

- Jim Enoté, Leader, Zuni Nation.
- Yolanda Kakabadse, former Minister for Environment, Ecuador, and President, World Conservation Union (IUCN).
- Uma Lele, Senior Adviser, World Bank.

Several guest speakers were also invited to make brief interventions, following the roundtable discussion. They included:

- Bruno Messerli, University of Berne (see following article).
- Lhakpa Sherpa, Manager, Qomolangma Conservation Programme, TMI.
- Monica Opole, Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems and By-Products (CIKSAP), Kenya.
- Hugo Li Pun, Deputy Director-General, International Potato Center (CIP).
- Bernadette McDonald, Vice President, Banff Centre.
- Gabriel Campbell, Director-General, ICIMOD.
- Faanya Rose, President, Explorers Club.
- Alejandro Camino, Secretary, Mountain Forum.
- Catharine Cooke, President and CEO, TMI.
- Larry Hamilton, Commission for Mountains, IUCN.

In addition to speeches and spoken interventions, the launch ceremony included a variety of other types of interventions that made this a not-so-typical UN event: there was a screening of a short "Overlands" video; an opening call on the Alpenhorn; and two musical interludes written and performed by

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the FAO, UN Task Manager for IYM2002, delivers the keynote address at the launching of the International Year of Mountains. (Photo by Francis Dejon, Digital Editor, International Institute for Sustainable Development)



contemporary Austrian composer Franz Hackl.

Peace and food security: Prerequisites for sustainable development of mountains

Armed conflict and hunger must be eradicated to protect the world's fragile mountain ecosystems and alleviate the desperate poverty that exists in many mountain communities. This was the central message of Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, in his keynote address.

"Without peace, we cannot reduce poverty," said Dr Diouf. "Without peace, we cannot ensure secure food supplies. Without peace, we cannot even consider sustainable development."

As the world begins commemorating the International Year of Mountains, conflict may be the single greatest obstacle to achieving its goals. At the global launch, Dr Diouf called on countries and UN agencies to make peace in mountains a priority in the International Year of Mountains by addressing the root causes of conflict.

Mountainous areas—ranging from Afghanistan to the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Andes, parts of the Near East, and Africa—are the flash points of conflicts afflicting the world today. The reasons for this are complex and varied, but the effects on mountain people are universally devastating. Fighting prevents them from undertaking fundamental life-sustaining tasks ranging from collecting water to planting and harvesting crops. Where landmines are laid, agricultural lands must be left barren until expensive mine clearance can be undertaken, typically many years later. Infrastructure such as roads and schools are destroyed, halting economic development. The death, injuries, and emotional trauma of war devastate individual lives and national advancement. Mountain regions suffer disproportionately

from all these effects of conflict because they are often the poorest and least developed places in the world as well as the homelands of indigenous cultures.

FAO's commitment to conflict prevention in mountains

The Rome-based FAO is the UN lead agency for the International Year of Mountains. FAO's partners include several UN agencies, Mountain Forum, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), mountain people's organizations, and many national committees representing countries around the world. FAO's priority is to support the creation and ongoing efforts of national committees dedicated to the International Year of Mountains.

National commemoration is important because countries have the power to frame laws and policies to ensure that mountain areas are developed in a sustainable way with the full participation of mountain people. Mountain people are the stewards of mountain ecosystems and the ones who live most intimately with the consequences of destruction of these ecosystems. Their knowledge, perspectives, and participation are vital to the success of any efforts to protect mountain environments and alleviate poverty. Lack of participation is one of the many causes of conflict in mountains.

Conflict in mountain areas often arises when mountain communities are denied a voice in how local resources are used. In some areas of the world, lack of effective political representation has been the fodder for violent revolution. Local rebel movements gain momentum when central governments based in lowland capitals impose their rule to exploit mountain resources and profit from them. When mountain communities are of indigenous heritage or belong to an ethnic, racial, or reli-

gious minority, their marginalization can be politically expedient for governing parties. The exclusion of mountain people from national politics can also be the result of deeply engrained and unquestioned racist attitudes.

FAO's IYM Coordination Unit is encouraging countries to include mountain people and a wide variety of cross-sectoral interests on national committees that are preparing for commemoration of the International Year of Mountains. By bringing together many stakeholders, FAO hopes to encourage integrated and participatory approaches and to stimulate long-term action that will lead to mountain-specific laws and policies, strategic plans for sustainable development of mountain regions, and community-level action that will improve the well-being of mountain people and protect mountain ecosystems.

Importance of mountain research

The importance of mountain research was made very clear by a number of participants at the launch. One principal objective of the International Year of Mountains is to increase awareness and knowledge of mountain ecosystems, their dynamics and functioning, and their overriding importance in providing strategic goods and services, particularly water and food, which are essential to the well-being of all people—rural, urban, highland, and lowland.

Because of their specificity, mountain environments require an approach to development different from lowland areas. However, in most cases, national mountain laws and policies do not adequately consider and address the special conditions and problems of mountain regions and their inhabitants. Therefore, the development of new legal and policy frameworks at all levels, but in particular at national

and decentralized levels, is an urgent necessity. It is hoped that the International Year of Mountains will foster progress in this direction. The formulation of mountain-specific laws and policies requires a solid knowledge base. Accordingly, mountain research needs to place itself within and significantly contribute to the framework of regional and national programs for sustainable mountain development.

Regional and global exchange of research results, methods and approaches, and the reinforcement of research partnerships across continents and mountain regions are essential and need to be intensified. The International Year of Mountains can make a major contribution to this challenging task. Research partnerships between the North and the South are particularly important to expose stakeholders to different situations and approaches. The journal *Mountain Research and Development* (MRD) is an important vehicle for exchanging research results, approaches, and experiences. The Global Mountain Forum (MF) with its regional nodes is another important tool for exchanging information. Close collaboration among researchers, politicians, and decision-makers is also important to mountain research in the North as well as the South.

Many interesting and promising global research programs have been

initiated within the framework of the International Year of Mountains. They include the IGBP-IHDP-GTOS Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) and the UNU/CDE Global Mountain Partnership Programme (GMPP). In addition, many UN institutions, CGIAR research centers, and NGOs have adapted their programs to include mountain-specific issues in their research activities.

Foundational research began at UNU

Jack Ives, Honorary Research Professor at Carleton University in Canada, represented the Rector of the UNU at the launch. He explained that UNU initiated a program of mountain research as early as 1978. That program continues today; from 2002 onward, it will focus on the sustainable mountain development problems of Central Asia. The early emphasis was on highland–lowland interactions and mountain-hazard mitigation in the Himalaya–Ganges and northern Thailand; with Swiss assistance, this was expanded into East Africa, Ethiopia, the Atlas Mountains, the Andes, and many parts of the Central Asian mountain core. It included an extensive training program that provided fellowships to young scholars from many countries where research was undertaken for study

in the United States and Switzerland.

The UNU program has drawn great strength from having a university status, unlike other UN agencies, and recruiting its senior scholars as volunteers. Thus, it was able to tackle highly sensitive issues. In particular, the challenge to major environmental paradigms, such as the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation, together with independent publication access through the quarterly journal *Mountain Research and Development*, led to a major role in ensuring inclusion of Chapter 13 in Agenda 21, a cornerstone for eventual designation of the International Year of Mountains. It also drew early attention to the disproportionate burden of warfare and all forms of conflict borne by mountain regions and their peoples and identified this as the main deterrent to sustainable mountain development throughout much of the mountain world.

For more information on the launch of IYM2002, visit www.mountains2002.org.

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