

MESSAGE

**BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, DR. AHMED DJOGLAF
ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY,
11 DECEMBER 2008**

For information only

FOOD SECURITY IN MOUNTAINS High Time for Action

“The agricultural productivity of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region... is heavily dependent on the availability of dry season water from the Himalayan glaciers, but these are shrinking as a result of global warming, which poses a serious threat to the long-term sustainability of food production in the entire region.” Food Security in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region, ICIMOD Position Paper, August 2008

The above report on Food Security in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region emphasizes the significance of this year’s theme for International Mountain Day 2008 “Food Security in Mountains”. The worsening global financial crisis threatens to perpetuate food insecurity worldwide and mountain people are more vulnerable to food shortages due to their isolated, inaccessible and remote location. The changing climate further exacerbates food insecurity in mountains as they are among the ecosystems most severely impacted by climate change.

Mountains provide vital resources to 22 per cent of the world’s population living in both mountain and lowland ecosystems and beyond, including critical reserves of biodiversity, food, forests and minerals, and fresh water for at least half of humanity. However, the people of mountain areas face major challenges. Often socially and economically marginalized, they are vulnerable to food shortages and chronic malnutrition. Global prices for food staples have soared since 2005, and the price of cereals has nearly doubled over the last year. In many mountain regions, priorities have shifted from producing food for self-sufficiency toward cash crops or other land uses. Overall food security has suffered as many mountain communities now purchase ever more costly food and the situation is exacerbated by increasing costs and difficulties of transportation. Food security and nutrition are clearly core issues in sustainable mountain development but paradoxically they are often not given due attention.

Food security is a basic right that must be upheld. The World Food Summit, in 1996, declared that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. To reach this goal, efforts must span across sectors and involve all stakeholders. We are not without success stories. In the mountains of Peru, a “potato park” provides food for communities by reviving indigenous farming practices as well as protecting both the genetic diversity of the region’s potato varieties, and the rights of indigenous people to control access to these local genetic resources. To encourage these efforts toward sustainable mountain development, mountain-specific research, policies and procedures are needed. The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity provides for such measures and its increased implementation will improve the welfare of people within and beyond mountain areas.

In 2003, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 11 December as ‘International Mountain Day’ (IMD), and mandated the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to lead the observance of the Day. In this capacity, FAO has developed information and communication material to celebrate IMD. This material is available for downloading at the special website dedicated to IMD 2008 at http://www.fao.org/mnts/intl_mountain_day_en.asp.

On this International Mountain Day let us recall and reaffirm the 2002 Bishkek Declaration to protect the Earth’s mountain ecosystems, to reduce poverty and food insecurity in mountain areas, to promote peace and economic equity, and to provide support for current and future generations of mountain dwellers to create the conditions in which they can shape their own goals and aspirations.

Montreal, 11 December 2008



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COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008