



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS
on the occasion of
INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY
11 DECEMBER 2016**

“Mountain Cultures: celebrating diversity and strengthening identity”

Covering some 22 per cent of the world’s land surface, mountains are home to spectacular landscapes, a wide variety of ecosystems, and a great diversity of species. Rich in biodiversity, mountains support about one quarter of world’s terrestrial biodiversity and include nearly half of the world’s biodiversity “hotspots”. They are often sanctuaries for plants and animals that have long since disappeared from the more transformed lowlands.

Mountains are home to distinctive human communities. Some 955 million people, or 13 per cent of the global population, reside in mountain areas. A significant number of these mountain dwellers are indigenous peoples, with distinct cultural traditions and traditional knowledge relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. As a result of this knowledge and cultural traditions, mountains host some of the world’s most complex agricultural diversity and traditional management practices. Ninety per cent of mountain-dwellers live in developing countries where most are dependent on subsistence agriculture.

This year, International Mountain Day is dedicated to the celebration of the diversity and identity of mountain cultures. The concept of traditional heritage, culture and spirituality is intrinsically linked with peoples’ livelihoods in the mountains, where traditional lifestyles and customary sustainable use of biodiversity often determine the way people make a living and subsist. Mountains have also greatly shaped traditions, heritage, social systems, cultures and religious beliefs. Numerous mountains are important to religions, such as Mount Sinai, Macchu Pichu and Mount Fuji, to name a few, and some indigenous peoples from the Andean region maintain their belief in the spirit of the mountains, like “Apacheta”, and always ask for permission before following a mountain pass and give thanks to the mountain for everything it provides.

Mountain peoples have developed remarkable land use systems. Rich in globally significant biodiversity, they have evolved over centuries thanks to the harmonious co-existence of communities with the environment. This relationship is at the heart of mountain peoples’ cultures. For them, land, water, forests, wild fauna and flora, and crops and livestock are not simply natural resources. They are the foundation upon which their ancestors built in order to live and thrive in these, at times, difficult environments. The careful stewardship of the environment is a path that must be followed for their well-being, their sense of identity and their children’s future.



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The protection and celebration of these mountain cultures, identities and traditions are essential to the preservation of biodiversity. Thanks to their rich history in interacting with their environment, mountain peoples hold precious knowledge for the continued sustainable use of mountain resources in areas such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries. They are also the foundations of a successful ecotourism industry. From hiking the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa to engaging with local communities in the Annamite Range in Vietnam, mountains offer numerous sustainable paths of revenue for communities through ecotourism and cultural exchanges.

As we celebrate International Mountain Day, let us seek to support and recognize the contribution of mountain peoples in maintaining and conserving biodiversity, strengthening their sustainable livelihoods, and contributing to the achievement of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.
