

Here in Stockholm we have been able to prepare the ground for industrialized countries to enter the post-industrial age and to obtain the capacity for developing the technologies and acquiring the resources that are needed for promoting healthier development.

Mankind must not fail to grasp the opportunity of erecting the pillars of sustainable, egalitarian development for all nations in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, so as to safeguard and secure the Earth's future.

FERNANDO COLLOR  
*President of the Federative Republic of Brazil*  
*Office of the President*  
*Brasilia*  
*Brazil.*

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

### UNCED 1992 and its Need of a Mountain Agenda

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) will open on 1 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, just 20 years after its predecessor, the landmark 'Stockholm Conference' (officially styled the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment) of 1972 helped to put environment on the world's political agenda. Interestingly, the Secretary-General for 1992 is the same man who propelled the Stockholm Conference to such overall success, Maurice F. Strong, of Canada.

Now, as then, there is a rush for influence. There is also a widespread apprehension that anything missing from the Conference agenda will be at a disadvantage in the years to come. The ambitions of the Conference are not modest; the principles which bear on environmental and developmental concerns are grouped in the so-called *Earth Charter*, and the assembly of action resolutions is referred to as the planetary management agenda for the next century, or *Agenda 21*.

The Stockholm Conference necessarily chose to highlight the more pressing concerns of the time. Mountain ecosystems did not feature, nor did acid rain, stratospheric ozone\*, or climatic change.† Indeed the concept of planetary management was regarded then in political circles as hardly serious. The twenty years which have passed since Stockholm have changed all that.

#### *Mountain Aspects*

Why should mountain ecocomplexes and their component ecosystems feature at Rio? Rather in the manner of the above-mentioned trio — acid rain, stratospheric ozone, and climatic change — at the time of Stockholm, mountain ecosystems were already known to some people to be a source of urgent concern. For they were rapidly becoming degraded under pressure from growing human populations and their various demands. The intervening years have made these fears and their outcomes more and more obvious and serious.

Montane ecosystems cover some 20% of the Earth's land surface and directly provide the life-support base for about 10% of the global human population. Indirectly, mountains are a source of water and energy, timber and minerals, spiritual inspiration and recreation, for more than half the world's population.

The people whose life-support base is in mountain regions amount to nearly 500 millions. They are mostly poor, subject to high population-growth, and politically marginal; yet they are the stewards of regions whose degradation will adversely affect the conditions of life of three to four times as many people on the plains below.

#### *Storehouse of Biodiversity*

Mountains are the storehouse of a great wealth of biodiversity; they also shelter a greater treasure of cultural diversity, together with associated indigenous environmental knowledge, than any other major physiographic division. These two characteristics are the direct consequences of the extreme range of

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\* Discussed in some detail already in our first International Conference on Environmental Future (1st ICEF) held in Finland a full 'year before Stockholm'. — Ed.

† Already adumbrated, together with the need of a holistic viewpoint and treatment, in our 1st ICEF. — Ed.

natural and cultural niches which has been generated by the unique, additional, vertical dimensions of the mountain landscape, the global vegetational belts, and the climatic zones. On a single mountain massif alone, these bioclimatic divisions may range from tropical rain-forest to perennial or even permanent ice and snow.

Because of political and socio-economic marginality, with frequent fragmentation of jurisdiction among nation states, and because of steep slopes and fragile vegetation-cover, the very diversity of the milieu renders mountains highly susceptible to environmental degradation, as well as to climatic change.

Global warming and climatic change are likely to have immediate repercussions in the mountains in terms of the availability of water and hydroelectricity for the surrounding lowlands, the shifting of vegetational belts and thus surface reflectance (with meteorological consequences), and the success or failure of winter recreational investments, to name only a few aspects. These problems are rendered all the more intractable simply because insufficient knowledge is available on which to base appropriate countermeasures.

### *Special Agenda Needed*

The *Mountain Agenda UNCED 1992* initiative seeks to use the occasion of UNCED to publicize the mountain problematic. It began with individuals from the UN University (UNU), the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in Katmandu, Nepal, and the network constituted by the International Mountain Society (IMS). Between them these agencies have sought to provide channels for contributions from as wide a range of people as possible.

The core of the activity is, first, a 200,000 words' *Status Report* on the environmental and developmental condition of the world's mountains; next is an *Appeal Document* presenting the case for action in a shorter, illustrated format, and introducing a plan for immediate action; and last, a two-pages' *Manifesto*. These three documents will be published before the Conference next year. The *IMS Newsletter* No. 2, of February 1991, carried a detailed account of the initiative and a comprehensive check-list for the guidance of contributors to the *Status Report*.

In parallel with the above is a call for public hearings and other media events around the world — to raise public expectations and prepare the ground for the reception of the documents. This 'second strand of activity' is less advanced than the primary one of preparing a convincing case to secure action by governments represented at Rio, but will, it is hoped, gather momentum. Financial support so far has been given by the Governments of Switzerland and Germany.

Further details may be obtained from: Mountain Agenda, c/o Institute of Geography, University of Berne, Hallerstrasse 12, 3012 Berne, Switzerland.

PETER B. STONE  
*Les Corneillettes*  
*Crozet*  
*Gex 01170F*  
*France.*