



**MESSAGE BY AHMED DJOGHLAF**

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

*on the occasion of*

**INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY**

**“MOUNTAINS AND FORESTS”**

*11 December 2011*

John Ruskin, the famous English art critic of the Victorian era, once said: “Mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery.” For 22 per cent of the world’s population living in both mountain and lowland mountain ecosystems, mountains are the source of livelihoods. Against this background, and 2011 being the International Year of Forests, the theme of this year’s International Mountain Day—“Mountains and Forests”—is timely and significant.

Mountain forests capture and store rainfall, maintain water quality, regulate river flow, and reduce erosion and downstream sedimentation. They also provide many environmental services, including protection against natural hazards and landscapes for tourism and recreation, and absorption of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Healthy mountain forests are crucial to the ecological health of the world. However, globally, mountain forests are one of the world’s most threatened ecosystems. Protecting these forests and making sure they are carefully managed is an important step towards sustainable mountain development.

Mountain regions are amongst the most sensitive to climate change. Melting glaciers, the shifting of natural habitats, and the retreat and disappearance of species are stark reminders of the vulnerability of mountains ecosystems to rising temperature and changes in precipitation levels.

Achieving environmental and human sustainability in mountains means finding ways to manage mountain resources and systems so that they can provide critical ecosystem services, even in the face of climate change. Options for climate-change adaptation in mountain ecosystems include, *inter alia*, mountain watershed management, establishment of both horizontal and vertical connectivity migration corridors, rehabilitation of degraded forest ecosystems, avoiding deforestation, and reducing human pressure on biodiversity. The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity provides for such adaptation options. At its tenth meeting, of the Conference of Parties to the Convention, in decision X/30 on mountain biological diversity, called for measures to reduce deforestation and restore degraded mountain forest ecosystems to enhance the role of mountains in providing important ecosystem services.

There are win-win opportunities in this arena to not only protect mountain ecosystems and the biodiversity they harbour – but to use these more proactively and wisely to contribute significantly to meeting multiple human development challenges in the face of a rapidly changing world. Our actions in support of mountain ecosystems will be a contribution to the overall achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and the building of a future of life in harmony with nature.

Let us celebrate the International Mountain Day 2011 in a befitting manner to raise awareness about the relevance of mountain forests and the role they play in climate-change adaptation measures and for achieving sustainable mountain development.

-----