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**COOPERATION AND FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN REGIONS
IN EUROPE**

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PARTNERSHIPS

**PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

**COOPERATION AND FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN REGIONS IN EUROPE**

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Executive Summary

Following the discussions at the second meeting of the Working Group of Senior Officials (29–30 June 2006) regarding the agenda of the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” to be held in Belgrade from 10 to 12 October 2007, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was invited to provide updates, as appropriate, on activities under the “Documents of Category I and II” in accordance with the framework for the agenda of the Conference. This Category I paper for the Conference is intended to report on the progress made in the cooperation for the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions in Europe.

Consequently, the Conference is invited to take note of and welcome the progress made in the development of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the South-East European Mountain Region, and to express its support for the mountain partnerships within and between the Alps, the Carpathians, the Caucasus, and the mountain regions of Central Asia.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations, in General Assembly resolution 53/24 of 19 November 1998, declared 2002 to be the International Year of Mountains (IYM), with the goal of raising international awareness about mountains, their global importance, the fragility of their resources, and the necessity of sustainable approaches to mountain development. Mountain initiatives build on the process initiated by the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the outcome of which, Agenda 21, highlights in its chapter 13 the urgency for action to achieve sustainable mountain development.
2. The most detailed reference to and international mandate for the elaboration of regional mountain instruments is contained in the recently adopted Mountain Biodiversity Programme of Work of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Programme of Work aims to establish “regional and transboundary collaboration and the establishment of cooperative agreements” on mountains. UNEP is one of the leading United Nations agencies supporting diverse mountain initiatives by providing its expertise, services and assistance for mountain regions worldwide, and plays a key role in promoting chapter 15 of Agenda 21, on “Conservation of biological diversity”. UNEP has initiated and/or facilitated negotiations for many multilateral environmental conventions, which address the major environmental issues of today, including agreements on protection and sustainable mountain development.

II. MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP

3. The Mountain Partnership, launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002, is a broad alliance of countries, intergovernmental organizations and major groups working towards improving the lives of mountain people and protecting mountain environments

around the world. Its Secretariat is hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, with the participation of UNEP. The First Global Meeting of the Partnership, held in Merano, Italy, in October 2003, was a landmark event, presenting the Partners with a unique opportunity to exchange views, to compare practices; to identify common needs, priorities and concerns; and to explore key issues related to the structure, membership and governance of the Partnership. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Central Asia have taken this opportunity to propose initiatives for the protection and sustainable management of major transboundary mountain ranges in Europe and Central Asia. The Second Global Meeting of the Mountain Partnership held in Cusco, Peru, in 2004, reconfirmed the initiatives directed towards making mountain challenges a priority issue of attention at the international level.

4. Adopted in 1991, the Alpine Convention brought together all the Alpine countries and the European Community to collaborate on mountain development and protection, and has provided much inspiration in this regard, particularly in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. Accordingly, in IYM 2002, UNEP assisted in launching a European mountain initiative aimed at facilitating partnerships and increasing cooperation between and among Governments and stakeholders of various regions, for the protection and sustainable management of transboundary mountain ranges.

III. ALPINE CONVENTION

5. The Alpine Convention, which entered into force in 1995, was the first regional convention created worldwide for the protection and sustainable development of a mountain region. Under this framework convention, eight protocols have been negotiated and adopted on a broad range of issues, including nature protection and landscape conservation, mountain agriculture, spatial planning and sustainable development, transport, mountain forests, energy, soil protection and tourism, as well as a special protocol on dispute settlement. All these protocols entered into force in December 2002. Since the seventh meeting of the Alpine Conference, the Contracting Parties have supported the establishment of mountain partnerships. At their eighth meeting in 2004, they decided both to include the development of mountain partnerships in their multi-annual work programme for 2005–2010 and to join the Mountain Partnership. The latter decision took effect in January 2006.

6. During the ninth meeting of the Alpine Conference held in November 2006 in Alpbach, Austria, the priority cooperation areas of the mountain partnership activities performed by the Alpine Convention – for instance, the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Central Asia – were extended to the Balkans, and a declaration was adopted in which the Alpine States and observers from various mountain regions of the world expressed their desire to support cooperation between mountain regions. The declaration takes “note with appreciation” of the partnerships formed and to be developed between the Alpine States and the countries of the Carpathians, Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia “to pass on the manifold experiences made in the Alpine process to other mountain regions”. It also notes with appreciation “the commitment of the Alpine States in the implementation of the Local Agenda 21 project ... aiming at establishing a transboundary alliance of mountain communities in the Caucasus”.

7. Recognizing the fact that climate change poses one of the greatest threats to the mountain ecosystems of the Alps, the ninth Alpine Conference adopted a declaration on climate change in the Alps and, to promote implementation of the declaration, requested the Alpine Convention's Standing Committee to produce an action plan containing recommendations for activities specific to the Alpine region in time for the tenth Alpine Conference, to be held in 2008.

8. During the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention), held in Kiev on 13 December 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding with the Alpine Convention was signed to facilitate the long-term cooperation of the two sister Conventions. Collaboration is foreseen in all areas of environmental protection and sustainable development covered by the Conventions, and in particular in the subject areas of the protocols to the Alpine Convention and the provisions of the Carpathian Convention.

IV. CARPATHIAN CONVENTION

9. In 2001, UNEP was requested by the Government of Ukraine to service a regional cooperation process for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians, a major transboundary mountain range shared by seven countries in Central and Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine). In 2002, an Alpine-Carpathian partnership was initiated by the Ministry of the Environment and Territory of Italy. At the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", held in Kiev in May 2003, the Carpathian countries adopted the Carpathian Convention. Since its establishment, Austria has continuously hosted and supported the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention provided by UNEP in Vienna. France, Germany and Monaco have provided continuous support for the establishment of a network of protected areas in the Carpathians through concrete projects.

10. The Carpathian Convention entered into force on 4 January 2006. Its first meeting of the Conference of the Parties was held from 11 to 13 December 2006 in Kiev. The meeting adopted the Convention's Programme of Work for 2006–2008. This ambitious Programme, facilitates the practical implementation of the Convention, including benefits to the health and well-being of the environment and local communities of the Carpathians.

11. The Conference established the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee as the Subsidiary Body of the Convention. The Committee will oversee the activities of the six newly established Working Groups, co-financed by the European Union's INTERREG IIIB¹ CADSES² "Carpathian Project", on the conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity; cultural heritage and traditional knowledge; sustainable agriculture, rural development and forestry; sustainable industry, energy, transport and infrastructure; sustainable

¹ Interreg IIIB is a European Community initiative which aims to stimulate transnational cooperation in the EU between 2000-06.

² Central, Adriatic, Danubian and South-Eastern European Space (CADSES).

tourism; and spatial planning. Starting the development of protocols, a first Protocol on the Conservation of Biological and Landscape Diversity is being negotiated.

12. Finally, the Conference adopted a decision inviting the European Community to accede to the Carpathian Convention.

V. SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

13. Significant steps towards closer cooperation in the South-Eastern Europe (SEE) region are being made with the support of the Mountain Partnership. UNEP was requested by the Ministry of the Environment and Physical Planning of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to support and service a regional cooperation process, aimed at addressing the need for sustainable mountain development in SEE.

14. After a series of preparatory workshops, including discussions at the Cusco Conference in 2004, the meeting, “Sharing the Experience – Capacity-Building for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in South East Europe”, was organized by UNEP and supported by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea. The meeting took place on 12 and 13 December 2005 in Bolzano, Italy, with the technical and scientific support of the European Academy in Bolzano (EURAC) and the cooperation of the Balkan Foundation for Sustainable Development (BFSD). At the meeting, experts and government representatives from the SEE countries were extensively briefed about the collaborative arrangements and activities in the Alpine and Carpathian regions, and subsequently expressed the wish for a formal subregional process, leading to closer cooperation in the SEE region.

15. Consequently, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia hosted the intergovernmental consultation on the “Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in South-East Europe”, in Pelister, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on 12 and 13 May 2006. The meeting reviewed a study conducted by the BFSD, the “Assessment on the current situation and needs of cooperation on the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions/areas in South-Eastern Europe (Balkans)”, expressed its support for developing a legal framework for cooperation in SEE, and recommended that a draft text of a legal instrument be prepared for negotiation.

16. Supported by Italy and in collaboration with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC-CEE), a partner of UNEP in the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) and a contributor to many aspects of its work, a third meeting was organized at EURAC in Bolzano on 3 and 4 November 2006. The meeting completed an expert reading of the draft convention text and suggested that all SEE countries join in a negotiation process. Consultations are under way to organize a next negotiation meeting in the region, with a view to advancing the agreement and conclusion of the proposed framework convention.

17. The 2007 Belgrade Conference is expected to be a landmark event for facilitating and launching the formal process of cooperation for the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions in SEE.

VI. CAUCASUS

18. In June 2001, in the context of the preparations of the IYM, Armenia, Georgia and the Russian Federation gathered in Yerevan to discuss the possibility of a legal instrument for the protection of the mountain ecosystems in the Caucasus. Underlining the principle of integrity of the Caucasian region in terms of its geographical, ecological and social dimensions, as a basic principle, they requested UNEP to continue to provide assistance. It was further agreed to engage the REC for the Caucasus (RECC) to raise public awareness of the initiative and WWF Caucasus to provide technical know-how.

19. In July 2003 the RECC organized a conference, “Sustainable Development of Mountainous Regions of the Caucasus”, which was attended by governmental authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and scientific experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Turkey. The conference concluded that “the solution of the existing environmental problems and the addressing of the challenges related to the rational use of natural resources are only possible subject to the intersectoral, interregional and interstate cooperation, which could serve as the basis for drafting in the future the Caucasus Convention, as a guarantor of the social, economic and environmental security of the mountainous regions of the Caucasus”.

20. Supported by Italy and serviced by UNEP, representatives of the Ministries for the Environment and Ministries for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey (Armenia was unable to attend because of technical problems) met at EURAC in Bolzano in December 2005, and were briefed on the collaboration and work under the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions. Reconfirming “the principle of integrity of the Caucasian eco-region in terms of its geographical, environmental, economic and social dimensions”, the participants resolved that they were “aiming at involvement of all Caucasian countries, other interested countries and international organizations in cooperation processes for development of a legal instrument on sustainable development, with special emphasis on sustainable land use and protection of the Caucasian mountainous ecosystems”.

21. Consultations are under way to arrange a high-level meeting between the six Caucasus States, at which the formal commitment to the commencement of the process is to be given. At the same time, the meeting will take stock of existing initiatives and programmes in the region such as the Alliance of Mountain Communities of the Caucasus and the Council for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Resource Use, as well as activities under the South Caucasus Water Program and other initiatives involving the Governments and NGOs such as the RECC and WWF. Supported by a number of intergovernmental organizations and donor countries, including the Alpine Convention, Germany, Liechtenstein and the United States, the meeting will aim to create the basis for the development of a framework agreement for the protection and sustainable development of the mountain regions in the Caucasus.

VII. CENTRAL ASIA

22. The degradation of mountain ecosystems is considered a serious problem in the Central Asian region, one accompanied by population growth, a rise in unemployment and poverty, the lack of energy resources, unsatisfactory infrastructure, and other economic and social problems. The vital necessity of cooperation and coordination of the activities of the Central Asian countries for the conservation of the mountain ecosystems at regional level has been recognized by all stakeholders. The Working Group of Central Asian Countries' Senior Officials in cooperation with the Central Asian REC (CAREC) has submitted a Category I document to the Belgrade Conference on the "Central Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development: Progress and Prospects", making ample reference to the issue of mountain protection and sustainable development, as well as to various joint activities with partners in other mountain regions of the world.

23. Following the initiative of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, the Global Mountain Summit took place in Bishkek, crowning the International Year of the Mountains 2002. As the facilitator of the first Global Mountain Summit, Central Asia is particularly committed to resolve the problems it faces in the area of sustainable development of mountain regions with a focus on halting the degradation of mountain ecosystems, as one of the results of global climate change and increasing human-induced pressure. The Central Asian countries are further adamant to increase the level of public awareness of the importance of sustainable development of mountain regions and to disseminate their experiences and knowledge about caring for vulnerable mountain ecosystems. The Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development for Central Asian countries has taken the decision to establish the Central Asian Mountain Centre, which will be located in Kyrgyzstan, and to address the donor community on issues that can be resolved only with the help of the international community.

24. Another example of successful mountain cooperation is the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP) programme, which promotes sustainable mountain development by encouraging the sustainable use of resources, product development and marketing, village development, and policy dialogue among different stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. CAMP is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. In November 2005 representatives of mountain villages of the Alps, the Altai, the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Central Asia met in Bishkek on the occasion of a conference on the role of local governance in sustainable development organized by CAMP and financed by the Contracting Parties of the Alpine Convention, which gave considerable impetus to the replication of the process in other mountain regions.

VIII. OTHER MOUNTAIN REGIONS

25. Within the framework of the global Mountain Partnership, and in close consultation with its partners in FAO and the Mountain Forum, which facilitates global communication and information exchange on mountain issues, UNEP is sharing its experience on the Carpathian Convention with other mountain regions such as the Andes and the Hindu Kush-Karakoram-Himalaya (including the cooperation with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)).

IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

26. Sustainable mountain development can be advanced considerably through regional and subregional initiatives, cooperation and actions. The Alpine region offers a wealth of experience in the field of sustainable development as well as many knowledge repositories of mountain-related information, which are increasingly made available to interested mountain stakeholders. Innovative regional and local development approaches are now being implemented in the Carpathians with European Union structural funds supporting the Carpathian mountain range cooperation, which can provide food for thought and the sharing of experience with other mountain regions such as in SEE, Caucasus or Central Asia. The Mountain Partnership offers a promising international platform for interlinking this experience with other mountain regions in the world.

27. In order to be successful and achieve lasting results, collaboration among mountain regions must address a great variety of interlinked areas: agriculture and forestry, energy and transport, landscape planning and water basin management, and sustainable tourism and biodiversity protection. Joint action in mountain regions will also directly contribute to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its programme of work on mountains; assist in the achievement of the 2010 target to halt the loss of biological diversity of the Pan European Ecological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS); as well as support European nature conservation policies in mountain ecosystems.

28. Collaborative arrangements such as the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions have proven themselves to be useful approaches and powerful incentives for mountain-related action and support. It is hoped that negotiations on framework conventions on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the SEE and Caucasus mountain regions will advance, and that they will receive the necessary backing and support from all partners involved.

The Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", to be held in Belgrade from 10 to 12 October 2007, is invited to take note of, welcome and support the mountain partnerships within and between the Alps, the Carpathians, the South-East European Mountain Region, the Caucasus, and the mountain regions of Central Asia, including the development of framework instruments for the protection and sustainable development of the South-East European and Caucasus mountain regions; to encourage the international Mountain Partnership to promote and foster exchanges of experience and expertise with other mountain regions in the world; and to call upon donors and the international community to continue to support and service mountain partnerships and initiatives in Europe and other parts of the world.
