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PRESS RELEASE

International Mountain Day 2006: the urgency of international mobilisation

On the occasion of International Mountain Day 2006 (11th of December), the **World Mountain People Association** (WMPA) is presenting a synthesis of the work and proposals emerging from encounters held since the beginning of the year between mountain populations of over 30 countries¹.

After six regional encounters on three continents (in the Andes, the Himalayas, North Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, and Austral Africa), with input from communities, academic research, and the experiences and expertise of development NGOs and institutions involved in mountain areas, WMPA and its regional representatives came up with the renew following conclusions:

- All over the world, and across differences of contexts and cultures, the mountain populations of the world recognize a **common identity** based on the know-how, lifestyles and practices through which they can live in particular environments. They are **proud** of having created mountain-specific civilisations. Although they are often little known or deprecated, they are a source of richness for our world.
- Yet, mountain populations suffer from a **growing discrepancy** between the plains and mountain areas, which, in many case, forces them to an **exodus to peri-urban areas** of coastal or plain areas but also to **long-distance migration** to countries of the Northern hemisphere: the USA for Andean peoples, Europe for peoples from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Far East or the Middle East for peoples of the Himalayas.
- Numerous mountain communities are **culturally, socially and politically marginalised**: lack or even prohibition of schooling in their mother language (e.g. Amazigh for Berbers in North Africa) ; loss of ancestral know-how, lifestyles and practices due to Western standards of development imposed by national legislation and international regulations. This is also due to unfair, wild competition from dominant economies.
- Mountain populations **are not any more in control of the natural resources of their territories**. They do not take advantage of the wealth produced by the exploitation or privatisation and sale of these resources to downstream peoples: mining, hydrocarbons, water and dams, woodlands, tourism...

¹ Algeria, Bolivia, Burundi, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Equateur, France, Gabon, Guinea, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Peru, Republic of South Africa, Centrafican Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Tanzania, Chad, Zambia, Zimbabwe

- **Agro-sylvo-pastoral activities**, which remain the main source of employment and revenue of mountain residents, are not any more the object of development policies from states, and dramatically lack adapted and specific support: technical research and support, market access, access to credit, promotion of mountain products, etc. Their practice and standards for the sustainable management of the resources of these territories are not recognized, and are even negated in some cases.
- **Conservationist policies** for the protection of biodiversity and the creation of natural reserves and national parks **are not negotiated with local populations** and are sometimes pursued against their activities, their interests and their vested rights, especially ancestral rights of property, on their territories (as in the case of natural parks in India or South Africa)
- Booming **tourism activity** is rarely controlled by mountain communities, and contributes too often to the **destructuring of their societies and folklorisation of their cultures**. More often than not, they are an easy substitute for a policy genuinely geared to the creation of innovating activities, whether industrial or small-scale.
- The ongoing worldwide **decentralisation processes** have fragilised mountain areas even further, for the benefit of booming urban centres, and have deepened already strong inequalities. Traditional community-based management structures and the way of life of mountain populations, sometimes extending beyond the limits of administrative jurisdictions, are not taken into account. Many new representatives lack **technical and administrative training**. Finally, states have very rarely implemented the **necessary budget transfer** at the national level in favour of landlocked rural mountain areas.
- Due to **additional investment overhead** due to relief and difficulty of access, mountain territories are mostly under-developed in terms of communication infrastructures (roads, railroads, postal mail, telephone, Internet), basic social services (access to water, health centres, schools, information), and diverse sources of employment (industry, tertiary services).
- Some mountain populations are **criminalized** for their **production of so-called "illegal crops"** – coca in the Andes, cannabis in North Africa, poppy and hemp in Asia. The programmes designed to eradicate these crops caused the displacement of millions of mountain residents, in particular in Colombia and in the Andean countries.

In conclusion of those findings, it appears that **economic globalisation** and a **specific approach addressing exclusively the ecological conservation of mountain environments**, not taking into account the development problems of the women and men living there, have drastically fragilised mountain populations everywhere in the world, even though they account for up to a billion human beings and 35% of the area of all continents.

To answer this challenge, which is relevant to mankind as a whole regarding economic, demographic, cultural and environmental aspects, WMPA is requesting the following:

1. **constitutional recognition by the relevant states** of the specificity of mountain territories and the passing, in conjunction with local populations, of **specific laws which are appropriate** to these territories, in order to proactively reduce the unfairness of their treatment.
2. the definition by states of **adapted policies** to support the productive activities and the life of mountain populations on their territories
3. assignment by states in their **national and regional budgets** of resources for the implementation of these policies and investments specific to mountain territories via fair **national-level transfers** and the wealth derived from the exploitation of natural resources in the mountains
4. definition of a long-term **International Action Plan for Mountains** in favour of mountain populations in order to reach the Objectives for the Millenium for Development (OMD) in those specific areas

5. **creation of a tax on corporations exploiting mountain resources** (water, energy, hydrocarbons, minerals, wood) for the benefit of local populations and to fund – along with national budgets and international co-operations – the international programme so defined
6. setting up of **Regional Centres for co-operation and exchange on mountains**, bringing together the actors of these territories, focusing on the conservation, development and promotion of their know-how, their empowerment in terms of proposal and negotiation with public authorities, the identification of objectives, and the facilitation of assistance to development projects by international donors
7. creation of an **International Mountain Observatory** which will compile the existing data and will take into account in its analyses the experiences and testimonies of mountain populations
8. voting by the General Assembly of the UN of the project of a **Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, who are a very large portion of the mountain residents
9. recognition by the **Worldwide Trade Organisation of the specificity of the economy of mountain territories** and of specific national and regional policies in their favour, both already implemented and yet to implement
10. creation of a **"Mountain" department within the FAO** in charge of coordinating international action in favour of mountain populations in relation with the Regional Centres, research, NGOs and the International Observatory.
11. **decriminalisation of the production of hemp and coca leaves for traditional** (chewing), **craft-oriented, cultural and pharmaceutical usage**, struggle against drug trafficking, decriminalisation of producers and revision of UNODC's (United Nations Organisation against Drug and Crime) "alternative" policies. Local populations are not to be blamed for trafficking and addiction; moreover, the traditional use of these plants has been largely sidetracked by the chemistry-oriented pharmaceutical industry.
12. creation of an **International Foundation for World Mountain People** in charge of facilitating exchanges between such people and international encounters between them to let them share their experiences and, together, influence their future.

To articulate in detail these proposals and advocate their implementation at the national, regional and international levels, the mountain populations of the world linked to WMPA propose to **hold an International Mountain Conference in 2007**, that is, five years after the International Year of Mountains, which, in spite of the international community's involvement, has not produced the expected tangible results.

In each country and region where it is represented, WMPA is launching a campaign for **public opinion awareness** and advocacy towards policy makers and economic decision makers for a better accounting for these situations and the commitment of resources to solve them. It will proactively pursue its initiative of mobilisation of mountain populations in favour of a **more equitable and sustainable development**.

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