



STATEMENT BY

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on the occasion of

INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY 2019

“Mountains matter for youth”

The nature that surrounds us, sustains us. Ensuring that it can continue to do so for future generations is a trust bestowed on us all. As we do this, it is important to make youth central to our collective efforts. As governments prepare to negotiate a post-2020 global biodiversity framework for adoption next year at the UN Biodiversity Conference¹ in Kunming, China, let us look up at the mountains of our world and enable youth to be full and active partners in building a sustainable future.

Mountains provide sustenance and well-being to 1.1 billion mountain people around the world and also indirectly benefit billions more living downstream. Accordingly, three targets of the Sustainable Development Goals are dedicated to the promotion of sustainable development for mountain communities.

Mountains support as much as one quarter of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity and include nearly half of the world’s biodiversity “hotspots”. Six of the 20 most important food crops originate in mountains, and more than half of humanity relies on mountain freshwater including for agriculture. Intact and resilient mountain ecosystems prevent soil erosion. In this way they act as buffers against climate change and natural disasters not only for mountain communities, but also those downstream.

However, mountain ecosystems are fragile and particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation. If we add to this, biodiversity loss, land use and land cover change, and natural disasters, we see the tenuous situation mountain communities, including youth, are faced with.

¹ Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity; Tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; Fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing; October 2020, Kunming, China.



Ecosystem degradation, and the loss of livelihoods leads many youth to leave mountains in search of a better life and employment opportunities. These migrations have a negative impact, as they lead to abandoned agriculture, further land degradation and a loss of cultural values and ancient traditions that have sustained biodiversity for generations.

To reverse these trends in mountain areas, and to ensure youth stay to build communities, countries need to make youth active participants in the project to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. Youth can be part of the work to adopt mountain-specific policies into national development strategies, such as poverty reduction plans and programmes for mountain areas. Youth can be mobilised to retain and transmit traditions of sustainable ecosystem management for mountains.

On this International Mountain Day, and in honour of its theme “Mountains matter for youth,” let us work to empower youth to protect these essential mountain ecosystems. Let us travel together on the road of transition to a future of life in harmony with nature.
