

**Statement by Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity on  
International Mountain Day (11 December 2025)**

**“Glaciers matter for water, food and livelihoods in mountains and beyond”**

This year the celebration of International Mountain Day carries particular significance. The United Nations declared 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation. Today is a good day to raise awareness of the importance of mountains and glaciers, and to raise the alarm about their plight.

Mountains cover one-quarter of the Earth's surface and host many global biological diversity hotspots. Half of the world's population depends on them for water, food, energy and other critical ecosystem services. Glaciers are particularly critical: they hold close to 70 per cent of the world's available fresh water. They also play a crucial climate regulation role by reflecting 90 per cent of sunlight.

Equally important is the role of mountains and glaciers as sources of cultural enrichment and spiritual connection for mountain-dwellers including indigenous peoples and local communities.

But glaciers are in a bind. They are retreating rapidly under the strain of climate change. Scientists estimate that many will disappear within decades. In addition to the loss of ecosystem services such as the provision of drinking water, melting glaciers will intensify sea-level rise, exacerbating the vulnerability of coastal countries and communities across the globe.

With half of the world's biodiversity hotspots located in mountain regions, the loss of glaciers could drive many specialist species, often endemic, to the brink of extinction. Observations indicate that many species are already migrating to higher altitude habitats, thus upsetting natural equilibriums and potentially exacerbating human-wildlife conflict.

The disappearance of glaciers will jeopardize hundreds of millions of people living downstream. Melting glaciers disrupt water supply, threatening agriculture and food supply in many regions of the world.

Recognizing the unique value of mountain ecosystems, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have established a programme of work on mountain biodiversity. The activities included are articulated around the protection of crucial mountain ecosystem services, including supporting genetic and cultural diversity as well as the livelihoods of highland and lowland communities.

In addition, the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (the KMGBF) supports the preservation of global biodiversity hotspots including our fragile mountain ecosystems. It is essential that indigenous peoples and local communities participate meaningfully in efforts undertaken under the CBD and beyond.

Mountains and glaciers demonstrate the limits of siloed approaches. They point to the imperative of synergistic action. The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity must go hand in hand with climate action, particularly mitigation, to slow down the rapid decline of the world's glaciers.

The goal is to restore degraded ecosystems, enhance ecological connectivity and bolster resilience. Integrating nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches in national policies and plans, including those pertaining to climate action and integrated water resources management, is vital.