

# **THE BERCHTESGADEN DECLARATION ON MOUNTAIN RANGE REGIONAL COOPERATION**

We, the representatives of state, regional and local governments, representatives of international bodies, non-governmental organisations, academic, science and research institutions, international financial institutions and development assistance agencies, the private sector and other entities – all with responsibilities for mountain affairs locally, regionally or worldwide -- have assembled in Berchtesgaden from 26 to 29 June 2002.

The purpose of this meeting was to reflect on lessons provided by the Alpine Process, to discuss principles and actions required for regional co-operation in mountain areas, and to reaffirm our commitment for regional partnerships in mountain regions worldwide.

We act on the basis of a series of preceding documents, most prominently on the Berchtesgaden Declaration of 1989, on the Alpine Convention of 1991, and on the principles of Agenda 21 and its Chapter 13, approved at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

We hold that the UN International Year of Mountains 2002 - which includes many important events, such as the upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and the upcoming Global Mountain Summit in Bishkek – should conclude with renewed commitment to sustainable mountain development and reaffirm the political will to take action.

We underline the importance of mountain regions as vast reserves of valuable resources, including water, energy and biological diversity - and in terms of other vital ecological, economic, social and cultural functions. Because they include transboundary and thus politically sensitive systems, mountain regions will continue to require careful stewardship.

Against this background we express our deep concern about the fact that, due to human activities, climate variations, and other factors, many mountain ecosystems are in decline, and that poverty in many mountain regions is on the increase. The situation in mountain regions is also characterized by a disproportionate number of armed conflicts and migrations of refugees.

We point out that poverty reduction, locally adapted patterns of sustainable use and containment of regional conflicts are among the major challenges facing governments in mountain areas on the road to a safer, more spiritual, peaceful, equitable and prosperous world.

We acknowledge our responsibility for mountain regions as homes to unique heritage of human kind.

## **Experience with the Alpine Process**

We acknowledge the global significance of the lessons provided by the Alpine Process as the only example worldwide of a legally binding inter-governmental mountain agreement. The Alpine Convention has evolved – despite some difficulties - into a successful platform for regional exchange and negotiations, and for sustainable development. As a result, it enjoys growing confidence among Alpine populations.

The Alpine Process demonstrates that regional cooperation as a process owes its success to the participation and support of local populations and local governments, right from the earliest planning stages – rather than to a legal framework alone.

NGOs have played a key role in the formulation and promotion of the framework agreement, and in actual implementation and projects. Community networks and committed citizens have fostered the acceptance of the Convention among Alpine populations, and they have enabled related measures at the local level.

The Alpine Process lives through locally implemented programs and projects, as well as through regional exchanges of experiences. Non-governmental organisations in the Alps have been instrumental in ensuring the existence of the framework convention and in the implementation of concrete activities and projects. A network of local governments and other citizen networks have facilitated acceptance of the Convention and provided continuous support for the required changes at the local level.

We acknowledge that the key to success in the Alpine process lies in transparent and continuous communication among the governments at all levels and local civil society, and in adherence to the principle of subsidiarity. Exchange of region- and location-specific information at the regional level is a pre-condition for fruitful co-operation.

We point out that each region would have to develop its own approach. The Alpine Convention is not transferable as such to other regions of the world. Rather each region will need to develop its own approach. However, many of the principles as well as the implementation experiences under the Alpine Process are likely to prove relevant and helpful.

These principles are stated in the attached set of recommendations entitled  
*“10 Berchtesgaden Principles for Regional Cooperation“*.

## **10 Berchtesgaden Principles for Regional Cooperation**

Governments, the international community, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and all other mountain stakeholders should consider basing their actions on these principles:

### *1. Hold Government Accountable*

The primary responsibility for ensuring sustainable and equitable management across mountain ranges at the national and sub-national levels rests with the governments. Sustainable mountain policies nationally are a requisite for any broader regional cooperation.

Improved governance frameworks must be put in place, if governments are to become responsive creators and managers of effective legal and regulatory frameworks.

### *2. Keep a Regional Focus*

Regional cooperation is necessary for sharing benefits and for peaceful development of mountain regions. The experience gained from the Alpine Process shows that regional action processes or regional conventions represent the most appropriate scale for planning and implementation in mountain range development, and can provide the most relevant framework for sub-regional and national plans and processes.

### *3. Foster equality & equity*

Equitable regional cooperation fostering equal opportunities can secure local livelihoods, reduce vulnerability to disasters and lead to a sustainable use and protection of mountain natural resources. Equitable access to resources is a mainstay for peace. Equitable gender and minority policies are among the most effective ways to combat poverty.

### *4. Decentralise*

Decentralisation is key. The local level is where regional and national policy must respond to community needs. Local authorities – if delegated the power and the means – can provide for increased responsiveness and transparency in the management of mountain resources and for increases in local participation.

### *5. Set clear objectives – chart a course flexibly*

Clear objectives, quality expectations, and tangible indicators to measure change are a key to success in regional mountain cooperation. Processes to reach such objectives and political instruments need to be flexible. Legally binding agreements can be toothless unless they are coupled with active participatory and cooperative strategies. Due to the great differences in geo-political, socio-economic and environmental conditions of mountain regions, objectives, priorities, and processes will vary from region to region.

### *6. Participation of local communities and civil society organisations*

The participation of local populations, and of civil society groups and organisations is essential for regional cooperation. They should be engaged throughout, from planning through implementation, to monitoring. Participation creates ownership of, and commitment to, sustainable mountain development and it reduces tensions and conflict.

#### *7. Networks*

To become a sustainable process, regional cooperation requires and benefits from multiple transboundary networks. For example, networks of mountain stakeholders and research institutions are necessary for both the effective exchange of experiences, access to and transmission and dissemination of information. Academic and research institutions have a major role to play in this context.

#### *8. Build Capacity-Share Knowledge*

Knowledge is the foundation of understanding of inter-linkages and for decision-making. Shared knowledge, respect for different forms of knowledge and inter-disciplinary approaches are an important ingredient in building regional consensus and resolving conflicts. Capacity building is required at all levels. It needs to be based on integrating the distinct and complementary contributions of local, traditional knowledge, knowledge from different professionals and disciplines, and the hands-on experience of practitioners. Practical actions to build partnerships and create channels for sharing information at all levels are the key to bringing regional cooperation to life.

#### *9. Encourage Partnerships*

New partnerships and coalitions, involving governments, non-governmental organisations, private sector, local government and local populations, have to be encouraged to ensure information flows, consensus building, and overall sustainable regional cooperation. These should include in particular arrangements, such as e.g. environmental service agreements, between upstream and downstream communities and users of transboundary watershed resources.

#### *10. Engage the international community*

Global conventions, UN organizations and other international agreements and programs can provide valuable support at the thematic level. Examples include the Conventions on Climate Change, Biodiversity, Wetlands, Desertification, and Migratory Species. Linkages with these mechanisms are encouraged to orient and empower various processes of regional co-operation. In addition, the long term commitment of the international community and engagement of donors will often be needed in support of sustainable regional development.

### **Our Commitment**

We urge the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg to take account of the outcome of this international conference on regional cooperation in mountain ranges, and call upon it to recommend and support the establishment of regional partnerships for sustainable development.

We pledge our support for regional initiatives and agreements for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathian, Caucasus and Central Asian mountains, and encourage all mountain regions of the world to follow suit.

Moreover we welcome cross-regional exchange of experience, and express support for international partnerships for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions.

We expect that the Global Mountain Summit in Bishkek in October 2002 will be a good opportunity to take forward the recommendations, roles and actions for all partners in regional and global cooperation in mountain areas.

We are convinced that we can act and that we must act. We know the principles.

29 June 2002, Berchtesgaden, Germany