

## United Nations International Year of Mountains

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Director of the FAO Liaison Office with the United Nations  
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**Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Honourable Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to present to you the "**Interim report on the International Year of Mountains, 2002.**"

Just about one year ago, the Director-General of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization, Dr. Jacques Diouf, stood before this chamber and launched the International Year of Mountains.

Who would have thought that magnificent snow-capped giants like Everest, Kilimanjaro and McKinley - symbols of strength and stability -were in need of an international year?

But then that was a year ago, before so many dedicated women and men rallied together to tell the world that mountains ecosystems were really fragile places, and that mountain communities endured disproportionate levels of poverty, and that both mountains and mountain people needed the world's attention.

Now, thanks to a global awareness-raising campaign that has prompted countless special events and celebrations, newspaper articles and television reports, educational programmes and conferences - not to mention, nine major global events - many around the world know the truth:

That mountains are crucial to all life on earth.

That half of humanity depends on mountains as a source for fresh water.

That the genetic diversity preserved in mountain ecosystems helps to ensure the world's future food security.

And that each day the future of these unique ecoregions and the people who call them home, are threatened by armed conflict, global climate change, exploitative mining and unsustainable forestry and agricultural practices.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Together, we have changed the way many in the world think about, and relate to, mountains.

We at FAO are honoured to have served as the United Nation's lead agency for the International Year of Mountains, and to have collaborated with governments, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNU and other UN agencies as well as non-governmental organizations, in bringing mountain issues to world attention.

But much of the substantive work, the creation of policies and programs that will make a real difference to the lives of mountain people, is being done by countries themselves, thanks to the efforts of the 77 national committees which have been leading observance of the International Year of Mountains around the world.

Such overwhelming support from countries is, I believe, unprecedented during an international year.

I thank you all for your commitment, for your enthusiasm and for your leadership.

It is through country action that real change takes place. And now that the International Year of Mountains is coming to an end, the role of countries is becoming even more important. We at FAO are committed to making the International Year of Mountains a real catalyst for change and to helping countries find lasting solutions to mountain problems.

Together with a number of countries, UN agencies and international organizations gathered at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, for example, we launched the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions.

Recognized as a means to promote and strengthen greater co-operation between all parties interested in mountain issues, the Partnership was given further support this month at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit - the culminating event for the International Year of Mountains.

It was there that FAO confirmed its commitment to hosting a secretariat to support the Partnership, as well as to help countries develop and implement national strategies for the sustainable development of their mountain regions.

We see this commitment as part of our ongoing work at FAO. As task manager for Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development in mountains, and as the United Nations' agency responsible for raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity and bettering the lives of rural populations, many of our people and many of our partners already work in mountains. It is a sad reality that a disproportionately high number of the world's 800 million chronically undernourished people live in mountains. A multi-disciplinary study recently completed at FAO shows that as much as half of the mountain population in developing and in transition countries - from 250 to 370 million people - are vulnerable to food insecurity.

By creating the conditions for sustainable development of mountain regions, we can make great strides toward ensuring that there is enough food for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The challenges facing the world's mountain ranges and mountain communities are still as big as mountains themselves. But together - governments, UN agencies, Major Groups and private sector organizations - we can make the International Year of Mountains a catalyst for long-term action.

Together, we can improve the well-being of mountain people. Together we can ensure the protection of fragile mountain ecosystems. Together we can promote peace and stability in mountain regions.

Thank you