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**International Year of Mountains and Working Party on the Management of
Mountain Watersheds**

(Item 12 of the provisional agenda)

Secretariat Note

Introduction

1. Chapter 13 is the section of UNCED Agenda 21 which addresses the sustainable development of mountains. These are considered fragile ecosystems and necessitate special efforts for a better knowledge of the resources they contain and sustained action for the development and conservation of mountain resources and communities. The main objectives of Chapter 13 aim at i) raising awareness of the importance of and improving understanding of sustainable mountain development issues at global, regional and national level; ii) protecting natural resources and developing technical and institutional arrangements for natural disaster reduction; iii) strengthening a global information network and database, for organizations, governments and individuals concerned with mountain issues; iv) strengthening

country capacity to improve planning, implementation and monitoring of sustainable mountain development programmes and activities; and v) combating poverty.

2. In 1993 FAO was designated Task Manager for the implementation of Chapter 13. In that role it is responsible for coordinating, steering and animating UN agencies' efforts to implement measures and recommendations prescribed in this chapter. Since then, it has been carrying out this responsibility through a variety of means, both internal and external, which are described below.

3. In 1998, the UN General Assembly took an additional important step in recognizing the importance of sustainable mountain development by declaring 2002 the International Year of Mountains and invited FAO to be the lead agency in the UN system responsible for preparing the observance of this year.

Decision to observe the International Year of Mountains

4. The idea to propose sustainable mountain development as a theme for an international year was first proposed by the president of the Kyrgyz Republic at the international conference "Mountain Research – Challenges for the 21st Century", convened in Bishkek in 1996. It was subsequently officially presented to the UN Secretary-General and after receiving strong support in ECOSOC, the resolution proclaiming an International Year of Mountains (IYM) to be celebrated in 2002 passed without vote in the UN General Assembly in November 1998. FAO was invited to act as Lead Agency for the year, a role which was approved by the FAO Council in November 1998.

5. Under the overall goal of ensuring sustainable development of mountain regions and the well being of their populations, the International Year of Mountains should serve, *inter alia*:

- To increase awareness of and knowledge about mountain ecosystems, their dynamics and functioning and their overriding importance in providing a number of strategic services and products essential to the well being of both rural and urban people and in particular to water supply and food security.
- To promote conservation and sustainable development of mountain resources for present and future human well-being.
- To promote and defend the cultural heritage of mountain communities.

6. These objectives will need to be achieved through a variety of means, including: generation and exchange of information; awareness raising and sensitization; education, training and extension; documentation of best practices based on successful field case studies; and promotion of mountain-specific policy formulation and legislation. Efforts will have to be made at both international and national levels and the IYM will be only considered a success if there is significant follow-up at the different levels.

Organizational activities for the implementation of Chapter 13

7. The implementation of Chapter 13, the related reporting and the preparations of the observance of the IYM constitute a compact body of activities in the FAO programme. A number of organizational arrangements have been effected which are recalled below.

Reactivating the Inter-Agency Group on Mountains

8. During 1999, FAO convened the fifth and sixth sessions of the *ad hoc* Inter-Agency Group on Mountains, thus restarting the collaborative mechanism on Chapter 13 implementation. This group, which has provided support and guidance to the task manager in the implementation of Chapter 13, will continue this role in the preparation and observance of the IYM. These meetings brought together leading international agencies and organizations involved in mountain development and conservation and laid the groundwork for coordinating further action and preparing the observance of the IYM.

Promoting networking on mountain issues

9. Networks of governmental and non-governmental institutions and individuals have become over time an essential tool in the implementation of Chapter 13. The Mountain Forum network was established in 1995 at the global level and has since constituted decentralized nodes in all regions. The network includes a European node, the European Mountain Forum, which is hosted at the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Gland, Switzerland.

Improving FAO organizational readiness

10. The implementation of Chapter 13 has helped further promote integration and interdepartmental cohesion within FAO in the development of activities relating to the conservation and development of mountain resources. To further promote this interdepartmental cooperation and integration, an interdepartmental working group on mountains has been reactivated. This group has started gathering information on relevant activities and contributing to the preparation of the IYM at the conceptual phase and will contribute actively to the operational phase when the moment arrives.

11. Regional and Sub-regional offices of FAO are expected to participate in and expand the scope of these activities. Focal points will have to be designated to animate cross-sectoral regional initiatives to prepare and implement the IYM. FAO country representatives will be provided with information on issues on mountain resources development and conservation and on approaches to observe the IYM.

Strengthening activities in the watershed management and sustainable mountain development programme

12. The preparation of the Programme of Work and Budget 2000-2001 has provided a new opportunity to strengthen the programme on mountains and watershed management. The new programme includes several clusters which will promote substantive activities in increasing awareness and information flow,

facilitating and improving networking and partnership and enhancing capacity at national level to plan and implement sustainable mountain development and watershed management programmes and activities.

13. This will be developed in close collaboration with regional and sub-regional offices, including sharing of resources, support of shared activities in partnership, etc. The identification of the major outside partners and collaborators in mountain-related activities and the promotion of a process to share responsibility including with NGOs will of course accompany this.

Steps towards the observance of the International Year of Mountains

14. A number of initiatives have been taken to start the preparation for the IYM, including dissemination of information, enlisting country support and guidance, conceptualisation of the IYM programme and consolidation of funding.

Enlisting country support and guidance

15. In a drive to fully inform and enlist the support of those governments particularly interested in mountain issues, FAO held in Rome, on 9 July 1999, a briefing meeting and discussion on the mountain agenda and on the IYM for Permanent Representatives to FAO. The outcome of the discussion emphasized the need to ensure that IYM implementation provides direct benefits to people and not only be limited to external and event-related celebrations. The special role of NGOs, and the importance of gender issues and of developing information and educational material was also stressed. The call was renewed to interested countries to support the process and provide necessary supplementary resources for a successful preparation and observance.

16. By December 2000, more elements to support and guide national participation will be available, including information and promotional packages and an established IYM coordination unit at FAO. The official IYM logo has already been released and made available for public use and a dedicated IYM web site has been established (www.mountains2002.org).

Concept for and means to prepare and observe the International Year of Mountains

17. To fully inform the preparatory process and provide a clear framework for the observance of the IYM, a concept paper and an assessment of needs and the formulation of a multi-donor trust fund were effected. This was also in response to the request by the 115th session of the FAO Council which recommended countries, in particular donor countries, to provide support and extra-budgetary resources to FAO.

Concept paper

18. The IYM concept paper has been formulated based on review and input from the *ad hoc* Inter-agency Group on Mountains. It aims to provide general guidelines and a framework for preparations for the IYM for all institutions and individuals involved in mountain-related issues.

19. Synthesis of the concept paper will be prepared and incorporated in the information packages that will support countries' preparations and observance of the IYM.

Resources needed to implement the International Year of Mountains

20. The 115th session of the Council recommended that FAO look into the needs for funding and to report to it in one of its upcoming sessions. The discussions and exchange of views developed on the subject, in particular the advice gathered from the consultations organized in-house and with partners in the Mountain Forum and in the *ad hoc* Inter-agency Group on Mountains, suggest an observance with the following characteristics:

- The observance should be based on an important outreach programme to build a shared vision of mountain realities through information, awareness-raising and education.
- Guidance and promotion of catalytic activities should help develop concrete local and national activities addressing issues and concerns at local and national levels.
- Substantive cognitive work should be done and the early decision by the UN General Assembly has been a comparative advantage of this year.
- It has been strongly advocated that gender issues, local communities, and overall social and environmental dimensions and services of mountains be among the major themes of the IYM.

21. The means needed for the observance of the IYM are aimed to support the following major clusters:

- Establishment of a specialized promotion and coordination unit to plan, coordinate, facilitate, monitor and report on IYM preparations and observance.
- Production of information, awareness-raising and education material to support the IYM.
- Support to and promotion of national observance.
- Key international events including regional and/or mountain range-based workshops and consultations or conferences.
- Studies and publications.
- Support to programme formulation.
- An international conference on mountains (funded separately).

22. Resources needed to cover all these activities and measures have been estimated at approximately US\$ 5 million, all of which need to be mobilized through extra-budgetary sources. Fund raising strategy will include bilateral and multilateral sources, as well as contributions from non-traditional sources such as private foundations and corporations. However, immediate contributions essential for the effective start-up of core activities, especially related to promotion and coordination of the IYM, will depend primarily on bilateral sources.

Special considerations for the European region

23. Mountains have been receiving increased attention in Europe in recent years, at least in part as a result of heightened awareness from Agenda 21 activities. The European Intergovernmental Consultation on Sustainable Mountain Development, which was held in two sessions (Aviemore, Scotland, April 1996 and Trento, Italy, October 1996), and the European Non-governmental Consultation on Mountains (Toulouse, France, July 1996) were important steps in this process. The intergovernmental process provided the first opportunity for European Governments to focus attention on the specific concerns of mountain ecosystems and communities, with a view towards developing more concrete action related to their development and protection. The NGO consultation helped identify many key issues and concerns of mountain peoples throughout Europe through an inquiry that was replied to by nearly 1,000 NGOs. This consultation also provided direct inputs to the discussion that was simultaneously occurring in the intergovernmental meeting.

24. Networking on mountain issues has also developed rapidly in recent years. In 1998 the European Mountain Forum (EMF) was established and currently serves as an important network of organizations and individuals concerned with mountain areas across Europe. The EMF has developed several regional nodes which allow for an even more specific treatment of local issues using the most appropriate language. It is also part of the global Mountain Forum network and as a result can take advantage of discussions and information exchange with other parts of the world. Several other organizations and institutions are working on mountain issues at the European level. These include the European Observatory on Mountain Forests, Euromontana, and the EFC/FAO Working Party on the Management of Mountain Watersheds (see below).

25. At an institutional level, it has become increasingly clear that better coordination and collaboration is required to avoid overlap and to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources. There has also been a tendency in recent years to deal with forestry and other natural resources use and land management issues in a more integrated manner, taking a broader view that includes economic and social concerns in addition to environmental and technical ones. Greater attention is now being paid to concepts such as multifunctionality and multiple use resource management. Sustainable mountain development is a term that is becoming more widely used in many circles to embrace a more holistic approach to development and conservation in mountain regions.

26. Among recent events on mountains that have taken place in Europe, a major mountain meeting, the World Mountain Forum¹, was held in June 2000 in Chambéry, France in the overall context of the International Year of Mountains. The event brought together hundreds of representatives of mountain communities from throughout the world to discuss and share information on issues of common concern. The drafting of a world charter on mountains was proposed by the organizers of the meeting and a background document to initiate this process was presented. A new organization of people from mountain regions was also established.

27. Preparations for the IYM at country level have already begun in Europe. Most notably, Italy has established an Italian National IYM Committee which is made up of a mix of researchers, politicians and practitioners. It has begun planning and even holding a number of activities and events directly related to the IYM observance in Italy, as well as abroad. The committee has served as an example to other countries interested in observing the IYM. Given the emphasis and importance of national level action, it is expected that many other countries in Europe will follow in establishing national structures to prepare for the observance.

Activities of the Working Party on the Management of Mountain Watersheds

28. The Working Party on the Management of Mountain Watersheds held its 22nd session in Toulouse, France, from 12 to 14 September 2000. Following up on the conclusions and recommendations of both the 21st session of the Working Party and the 29th session of the Commission in 1998, the Working Party attempted to refocus and streamline its work and to reduce costs. This was achieved by shortening the overall length of the 22nd session and focusing on one principle theme: "Integrated land use planning in mountain areas". Additionally, the FAO/IUFRO Symposium, which has long been an integral part of each Working Party session, was held this year just prior to the session's official opening, in a further effort to reduce costs. The topic of the symposium, "Landscape Management and Natural Disasters", was however, closely tied to the theme of the 22nd session, and its results and conclusions were presented during the session. The Working Party also made proposals for a revised mandate and vision, and determined a limited number of concrete, low cost activities to be carried out in the inter-sessional period leading up to the 23rd session. These include:

- establishment of a permanent internet site to serve as a discussion and exchange forum for the Working Party and provide access to working papers, reports and other documentation of the group, including unpublished material. FAO offered to host this site on its Forestry Department website, which already includes a small section devoted to the Working Party. Information and material would be updated monthly and could likely be done within existing budgetary constraints;
- holding an electronic conference on a specific theme, possibly related to follow-up to the theme of the 22nd session and/or in preparation of the 23rd session. This should be focused in terms of content and pragmatic with respect to length and cost. It was suggested that the European Mountain Forum be considered as a possible partner in providing the technical support to hold such an electronic conference;

¹ The World Mountain Forum event had no insitutional connection with the Mountain Forum network.

- developing an historical retrospective on the last 50 years of Working Party activities and their consequences related to prevention work that would culminate in a document to be presented at the 23rd session in 2002. It could serve not only as an interesting view looking back at the early work of the group, but could possibly assist the group in determining its current role and orientation in the present day context. This work could also be considered a contribution toward the International Year of Mountains – 2002.

29. These activities are expected to contribute to a better prepared session in 2002 and to enhance the overall impact and effectiveness of the group's work by facilitating and providing more opportunities for exchange. The full report of the 22nd session of the Working Party is being made available to delegates of the 30th session of the European Forestry Commission.