**Keynote: “Perspectives from the United Nations Environment Programme on the global agenda for the protection of mountain biodiversity”**

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***Mountain Biodiversity Day, 13th January 2021 – GLOBAL MOUNTAINS***

**General introduction on mountain biodiversity**

* Mountains, their **biodiversity**, and the vital ecosystem services they provide, are **essential for the well-being of people worldwide**. Mountain ecosystems are found on every continent and occupy a considerable part of the world’s land surface, and although varying in many ways e.g. from their geology, mountain regions share one feature: they **contribute disproportionately to the terrestrial biodiversity on Earth**, hosting a diverse range of species, including many endemic, rare and threatened ones. Approximately **30% of the total land area identified as terrestrial Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)** is located entirely or partly within mountain areas. With their complex topographies along steep altitudinal gradients, mountains represent important refugia for species, especially under the prospects of a changing climate. From a social perspective, mountain regions represent **rich ethnic and cultural diversity**, and provide numerous examples of human and biological adaptation to extreme environmental conditions. Mountains **provide crucial services** to our human society, from regulating climate and air quality, providing food and medicinal resources and space for sports and recreation. Importantly, as the **“water towers” of the world**, mountains provide water for about 22 per cent of the world’s population.
* However, even though the richness and value of mountains are evident, they are **exposed to multiple stressors and processes of global change** that can threaten and damage their precious ecosystems. Concerted efforts are and will be needed to emphasize the key relevance of mountains and the need for their conservation in global agendas.
* The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) directly refer mountain ecosystems and the need to ensure their conservation in goal **15.4.** Furthermore, the **United Nations General Assembly** acknowledges the critical need to focus on the specific challenges, as well as opportunities provided in mountains to achieve the SDGs and targets relating to poverty, hunger, sustainable agriculture, climate change and gender equality.
* Like many ecosystems, mountains across the globe are **divided by political boundaries** and are therefore **subject to different policy, legal and institutional structures, management and governance regimes**; they are moreover affected by various social, cultural and economic contexts and systems. **Transboundary conservation and restoration** can act as a practical way to bridge the complexity and encourage cooperation to achieve shared conservation goals. Both the Alpine and Carpathian Convention with the latter serviced by UNEP provide for successful case example of cooperation at the regional level, having already inspired for processes in other regions such as the HKH region.
* There is an undebatable **need to emphasize the key relevance of mountains biodiversity and to specify explicit ambitions for mountains in the environmental and policy discourse**. The role of mountains for the **global protection of biodiversity needs to be especially acknowledged in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework** with its 2050 vision of “Living in harmony with nature” which will pave the way for biodiversity conservation during the next decades. An explicit call for action has been also made in the last UN GA resolution on mountains supported by many member states that are represented in today´s event including in particular Alpine and Carpathian countries.
* Two **UNEP Mountain Policy briefs** have been produced in a very successful cooperation with the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment, the Mountain Research Initiative, the Alpine and Carpathian Convention and others. They provide the scientific basis and a set of policy recommendations for decision-making to support a dialogue and negotiations on priorities, goals and targets for mountains in 2030 and beyond. As a future step, **a set of mountain-specific indicators will be compiled** to support the monitoring of the targets and goals of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. UNEP will continue to work closely with its partners and supporting mountain member states.

**UNEP’s work on mountains**

* Mountains and in particular work on mountain biodiversity are at the core of UNEP´s work on ecosystems.
* The Vienna Programme Office – serving also as a Mountain Hub in UNEP - houses the Secretariat of the **Carpathian Convention**, as already presented by Bozena Haczek, currently holding the Polish Presidency of the Convention, which provides a framework for cooperation and governance to guarantee the protection and sustainable development of the entire Carpathian region. The **convention provides tools for adequately managing and protecting Carpathian natural heritage and restoring the ecological connectivity throughout the region in a form of several** **transboundary Action Plans** (adopted at the Carpathian Convention COP6 last week 25 Nov 2020).
* The **Carpathian Convention, together with the Alpine Convention**, do provide very valuable examples of a **successful interregional cooperation mechanism**, which can well work as a role model to encourage further mountain regions to strengthen such mechanisms.
* In addition, UNEP´s “**Vanishing Treasures**” flagship programme implemented in partnership with local, national and regional partners and financed by the Government of Luxembourg, aims to promote ecosystem-based adaptation and climate-smart conservation of flagship mountain species such as the snow leopard in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the mountain gorilla in Virunga mountains of Rwanda and Uganda, and the Royal Bengal tiger in Himalayas in Bhutan. Today, we will hear 2 interventions from two regions of the programme.
* Other projects and initiatives of UNEP include awareness raising for the need to protect biodiversity on a global level, including digital innovation. UNEP´s recent global **Run Wild campaign** in partnership with Austria based adidas Runtastic has helped to mobilize 1 Mio runners representing 1 Mio endangered species, a remarkable message of the global community which will be conveyed to forthcoming UNEA 5, COP15 CBD and other major events.
* Finally, last year’s **International Mountain Day** did focus on biodiversity, which could not be more fitting to the challenges we had encountered with the global Covid-19 pandemic, which changed our daily lives to a huge extent – and which showed us how strongly human well being and a healthy nature are interlinked. More then ever, the solution seems to lie in recalibrating our relationship with nature, reserve some untouched spaces in which wildlife can live mostly undisturbed, restore damaged ecosystems and reflect about our own needs for resources. In this context, let me also stress again the statement of the UN Secretary General who pointed out to the necessity to consider mountains within the Post-2020 framework discussions as well as the action within the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration with UNEP besides FAO being the major custodian.

**Links and Resources**

* **2019 Report of the Secretary General on Sustainable Mountain Development UNGA A/74/209**
* [**Policy Brief: Elevating Mountains in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework**](https://www.grida.no/publications/473)
* [**Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment**](https://www.gmba.unibe.ch/)
* [**IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate**](https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/)
* [**UNEP Vanishing Treasures Programme**](https://vanishingtreasures.org/)
* [**Run Wild campaign**](https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/run-their-lives-free-app-challenges-users-outrun-pangolin-tiger-and)