



MESSAGE BY

DR. AHMED DJOGLAF

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

ON THE OCCASION OF

**“INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY 2009”
DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN MOUNTAINS**



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220, Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int



Life in harmony, into the future
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Owing to their nature, mountain ecosystems and the people who live in or near them face greater risk from natural hazards – floods, droughts, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, avalanches, debris flows, earthquakes and landslides. The earthquake that devastated a vast area between Pakistan, India and Afghanistan in October 2005 killed over 80,000 people and left millions of mountain dwellers homeless. The theme of this year’s International Mountain Day (IMD), “Disaster risk management in mountains” highlights the natural and often devastating dangers of living in mountain environments. Disaster risk management in mountain areas is receiving increasing attention, particularly in the context of the impacts of climate change. The growing risks of glacial lake outburst floods in the Himalayas and rockfalls in the Alps, resulting from the upward movement of permafrost, are just two examples. By showcasing these and other risks, the aim is to raise awareness of the high vulnerability of mountain communities as well as the possible ways and means of minimizing these risks.

Mountain biological diversity is of high importance for a number of ecological functions. Natural and semi natural vegetation cover on mountains help to stabilize headwaters, preventing flooding and maintaining steady flows of water to lowlands. Mountain biological diversity also augments the resilience of mountain ecosystems and, should extreme disturbances occur, often provides effective barriers to high-energy events such as rock falls and avalanches. Mountain biological diversity contributes to human well-being well beyond its immediate vicinity and is essential to maintain ecosystem services. Mountain ecosystems which have been degraded are even more vulnerable. Practices such as sustainable agricultural practices, and sustainable pasture and forestry management are key elements of risk reduction which should be integrated into strategies and policies at national level.

The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity, which aims to conserve mountain biological diversity, provides for such practices and its effective implementation is of paramount importance for disaster risk management in mountains.

In 2003, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 11 December as “International Mountain Day” and mandated the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as the lead agency to observe International Mountain 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 International Mountain Day 2009 at http://www.fao.org/mnts/intl_mountain_day_en.asp

This year, on 11 December, as climate change talks are underway in Copenhagen, let us consider the serious results of inaction on the most vulnerable members of our communities, in particular those residing in mountain environments.