

**Statement by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema**  
**Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity**  
**on the occasion of**  
**International Mountain Day**  
**11 December 2021**  
*#MountainsMatter*

Mountains offer some of the most unique and inspiring landscapes on Earth. From medium elevation slopes to the highest peaks, mountains cover a high variety of ecosystems that are sensitive to the ways we use and experience nature.

Despite often being portrayed as far-away places for urban tourists to bask in panoramic vistas, mountains are important ecosystems that provide essential functions and services to the people that live there. Mountains are hailed as the water towers of the world, as they provide freshwater for more than half of the world's population. Freshwater, through lakes, rivers and groundwater, provide us with the water we drink and that we use for growing food and medicine.

Mountains cover around 27 per cent of the Earth's land surface, yet they contain half of the world's biodiversity hotspots. Mountain ecosystems can host rich species diversity with higher levels of endemism compared to lowland regions, making their biodiversity uniquely fragile and important to protect, especially as they are currently exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

This year's International Mountain Day is celebrated under the theme "sustainable mountain tourism" and puts a spotlight on people that depend on mountains for their livelihoods. Mountains are home to 15 per cent of the world's population, predominantly in developing countries, and attract around 15 to 20 per cent of global tourism. Tourism can be a significant contributor to the health, security and livelihoods of mountain communities.

If managed sustainably, mountain tourism can provide many economic and social benefits to these communities, such as promoting sustainable food systems, valuing local products, valuing and protecting the natural and spiritual heritage of mountains, and the cultural diversity and traditional practices of mountain peoples. Not only do these ecosystems bring benefits to mountain communities, they also bring direct and indirect benefits to billions of people that live downslope in the form of freshwater.

Indigenous peoples and local communities are often the stewards of mountain ecosystems and their knowledge, traditions and cultural practices are vital to maintain the biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services in these regions.

Perhaps due to the difficult and isolating nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, visits to open air and less crowded destinations, such as mountains, have increased in recent years. This renewed interest in going outdoors and exploring nature is inspiring, if it can be kept within sustainable limits, and may empower mountain communities that depend on tourism.

On 11 December 2021, I encourage you to show your support for mountains, their biodiversity and their communities, by sharing an experience or an adventure you have had and tag [#MountainsMatter](#) on any media platform you may use.