

MESSAGE FROM DR. AHMED DJOGLAF

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on the occasion of

INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY 2007

Reporting on the shift in butterfly ranges in the Sierra de Guadarrama mountains in Central Spain, a news article recently published online by Nature highlighted that rising temperatures are changing mountain ecosystems as the heat forces some species upwards – until there is nowhere left to go. This ‘Escalator effect’ is threatening mountain species world wide and reiterates the significance of this year’s theme for International Mountain Day 2007, “Facing Change: Climate Change in Mountain Areas”.

Today, climate change is a reality. It is for this reason that this year the international community celebrated the International Day for Biological Diversity on the theme of “Biodiversity and Climate Change”.

Climate change affects all ecosystems and mountains are among the ecosystems most severely impacted. At the same time mountain ecosystems are crucial in mitigating the adverse impacts of global warming. Mountain ecosystems cover about 27% of the Earth’s surface and are vital to the survival of 22% of the world’s population. They support the most spectacular landscapes and harbour an extremely rich and diverse range of species. Many species adapt and specialize in these ecosystems, providing essential goods and services to people living in mountain regions. However, mountain ecosystems are already under stress from various anthropogenic activities such as overgrazing, and inappropriate land management, reducing their natural resilience to climate change.

The melting glaciers, the shifting of natural habitats, and the retreat and sometimes disappearance of species are stark reminders of the vulnerability of mountain ecosystems to rising temperature and precipitation changes. What can be done to prevent the further decline of these important ecosystems? How can we ensure the survival of the vital ecological services that mountain ecosystems provide? What are the adaptation options available to cope with climate change?

Activities that link upland and lowland management strategies can provide adaptation options. These options include mountain watershed management, establishment of both horizontal and vertical connectivity migration corridors, rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, avoiding deforestation and reducing human pressure on biodiversity. The CBD programme of work on Mountain Biological Diversity, which aims to conserve mountain biological diversity, provides for such adaptation options. Its effective implementation is of paramount importance to minimize the adverse effects of climate change on mountain ecosystems.

In 2003 the UN General Assembly proclaimed 11 December as 'International Mountain Day' (IMD), and mandated the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to lead celebrations of IMD. In this capacity, FAO has developed information and communication material that are available at the special website dedicated to IMD 2007 at http://www.fao.org/mnts/intl_mountain_en.asp.

On this International Mountain Day let us resolve to effectively implement the CBD programme of work on mountain biological diversity to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and its implications for humankind within and beyond mountain areas.