



**Association  
des Populations  
des Montagnes  
du Monde**

**WWW.MOUNTAINPEOPLE.ORG**

**THIRD MOUNTAIN PEOPLE WORLD ENCOUNTERS  
OLORON SAINTE-MARIE, FRANCE  
25th September-3rd October 2010**

**LIVING MOUNTAINS!**

**MOUNTAIN PEOPLE'S ANSWERS TO THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC  
CRISES**

Mountains have always made people dream, but they still remain merciless to the people living in their hillsides.

In addition to harsh material conditions, they have to deal with a strong feeling of rejection from modernity, of no longer mattering to the rest of the world.

The most important oncoming challenge faced by mountain people all over the world is to continuously win back their dignity and their right to live in their territories.

While altitude, slope and land locking make everything more expensive (the right to eat, the ability to produce, the necessity to have access to health and education), the fight has started to convince the global system that no territory or culture is useless to mankind; a peaceful fight rooted in the rejection of a mad upside-down world that wants to bring everything down to a mere profit.

WMPA has been willing to tell this story since it came into being in 2000. WMPA inscribed this ambition in the Charter for World Mountain People. WMPA today wants to draw the World's attention to these "resistance" fighters' destiny, certainly to make the World a better place, but also to let this World know that a mountain always hides another mountain in mankind's blind walk towards a limitless as well as illusory progress.

WMPA conceived this world event as the merging of three paths: to be, to have and to achieve. Taken separately, they lead to isolation, destitution and helplessness. Together, they make inhabited mountains possible, a horizon lowland people need to build their own future.

### Legacy and passing on

To live in a mountain is primarily to learn. Learn from elders, of course, learn from others, too, learn from ourselves, ultimately. Mountains are the very place where nature's spiritual forces and energies meet. This spiritual and human chain, wrought with sublime and fear, created the languages and cultures of many peoples and civilisations. This chain marked out a path that has not faded away with time. Natives or settlers, mountain peoples preserved this path and we will follow them through their knowledge and skills.

This path will lead us to what builds the mountains identity, the territory that sings in their languages, their musics, their vision of the world and that teaches us to remain faithful to the earth.

### Production, know-how and exchange

Mountains are generous but exhaustible sources of drinkable water and breathable air, of biodiversity and raw materials. For long, mountain people alone have been in charge of the durability of this natural wealth, using it carefully in their exchanges with the lowlands. Since they cannot compete with mechanized horizontal civilisations and standardized production processes, they progressively lost the benefit of their work and then of the mastering of their environment. Today, they are often subjected to the triumphant eco-liberal dogma: multinationals plunder and merchandise the wealth of their soils (forests, minerals, hydrocarbons, water). At the same time and in such a contradictory way, their territories are put under institutional custody in compliance with preservation policies promoting a nature without human beings: derisory alibi for the uncontrolled destruction of the other regions of the world.

This path will lead us across mountains towards the fight for the recognition of one of the mountain people's skills: a skill to obtain food and well being using verticality to create and preserve a great diversity of plants, products and services. Today, through quality labellings, concerted management of biodiversity, industrial or small-scale processing of local resources, sharing of natural wealth, responsible tourism... mountains witness the rebirth in their womb of project territories that, in tune with modernity, invent a new vision of exchange in which territories, cultures and products are inextricably woven.

### Recovering the political power

Even when they were free, mountain people were subjected to a colonisation that never spoke its name. Places of refuge, smuggling and resistance as they were, central governments have been relentlessly trying to subject them to the common rule. A rule that has today become a fraud, even in countries that apply it in the name of republican equality. Today, States too often perceive mountain areas as a permanent threat and a political reality that can overthrow governments through ballots or weapons. Beyond legitimate and historical aspirations to autonomy, the issue is to build the institutional structures and tools that can reunify mountains, countrysides and towns around a common destiny that respects their particular specificities.

This last path will lead us to the common formulation of a platform of propositions and actions relying on communities', elected representatives' and NGOs' experiences and struggles. These proposals and actions will be included in our resolution Mountain Territories and Resources. We will use this text to convince national, regional and international authorities of the need of trusting mountain people's management capacities and of drawing up policies that fit them, so they can live and benefit from the wealth of its territory, as well as the other components of national society do.

The Third Encounters are hosted in Oloron-Sainte-Marie in the French Pyrenees. This city's history and the livestock keepers' lives from the three neighbouring valleys of Ossau, Aspe and Barétous are symbolic of the values WMPA stands for and will inspire us to update the Association's vision and missions.