

## Quito declaration: Draft charter for world mountain people

Association des populations des Montagnes du Monde, Quito, Ecuador

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The representatives of Mountain Territories from forty countries met on 20 September 2002 in Quito (Ecuador) and adopted the main points of the following declaration. This charter was then drafted as faithfully as possible in the spirit of the meeting. In keeping with the mission assigned to them, the encounter organizers submit this text for approval. They would like as many mountain towns or communities, organizations and inhabitants as possible to ratify it. By this broad adhesion, it will become the "Charter of World Mountain People". The charter will be binding on the signatories. By this Charter, mountain people all over the world express their desire to work together to promote a certain idea of the mountains and their future.

**1. We believe in the future of mountain regions!** Leaving the mountains is a painful experience for all its children. Because the mountains demand strength and patience, renouncement and sacrifice, energy and courage, imagination and combativeness, because we have learned to respect and to defend their integrity, our attachment to the mountains is strong. Because in return, the mountain territory offers us the beauty and serenity of its landscapes, inspiring thoughtfulness and meditation, and naturally keeping us in harmony with nature, it is a source of inspiration and elevation. In the mountains, we maintain the memory of generations before us who have shaped our territory. We are grateful to them for having transmitted this heritage and this culture to us. **We must not let this territory deteriorate, this heritage be dilapidated, this culture become trivial.** We are not condemned to abandonment or exile. Our territory can support all its inhabitants and welcome others. Real perspectives exist. Contemporary society expresses great expectations. Technical progress does not erase the difficulties, but it does reduce them. Agriculture, stock grazing, forestry, recover new vitality by offering new products and exercising new functions and our crafts and our industry show their capacity to adapt to the new economic context. We dispose of major natural resources - water, energy, minerals, space - that can be better exploited economically and ecologically, and their proceeds can be better shared. Tourism, when under control, can be a factor of major, shared financial flows. Our local values and know-how, our intimate knowledge of our territory, continue to be exceptional assets for progress. We are determined to make this potential a reality: for this reason we believe in the future of the mountains.

**2. We claim our rightful place in society.** Mountain areas are different; they need not be separate. Society must not exclude their people nor marginalize their territory. Nor must it try to standardize or assimilate, ignoring the specificities and particularities of these regions. Mountain people should have access to the same social and political rights and the same opportunity for development. We know there is a long way to go before we achieve this. Certain mountain people have taken that path, always with great difficulty: they now are both recognized and respected. Too many others are still rejected, plundered, held in contempt and confined. Some are rich but subject to an increasingly demanding market. Others have attempted to gain status through assistance. Still others perpetuate unfairness in their own communities. **Mountain people do not demand equivalence of situations; they demand equity to durably correct disadvantages and injustice.** They are aware that first they must apply to themselves what they demand of others. We want to construct a society that provides key services for social, economic and political progress to all its members: vocational training and education, housing and health, the possibility of communicating and travel. Mountain people do not want to continue in an inequality that jeopardizes their dignity. They do not want to appear as eternal supplicants when they are demanding only justice and rights. They want to dispose of the means of expression and representation to democratically and forcefully defend both.

**3. We want to broaden the range of possibilities for mountain areas.** Our territory, which was long held in disdain, increasingly interests our contemporaries. For some, it is an area for leisure and relaxation, for others a natural environment dedicated to conservation. The mountains cannot be reduced to these two dimensions. We need to assume these two recreational and environmental functions that are necessary for a balanced society and to maintain natural wealth and our development, but we should not identify with them. We do not want to be exclusively a host territory, guardians of nature or a service society. **We have other ambitions and other assets to promote.** We want to construct a society founded on the diversity of trades, and social and human components, as a factor of economic solidarity and social enrichment. We want activities related to the soil, agriculture, stock grazing, forestry, that make a living for the population, maintain and renew natural resources, to be considered of general interest in mountain areas. We refuse to base the wealth of the mountains on the sale of its heritage and farming out the territory. The wealth of the mountains must grow from our capacity to produce and create real value added, without deteriorating our capital, to the greater benefit of mountain people and the national community. In this way, we want to offer young people alternatives to leaving and to invite them to invest all their creativity in a new development of the mountains, their "country".

**4. We want to recover control of our development.** We have the feeling that we have less and less influence on the future of our territory. Strategic decisions have too often been taken by companies from outside the area that

decide on the future of our resources without us. The management of the territory is in the hands of an administration that wants to narrowly control its usage. Outside agents, institutions or organizations too often impose models or techniques that undermine the structure of local societies. We are subject to diverse and various lobbies that want to decide on our happiness, without us and often against us. The mountains tend to become a subordinate territory, an object territory, whose fate is settled without consulting the local population, towns and communities that make it up. For lack of a sufficient hold on the situation, we become powerless to change the course of events, to control the economic and social forces that can cause sharp breaches in the evolution of our society. **We want to put an end to this situation: we want to be the advocates of our country.** Mountain people must reclaim their role as the real agents of their future. They must recover the power to manage their territory, not without submitting to rules for public utility that must be developed democratically and in consultation with their representatives. We want to master exploitation of our resources and fully benefit from their economic results. We want to choose our own path for the development and management of our territory. By improving our capacity to conceive and decide, we want to gain better control of the channels for our products. We want scientists and experts, whatever their specialty to work alongside us. We want to be present at higher levels where strategic decisions that influence our future are taken. We want to be recognized as real partners, through our communities and our organizations, with a contractual right to contribute to decisions affecting us.

**5. We want to act by means of strong, united communities.** Individually we can do much for our territory, each person in his/her field of activity or responsibility. The mountains very much need these initiatives. But our real capacity to make headway for the entire community to which we belong can only come from a joint effort of all, a convergent action of the inhabitants, pooling the resources in our mountain towns and communities. It is up to them to spark and carry our collective determination to go forward. It is up to us all to give them the concrete means - legal, financial, technical, scientific - to better manage the common territory, provide services to the population, develop facilities, valorize collective resources, promote economic development, maintain the richness of local cultures. It is up to the communities to gain a position to exercise these missions through cooperation. **Our commitment as citizens is also the key to collective success.** If management must be delegated, it must also be assisted upstream by close participation of citizens and reinforced downstream by regular assessment. This is the price of consolidating the community's capacity to make headway and to ensure progress of all its components, particularly the most disadvantaged or isolated. Having mobilized all our resources and fulfilled our own obligations, we can demand that the State meet those of the national society with regard to mountain communities that have reduced means to cope with a more difficult environment. The first obligation of the State is justice:

different situations require different policies. The second is freedom of management: a democratic community means autonomous management.

**6. We want to organize in order to influence decisions concerning us.** The development of mountain areas still depends to a large extent on the rules of the economic game applied at national level or retained in international agreements. Agriculture, services, the forest, industry, trade, even culture are strongly subject to the mechanisms set in motion. Mountain regions are particularly vulnerable to liberal policies in many ways, because of their fragility and limited competitiveness. They are also very dependent on public action due to the weakness of their own means. **For this reason, we must be present everywhere decisions are taken concerning our territories, from the local to the international scale.** Our spokesmen will be better heard if they are representative of mountain populations. They will be that much more convincing if they base their arguments on high-quality studies and dossiers. We need to give them the democratic legitimacy and the capacity to negotiate on behalf of representative mountain organizations having real means of action. The existence and the strength of these organizations are particularly needed for mountain people because they are in a situation of under-representation in their own countries and must fight a natural movement that tends to satisfy population centres rather than territories. So we need to ensure representation of mountain territories everywhere to obtain favourable arbitration. But we also need to discover the universal aspects in our particular problems and join forces with those who defend the same values.

**7. We want to construct the community of mountain men and women.** We consider that the cause of the mountains can bring together mountain people from all continents, from south and north, from east and west, in the same movement, because, despite our differences in culture, income, living conditions and social organization, we all have something in common: attachment to our mountain territory, and the determination not to dissolve the relationship that binds us to it, to continue to live in the mountains and to ensure that they last. We consider that we are confronted with the same fundamental challenge, equitable development under our control, in a historical context where identities are waning in favour of a single cultural model where the weakest are threatened with growing gaps and delays. **We want to come together to answer these challenges by helping each other and mobilizing our resources to the benefit of all mountain communities.** We want to create a community where the most disadvantaged will be defended first. We want everyone to be aware - mountain populations, nations, and the international community - of what the mountains represent and what they contribute to humanity in terms of products, services, environment, social practices, collective management, spatial management, values, and cultures. We want to totally assume our responsibilities with regard to the national and international communities. Mountain people will achieve this better when they are democratically organized and control the future of their territory.

Our alliance should enable very different people to come together on a common project that is very dear to them: taking the destiny of their country in hand. Starting with local communities, we can thus constitute a real community for the future of all mountain regions in the world.

**To ensure achievement of the objectives of this Charter:**

- developing new perspectives for mountain areas
- conquering new social and political rights
- broadening the range of possibilities for mountain areas
- recovering control of our development
- reinforcing cohesion and autonomy of communities
- constituting representative mountain organizations
- constructing a socially conscious worldwide community

**We make a commitment to:**

1. **Work** to achieve these objectives in our field of activity and responsibility, to inform and encourage mountain communities and organizations to adhere to them.

2. **Promote** the creation of a movement of mountain People for this purpose:

- meeting in each country in an association of mountain people constituted with reference to the WMPA statutes, drawing support from local territorial communities and associating representatives of organizations that take part in the management and the development of the territory, as well as from researchers and experts working alongside mountain populations
- grouping these national associations, once they have been constituted, in larger organizations on the scale of mountain ranges or continents
- uniting in the World Mountain People Association

3. **Develop** actions and encounters between mountain people from various mountain territories.

4. **Undertake** cooperation actions between mountain people by means of these associations or other organizations with the help of NGO partners.

5. **Construct** alliances or partnerships with movements or organizations that have similar objectives and have the same values.

This charter is proposed throughout the world to all mountain towns, communities and organizations, through the channel of the regional WMPA officials. We invite all those who share this vision of the mountains and its future - individuals, communities or towns - to sign this charter and send this

document with their comments to the regional representatives of WMPA. These observations will be presented to the WMPA Bureau meeting to be held early September 2003. The Charter will be definitively adopted in view of these comments.

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### **Notes to readers**

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