

Statement on Food Security in Mountains

by Mr. El Hadji Sene
Director, Forest Resources Division
Forestry Department
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Food Summit: five years later
Side Event: Sustainable Mountain Development
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Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us today for this special event on mountains at the World Food Summit: five years later.

As you know, FAO is the lead agency for the International Year of Mountains. We are proud and honoured to be leading such an important initiative. We see this essential work as an extension of our role as task manager for implementing Chapter 13 of the Earth Summit's Agenda 21, the blueprint for the sustainable development of mountains.

We believe that sustainable development of mountains will bring us closer to FAO's goal of alleviating hunger and poverty so that all people throughout the world will have access to the food they need for active, healthy lives.

No single endeavour could be more important than ensuring everyone has enough food.

Estimates show there are about 800 million chronically undernourished people in the world. Although mountain people represent about 12 percent of the world's population, research underway at FAO suggests that mountain communities may carry a much larger portion of the burden.

The reason for this has much to do with the inaccessibility of mountains, the complexity and fragility of mountain environments, and the extent to which mountain people, particularly women, are often socially, politically and economically marginalized.

But there is another reason. Most of the world's armed conflicts are being fought in mountain regions. As many of you know all too well, it is impossible to produce food in conditions of war. Just as it is impossible to take the necessary steps to improve your life or even dream of a better future, when chaos grows around you.

For these and other reasons, food insecurity and malnutrition in mountain communities plays out in many different ways around the world.

In the disease and disability that evolve from micronutrient deficiencies
In the exodus of thousands fleeing natural disasters, drought and famine
In the unemployed youth who flock to lowland cities
In the heartbreak of infant mortality rates that are among the highest in the world.

Ultimately, our hopes for many mountain regions rest on resolving conflicts and bringing about peace. One way we can help to do this is by encouraging sustainable mountain

development and mountain-friendly policies and laws.

All our efforts must be built on the wisdom, knowledge and experience of mountain people - as well as being supported by research. At FAO, our work on food security in mountains is helping us to better understand the nature and extent of poverty and hunger in mountains and to develop more effective programmes.

But as we begin to understand the problems in mountains, we are learning, above all, that there are no universal solutions. Policies and laws, indeed, all our plans and programmes, must be tailored to meet the unique needs, priorities and conditions of mountain communities. Bringing people together to share information and experience is integral. I look forward to learning about your country's efforts later in this event.

At FAO, we are focusing a great deal of our energy on stimulating the establishment of national committees to lead country-level observance of the International Year of Mountains, particularly in the developing world. Our hope is that these groups will play an important role in improving policies for mountain areas in coming years. We do this because we believe that mountain specific policies are one of the most important determinants of successful and sustainable mountain development.

At the last count, 67 countries have established International Year of Mountains national committees. Most bring together a wide variety of mountain stakeholders, essential for approaching mountain-development issues from a holistic, long-term perspective.

Many aspects of the road to sustainable mountain development are not yet clear. However, a path is emerging. It leads first to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in August and then later to the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in October.

At Johannesburg we will establish a global partnership to implement Chapter 13. This partnership is forming now. During preparations for the World Summit for Sustainable Development and the International Year of Mountains we began a process of collaboration - of bringing people together, as we have today, with mutual interest in sustainable development and concern for mountain communities. Now we must ensure that these partnerships continue to grow and flourish. One way we can do this is by establishing clear goals and making concrete plans for action. But to do this, we must also take steps to establish formal commitments to each other and to develop the systems that will ensure our work continues into the future. During the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, we must tell the world how these partnerships will take shape, as well as the means and mechanisms that will be employed to reach our goals.

Later, at Bishkek we will state our priorities and intentions in a formal declaration on mountains. This declaration is being developed with contributions from countries and regions, researchers, women, children, mountain people's organizations, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies dedicated to protecting mountain ecosystems and improving quality of life in mountain communities.

We at FAO will pledge our work in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and rural development and, most importantly, in alleviating hunger and chronic malnutrition around the world. We will also help countries develop strategic plans for sustainable mountain development, as well as mountain-friendly policies and laws.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are immense opportunities in mountains - immense opportunities to save the

world's biological and cultural heritage, and to address poverty and hunger in mountain communities.

There are also immense opportunities for mountain people. Mountain environments are exceedingly rich in natural resources. They are also the places that many seek out for rest, renewal and recreation. As guardians of this wealth, mountain people need not be poor, nor hungry.

We can help to reduce hunger, poverty and environmental degradation by ensuring that mountain people benefit from their labour and resources, by recognizing local property rights and by decentralizing decision-making. These measures can and have been effectively addressed by countries through national policies and laws.

I thank you all, dedicated partners, for the efforts you are developing and supporting with us - including the holding of this WFS side event - the feedback and guidance you are providing and the encouragement you are sending back home for an optimum observance of the International Year of Mountains.

We look forward to working with all of you in this regard. Thank you.