

# Opening and Closing Statements

## Opening Address by Neten Zangmo

A very good morning!

“The interdependent nature of the external environment and people’s inward nature has verily been vindicated by our present experience.

Being attentive to the nature of the interdependence of all creatures, both animate and inanimate, one should never slacken in one’s efforts to preserve and conserve nature’s energy.

Forsake wastage; pollute not the clean, clear nature of the four elements and destroy the well-being of the people; but absorb yourself in actions that are beneficial for all.”

This quotation is an excerpt from a renowned Buddhist monk’s reflection on “Ecological Responsibility”.

Lams,

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji,

Representatives of the International Community,

Representatives of the Royal Government,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen —

On behalf of the people and the Royal Government of Bhutan, it is my honoured responsibility and pleasure to extend to all the delegates, our heartiest and warmest welcome to our country, where mountains stand lofty and formidable, but breathtakingly beautiful, the pride of its men and women who throughout the centuries have treasured their natural environment and have looked upon it as the source of all life.

At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I feel that it is only appropriate for this milestone event, “Celebrating Mountain Women”, to be hosted in Bhutan, where people and nature live in close harmony; where Gross National Happiness, as propounded by His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, is its development beacon; the middle path its approach to achieving the vision; and a country where perhaps men feel threatened by women!



Neten Zangmo

It is indeed our privilege to host this landmark event.

It is only befitting that the Honourable Prime Minister is gracing the inaugural ceremony of this significant event. His Excellency is also the Minister for Agriculture, responsible for Forestry and Livestock Services, and is in addition, the Chairman of the National Environment Commission. We are indeed honoured, Sir. On behalf of the delegates of the organising committee, I have the privilege to extend a very warm and hearty welcome to Your Excellency.

A very warm and hearty welcome also to all our esteemed guests. Madams and Sirs, Aums and Dashos, we are indeed gratified by your mere presence.

For our mountain countries, the International Year of Mountains is recognition that mountains and

mountain people matter very much. It is a recognition that could not escape the wisdom of common sense and the patience of time, for it is a common peril that unites us: mountain people and people of the lowlands, the powerful rich and voiceless poor, developed and developing countries. It is after all, the survival of humanity.

We have gathered here today to celebrate the spirit, courage, and hard work of mountain women and those associated with them from mountain countries. A significant and important outcome of this conference will be the message to the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, which will ensure that the realities, achievements, dreams, and challenges of mountain women will be heard and taken into consideration in global mountain development policies and practices.

The themes of the conference are these: first, Natural Resources and Environment, which sustain our very existence. Second, Culture and Indigenous Knowledge. These sustain us as individuals, families, communities and societies, both spiritually and socially. The third theme is Entrepreneurship; while Legal, Political and Human Rights, the fourth theme, empower us and sustain our physical, psychological, political, and spiritual health and well-being — which are also the principal tenets of “Gross National Happiness”. The fifth theme of CMW is Health and Well-being.

The conference has brought face-to-face, mountain women and men, NGOs and civil societies, planners and policy makers, researchers, and not least importantly, development partners, to share rich experiences, articulate challenges and concerns, and to forge a closer cooperation in defining solutions that will be articulated in the local, national, regional,

and global development policies and strategies and implemented in a sincere spirit and form — at this point I recall the youth at the WSSD who said signatures do not feed people and words on paper do not stop deforestation.

Amongst us today are many distinguished and accomplished women and men who have contributed and continue to contribute with their vision, social consciousness, and commitment to many commendable initiatives which have transformed the lives of mountain communities all over the world.

Let us all celebrate the courage, endurance, selflessness, and ingenuity of our mountain women as we gear up to blaze new trails in our journey towards the goal of Gross National Happiness for our peoples.

Let us sing mountain songs, enjoy the rich variety of mountain food, and listen to the wisdom of mountain stories.

I am hopeful that the drive and enthusiasm of the delegates and the momentum gained from Johannesburg to Bishkek will ensure that the objectives of this conference are achieved. But in the end, this will not depend on how eloquently the declaration is drafted and announced on 4 October, but by the quality of life that our mountain women, men, and communities achieve one year, five years, and ten years from now.

Dear delegates, I hope that you will enjoy the beauty of our mountains and the warmth and hospitality of our people, and that your brief stay will be a memorable one.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!

## Opening Address by the Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan, H.E. Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji

Distinguished Delegates,

Representatives of International Organisations and Agencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen —

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning to welcome you to Bhutan and to the global gathering “Celebrating Mountain Women”. It is indeed a great honour and privilege for my country to host this important gathering.

Mountains are crucial to all life on earth. They are home to one tenth of the world’s population and are a source of biodiversity, minerals, and forests. More than 3 billion people rely on mountains for water to grow food, to produce electricity, to sustain industries, and most importantly, to drink. As you are all aware, the United Nations declared 2002 as the International Year of Mountains to increase awareness of the global importance of mountain ecosystems and the challenges faced by mountain people; and to stimulate long-term, on-the-ground action. This unprecedented opportunity to address mountain issues and celebrate mountain culture evolved from the 1992 Rio Summit, where mountains became the singular focus of Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development. We, the mountain people, have made the most of this opportunity and have already marked the year with many international events, such as the High Summit, the International Conference of Mountain Children, international meetings on mountain ecosystems, sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions, and world meetings on mountain populations.

“Celebrating Mountain Women” is one of the events marking the IYM and I am pleased that the organisers have chosen to hold the event in Bhutan. I think it is very apt that the event be held in this country. We are an entirely mountainous country with almost 80% of our population living in rural areas, and therefore our policies in conservation and sustainable development aim to tackle the challenges faced in the mountainous regions due to the physical terrain, remoteness, lack of infrastructure, capital, and so on. All our social and economic development policies are geared towards achieving our ultimate goal of “Gross National Happiness” which is to be achieved through the four main pillars of economic development, good governance, environmental protection and conservation, and preservation of cultural heritage. I am confident that the outcome of this gathering will support and complement our efforts to achieve our ultimate goal since the thematic issues of this gathering are Natural Resources and Environment; Health and Well-being, Entrepreneurship; Legal, Political and Human Rights, and Culture and Indigenous Knowledge. We hope we can share some of our experiences and also learn from yours.

It is a known fact that life in all mountain countries is hard, and it is harder for women. While women have a difficult time they are not helpless. There are many cases where women have transformed their communities by their vision and social consciousness. They have made their environment a better place to live in, brought people together, and served as an example to others.



H.E. Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji

Over the last three decades, there have been declarations in which mountain women’s concerns have been incorporated. In 1972, at the first global meeting on the environment in Stockholm, the conference noted that women were an important part of environmental solutions. After Stockholm, importance was accorded to mountain women in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). In Johannesburg last month, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) reaffirmed the principles of 1992, taking the last decade’s reality into consideration. However, in each of these conferences and declarations, women had to struggle to place their concerns on the table.

Parallel to these environment dialogues and debates were the women’s conferences. In 1975, the first UN Conference on women was held in Mexico City, followed by international meetings in 1980, 1985, and then 1995. Each of these meetings paid some attention to the issues of mountain women. A great deal has been learned about mountainous communities, especially mountain women, over the last decade. This is due to the persistent research, documentation, and fieldwork of many individuals and institutions, some of whom are present here today.

Today, with technological advancements, mountain women who have been living in isolated and remote areas can be connected to each other and can communicate outside their immediate environment. This has had an empowering influence on women. For example, mountain women who for decades have been isolated in subsistence living, now dream of branching out into entrepreneurial activities that will expand their horizons and generate income for themselves and those with whom they communicate. Many women who are in the audience here today are such women.

Mountain women are often guardians of agricultural biodiversity and know more about plant varieties, characteristics, and plant susceptibility to diseases, as well as options for food preparation, than men. Knowing this, how do we ensure that this knowledge

is preserved, passed on and shared with others? How do we tap the potential of women, while bringing men along at the same time? These are some of the questions I hope this gathering will address.

We in Bhutan believe that every individual has a role to play in life and society. Both sons and daughters are treated by equally by their parents. Therefore, there is no discrimination towards women. The status of women in Bhutan, I am proud to state, is much better than in many other developing countries. The inheritance practices are more in favour of women and there are no wage differentials. The Marriage Act has been amended recently to protect women.

It is true that you will see fewer women in management positions or in white-collar jobs. However, this is because in the earlier phase of our development, schools were few and far between, sometimes requiring days of walking to reach, and also because parents were more protective of their girl children. Perhaps this reflects the specific nature of challenges faces by mountain countries where settlements are scattered, accessibility is difficult, and delivery of services impossible.

We in Bhutan, under the wise and far-sighted leadership of His Majesty the King, have tried to address these constraints and have mitigated the challenges through the Five Year Development Plans (FYP). Today, 77.8% of the rural population has access to basic health facilities within a walking distance of two hours. The enrolment ratio in schools between male and female children is almost 50:50. Of the 117,297 students enrolled this year, 54,284 are girls. We also have an NGO, the National Women's Association of Bhutan, which was established in 1981. This NGO continues to provide support to rural women.

During the Ninth FYP, beginning in July 2002, the above programmes and activities will be continued, while priority will be given to infrastructure development, particularly roads, telecommunications, schools, hospitals, and market infrastructure. Twenty-five per cent of the plan outlay has been earmarked for health, education, water supply, and sanitation.

We have realised that the present population growth rate has to be further reduced if the country's fragile ecosystem and economic growth are to be maintained. The Government has endeavoured to educate the general population and Her Majesty Queen Ashi Sangay Chhoden Wangchuck, the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, has travelled the length and breadth of the country to spread the message of population control and development. I fear that the population pressure will ultimately lead to the

degradation of the forests and the destruction of the mountains if corrective measures are not taken now.

In conclusion, I look forward to the Declaration of this event, documenting the realities, achievements, dreams, and challenges of mountain women. I understand that there is a broad consensus on several fronts related to mountain women. Some of these are as follows.

- Mountain women's concerns are similar and yet different from the concerns of women in the plains.
- Mountain women make a substantial contribution to their environment, for which they get a little or no credit.
- Despite the odds, mountain women have made great strides in preserving their habitat, transferring cultural values to the next generation, and in seeking new and different ways to enter the world of enterprise and commerce.
- Mountain women want contact with the external world and to be part of the twenty-first century.
- Policies and practices related to sustainable development of mountain regions are not possible without the involvement of women in an integral way.
- Bringing mountain women into the mainstream of development needs the cooperation of many development partners, including mountain communities, NGOs and civil society organisations, policy makers, governments, researchers, the corporate sector, and the media.

I understand that from Bhutan the voices and actions of mountain women will be taken to Kyrgyzstan, where the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, the final global gathering for the IYM, will be held towards the end of this month. The Bhutan Declaration will be presented at the plenary, and ICIMOD, in partnership with other organisations, will initiate and be part of a round table session and panel presentations. Follow-up activities recommended by the participants at this meeting will also be formulated into projects, plans, and action. Together, I hope, we will be able to protect the mountains and remove the mountainous challenges relating to many mountain people.

We wish you all a pleasant stay in our country and a successful deliberation. With this, I declare this important conference, "Celebrating Mountain Women", open.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!



## Opening Address by the Director General of ICIMOD, Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell

Your Excellency, the Prime Minister of Bhutan,  
Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji,

Dashos,

Mountain Women of the World — of South America, of Africa, of Europe, of North America, and of Asia,

...and fellow men who respect and deeply appreciate mountain women, and who sometimes (and on this occasion particularly) wish we were mountain women, to better express our solidarity with you —

For my colleagues and myself at ICIMOD, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, this occasion is a dream come true. A dream conceived in the Andes over four years ago, a dream that has become reality through the joining of key partners and the guidance of a dedicated group of mountain women from around the world.

This is the first time the mountain women of the world have come together in a world celebration — a global meeting to chart future actions to make their lives better.

Among the approximately 250 people from 35 countries here with us today, we are pleased that over one-third are mountain women from the grassroots.

We have with us farmers and agriculturalists, craftswomen and entrepreneurs, herders and livestock specialists, writers and film makers, scholars and independent thinkers; as well as development workers and service providers, networkers and advocates, mountain climbers, spiritual leaders; and of course mothers and care givers, daughters, sisters and wives, home makers and bread makers.

The world's attention is focused on mountains this year and much concern is being expressed about mountain regions' disproportionate poverty, their vulnerability to environmental degradation, the fact that mountains supply 60% of the world's fresh water, that they contain important biological diversity, that they are refuge to extraordinary cultural diversity, and are sacred and beautiful places of spiritual renewal.

And yet mountain people are neglected in policy and development, and marginalised in government decision-making. Moreover, mountains are home to most of the world's conflicts. Those at the centre, the backbone of mountain livelihoods, the mountain women, are rarely heard, rarely govern, rarely seen for who they are, too often not allowed to grow, learn, and energise our search for a better future.

In most, but not all, of our Hindu Kush-Himalayas and mountains of the world, it is women who are the main farmers, the ones who select and sow the seeds, weed and harvest, thresh and prepare the grains, feed and milk the cows, weave the clothes,

feed the children, and care for forests and pasture.

Yet rarely do they own the land, obtain or control the cash from market sales, receive the information on technology choices or markets, or make the policy decisions that affect their lives.



Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell

Mountain women work longer hours — in Nepal, eleven hours of productive labour to men's seven hours — but too often do not reap the benefits.

We are gathered here in this beautiful, thoughtful mountain kingdom to change this.

Many of you have demonstrated already how this can be done.

Women's strengths in social mobilisation, in developing new skills and self-confidence, have been proven by your wonderful work throughout the world.

You are here:

- To bring the world's attention to the strength and plight of mountain women
- To chart courses for future action
- To build networks for solidarity and strength
- To celebrate the role of mountain women
- To strengthen their rights to resources
- To voice concerns and influence public affairs
- To bring peace where men wage war
- To make all our lives better, and
- To develop our concrete follow-up actions

ICIMOD is privileged to organise this event with many partners and under the guidance of the Steering Committee, and with the support and collaboration of the Mountain Forum, UNIFEM, IFAD, SDC, ICCO and TMI: all organisations that share of our commitment to really care for mountain women. This event is part of our commitment to securing better livelihoods for mountain people of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas and the world.

Most of all, we are all privileged to be hosted by the Royal Government of Bhutan — a developing mountain country, which perhaps more than any other, has shown its sincerity and commitment to doing development the right way for all its people — both women and men. Honourable Prime Minister, you inspire us; Bhutan inspires us.

As a member country of ICIMOD, we seek to serve the Hindu Kush-Himalayas as a mountain learning and knowledge centre. We are honoured to learn from all of you. May all of you make a difference in

the lives of mountain women. May this be the birth of a global movement for mountain women, and better, more sustainable lives for all of us.

This morning you are hearing, yet again, many men's voices. From now on, let it be women who show us the way.

Thank you!

## Opening Address by the Representative of IFAD, Rome, Dr. Ganesh Thapa

The Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan,  
Senior Officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan,  
Distinguished Guests, and Participants —

I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to address this conference. I bring with me the best wishes from my colleagues at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for the success of this important meeting. IFAD is an international financing institution and a specialised UN agency focusing on agriculture and rural development. IFAD's mission is to enable the rural poor to overcome their poverty. We are very happy for the opportunity to collaborate with the Royal Government of Bhutan, ICIMOD, and other bilateral and multilateral bodies in organising this conference.

IFAD's strategic framework for 2002-2006 identifies the addressing of gender inequalities and increasing women's capabilities as preconditions for achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015. We believe that unless efforts and resources to address gender inequalities by increasing the resilience of poor rural women are significantly scaled up, little progress will be made towards achieving this target. The strategic framework also points to the importance of empowerment and institutional development, which we see as an integral component of poverty reduction. No change is sustainable if poor rural women and men do not acquire a greater capacity to influence the decisions — public and private — that have a bearing on their lives.

IFAD's field experience and analysis has shown that poverty in Asia and other parts of the world is concentrated along two dimensions: geographical and social. Geographically, poverty is concentrated in less favoured areas such as remote uplands and mountains, marginal coastal areas, and rain fed areas. Socially, it is concentrated among women, indigenous peoples, the landless, and small and marginal farmers. This implies that the mountain women are doubly disadvantaged. I am confident that this conference will address the issues faced by these mountain women in different parts of the world.

IFAD has accumulated considerable experience in designing and implementing projects and programmes for the various groups of the rural poor. It is significant that in almost all IFAD-funded projects, women have always emerged as a notable group of participants. This important feedback demonstrates the desire and potential of women to be agents of change — once their chance to build human capital and physical assets has been improved, or once they have the capability to find 'exit options' from exploitative home or work situations. Today, in many areas of the world, particularly in the mountains and other less favoured areas, there are more poor women than there are poor men. Women tend to experience poverty more

deeply; they also find it more difficult to escape from poverty. Women suffer from more severe social deprivation. Even in the more egalitarian societies of the indigenous peoples — where women often have an immediate ownership and decision-making role over land — there is a disturbing trend of final and ultimate control over land and any other property increasingly being exercised by men.



Dr. Ganesh Thapa

Enhancing women's capabilities requires action on a number of fronts. Property rights, access to finance, including micro-finance, building of women's organisations, effective participation in community forums, measures to curb domestic and other violence against women, tackling discrimination against the girl child in matters of nutrition, health care and education — all these are aspects of transforming gender relations. Micro-finance, for example, has been shown to have beneficial effects not just on women's entitlements to nutrition and health care; it also improves women's mobility, social visibility, dignity, and self-esteem.

The effects of transforming gender relations, however, go much beyond benefiting women alone. They are efficient and cost-effective measures for reducing poverty and increasing GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per person, particularly through lower child mortality, higher literacy, and lower couple fertility. IFAD's Rural Poverty Report for Asia and the Pacific argues that enhancing women's agency will enable an increase in agricultural production and productivity, and will create a ripple effect across all spheres of human existence. Enhancing women's agency could create new dynamics in the politics of transforming the nature of human societies. This strategy of promoting women's agency will be part of IFAD-supported projects in all the less favoured areas, including the mountains.

In addressing poverty in Asia and other regions of the world, IFAD seeks to address the structural causes of the lack of agency of the poor. This means, for IFAD, the challenge of tackling the causes of restricted access to productive resources, and actually increasing control over the use of these resources. Changes in access to resources, such as property reform for forests in the uplands and mountains, access to finance and other resources, and land reform through land distribution to the landless, will increase the income and overall capability achievement of the poor. It will also contribute to increasing production and productivity in their respective local and national economies. Such changes are redistributions that enhance productivity,

essential if poverty reduction is to be sustained in an age of globalisation.

In the uplands and mountains, the central issue is secure and reasonable property rights over the forests, land and water, the productive bases of women, the indigenous people, and other marginalised groups of rural poor. Through their management of the forest systems, these people provide the rest of the world with many valuable environmental services, including carbon sequestration, hydrological services, and biodiversity conservation. But these and other valuable services are not compensated for in any way. Instead, the people who perform these services are forced to bear costs 'external' to the mainstream economies. IFAD's property rights reform proposal aims to link improved livelihoods with increased provision of environmental services. This important reform proposal recognises the right of the indigenous people to sell these services, and to manage their land-use systems so as to combine the needs of production with those of providing local, regional, and global environmental services.

Strategic gender impact and women's social transformational roles have also been observed in many IFAD-funded projects. For example, in the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development Project in India,

Self-help Groups (SHGs) of women took up contracts for local construction and, with the help of supportive bureaucrats, were instrumental in the elimination of contractors for such work in all indigenous people's areas of the state. More recently, federations of SHGs in the project have taken on multiple functions in addressing social and administrative issues at the block and sub-divisional levels. They have taken up issues like construction of toilets, repair of roads, improvements in drinking water and electricity supply — all matters of good governance at the local level. In other IFAD-funded projects, women's groups were able to fight against social evils such as female infanticide and alcoholism.

I am happy to see that women representatives from three Indigenous Women's Resource Centres from China and India, supported by IFAD, are here with us. We all look forward to hearing from them and from participants of other regions of the world about their work in empowering women from different mountain regions of the world. I believe that the conference will provide a unique opportunity for all of us to exchange ideas and experiences, and to network with one another. I wish the conference great success.

Thank you.



## Opening Remarks by Regional Director of UNIFEM-South Asia Regional Office, Ms. Chandni Joshi

Honourable Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan, Your Excellency,

Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen —

It really is a privilege for UNIFEM to be partnering this global conference, “Celebrating Mountain Women”, with ICIMOD and the Mountain Forum, in collaboration with other international agencies. I take this opportunity to congratulate both ICIMOD and the Mountain Forum for taking the lead in organising such an innovative celebration. This platform will bring to the fore mountain women’s voices, concerns, and realities, which have been negligible in the development discourse for so long.

One of the most remarkable things that has been happening towards the end of the last century — no less dramatic than the developments in science and technology — is the emergence of the global consensus to respect, protect, and promote the human rights of the people as the ultimate and immediate goal of governments, institutions, and civil society. People-centred development that respects the fundamental freedoms and human dignity of individuals has now become a common and shared agenda of the international community. This gathering is very opportune and special for us, the disciples of development.

Since yesterday, I have been feeling nostalgic being here in Paro — some of it is of course childhood memories, and the other is the occasion of this celebration. I will begin with briefly sharing the vignettes of some personal experiences with you. In 1990, UNIFEM had organised a series of peasant women summits in four countries of South Asia — Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan — a process that carried their voices to the Earth Summit in Rio. During this process, the peasant women had the opportunity, for the first time, to share a platform with the policy planners, and to express their views on the management of natural resources. At one of these summits in Kathmandu, the women were assembled in a small room talking animatedly with senior functionaries responsible for charting National Perspective Plans. It was well past sunset and one of the senior-most (and I must add, one of the most gender sensitive) members of the National Planning Commission happened to look at his watch, indicating that it was getting late. The women would have none of it. This was one day they had got to talk to the Planning Commission and they would talk whatever it took, or however long it took. If that meant someone’s meal was being delayed, so be it. I can’t forget that day or the women’s faces.

Listening to them, I felt like there was so much one did not know about, there was so much one needed to unlearn about development as we saw it, and so much to learn from these women and their sheer existential realities. They simply needed to be given

a chance and an opportunity to talk, while we for a change, listened. In a similar setting in Bangladesh, in reply to a question as to what message they had for their government, the answer was, “We will tell



Ms. Chandni Joshi

them that they should not approach us individually: we stand united as one group and they should ask us collectively what we want.” In Bangalore they told us, “We want equal participation.” Then, this year in Afghanistan, it was the women themselves who outlined their role in the re-building of their country.

This confidence was similar everywhere, only the women’s faces were different. They are their own advocates, and entirely capable of having a meaningful dialogue with any stakeholder on an even footing, with knowledge, confidence, and dignity. Women know what they need and what their families and communities need — as they have been preserving natural resources all their lives. What they have said time and again is that they need spaces and opportunities for equal participation. What we have learnt from them is the source of UNIFEM’s work in South Asia. We try to apply this very approach in all our work, be it engendering planning processes, gender budgeting exercises, carrying out a large census exercise, facilitating the implementation of CEDAW, or combating violence against women.

Despite progress in many areas, women worldwide face barriers to their advancement. Women are the majority of the world’s poor, lack economic and political power, and are the primary victims of conflict and violence. While mountain women face many of the same inequalities as women throughout the developing world, they face additional challenges. Local realities, such as altitude, rough terrain, severe climate, limited access to resources and services, environmental degradation, and the out-migration of men are factors that contribute to making their situation even more difficult.

Despite the recognition of women’s rights as human rights in Vienna, their identification as an issue of central importance at Beijing, and the creation of human instruments like CEDAW, women’s rights continue to be excluded from the mainstream human rights discourse, both at the conceptual and operational levels. True people-centred development must be underpinned with the imperative of equality between women and men at all levels. This calls for equal material well-being, a value system based on equity and equality, equal participation in decision-making, and equal control over resources and benefits for both women and men. This has been

the continuous refrain at the major UN conferences of the last two decades: Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing. The challenge lies in making this a reality. UNIFEM visualises the global Celebration of Mountain Women as an opportunity to revisit this agenda together.

The recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg confirmed the unequal access of women to resources, including information. The Gender Opinion Survey of the Gender Equality Commission noted that gender perspectives were not keeping pace with the new legislation and that knowledge of these new rights was not filtering through to the users. Several issues were debated, including the right of women to own and inherit land and the gender neutrality of markets.

Although ten years have passed since Rio, we are still reconfirming Agenda 21 and are repeating that only the effective participation of women as environmental managers can ensure sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods. We need to look again at the findings of Johannesburg and set the goals holistically by listening to the dynamic women present there. History will not forgive us if we repeat the rhetoric again. In order to understand their reality as it exists, let us identify these stars, listen to their untold stories, sing with them their unsung songs, and come up with forward-looking strategies — and we could do this nowhere better than in Bhutan, with like-minded people like you.

Thank you!

## **Opening Remarks by the Representative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Berne, Switzerland, Dr. Ulitz Lutz**

Your Excellency,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues and Friends —

On behalf of SDC, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to be among you. It is an honour for our agency to be able to participate in this important conference. And it is a particular source of pleasure for me to be back in this beautiful country with its spectacular scenery, its fascinating culture, and its very hospitable people.

For Switzerland, it is obvious that participation in events focusing on highly important mountain topics is a must, especially during the International Year of Mountains 2002. And merging the theme of 'women' with the theme of 'mountain development', as will be done during this conference, is a challenge that we could not ignore.

Today, the importance of the role of women and of their contribution to sustainable development has been widely acknowledged. But we still lack the will and the strategies to take action based on this awareness.

So, to be honest, when I first read the title of this conference "Celebrating Mountain Women", I was puzzled. Is this enough? What does the phrase really imply, and what could it be made to mean? Is celebrating mountain women the appropriate response to the need for the enhancement of mountain women's social status and political position?

I guess it is! Celebration means joy and pride in achievements; it means solidarity, a common spirit of commitment, and strength. This is crucial for a

strong sense of identity, for sound self-confidence, and for self-esteem. Indeed, it is important for women to develop a strong enough voice to participate in negotiations and decision-making.



**Dr. Ulitz Lutz**

What shall we do with this awareness of achievements, this confidence, and this strong voice? Let us make sure that we bring it all back home, let it influence our personal lives, our families, our working environment, and the society in which we live. Let us integrate the gender perspective in debates and policy-making at all levels, whether the impact expected is a big or a small one.

This integration is the most important contribution to our common quest to improve the livelihoods of women and men in a sustainable manner. It is also a crucial step towards gender equity, as well as towards real gender balance in our lives.

To conclude, I would like to affirm Switzerland's and SDC's commitment to our common cause: we recognise that without fully integrating gender issues in our programmes and projects — in other words, without promoting gender mainstreaming — we will never be able to appropriately address our major concern, which is to improve livelihoods in a sustainable way, be it in mountain regions or elsewhere. We count on your involvement to achieve this goal. And you can count on our commitment!

I would like to thank the Royal Government of Bhutan, ICIMOD, the Mountain Forum, and all other institutions and persons who contributed to making this conference happen. Its good to be here — thank you for your attention.

## Keynote Address by Ms. Irene Santiago

'Madadyaw na adlaaw Kamayong tanan! Maglipay kita mga kaiban ko na bubay sa kanato pagtapok ngadi sa madayaw nga nasud sa Bhutan!'

(From the mountain women of southern Philippines, a beautiful day to all of you! Let us all celebrate our coming together here in the beautiful country of Bhutan!)

At the outset, allow me to congratulate the Royal Government of Bhutan, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, ICIMOD, The Mountain Institute and the institutions that have supported this conference, for doing a splendid job in bringing us all together in what promises to be a milestone in the movement to improve the lives of mountain women.

Yesterday, as I went around to see the tents and exhibit areas go up, I remembered the NGO Forum on Women in 1995. Seven years ago, at the grand opening of the NGO Forum on Women 1995 in Beijing, the voices of 30,000 women rose in unison to sing a song that resonated strongly with each one of them. They sang, "Gotta keep on moving forward, gotta keep on moving forward, gotta keep on moving forward, gotta keep on moving forward, never turning back, never turning back!"

Here we are in Bhutan at another celebration. But perhaps before we can sing, "never turning back", it will be good to "look back".

And since the NGO Forum on Women 1995 was such a milestone in the women's struggle, it is to the NGO Forum that I would like us to look back even for a brief moment today. The Forum was the culmination of a vast empowering process that started in our villages and towns, to our national capitals, and from there to our regional meetings, to New York for preparatory meetings, and then finally to Beijing.

As we all know, the Forum was the parallel NGO event to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women. While these two events were parallel, the NGO Forum was dynamic, multi-dimensional, sometimes chaotic, but fun. The official conference was formal, structured, sometimes chaotic, occasionally fun, too. We came to lobby there for what we wanted, what we didn't want, what we hoped would change, and how we wanted that change to take place. The



Ms. Irene Santiago

Beijing Platform for Action was the culmination of all our work. The document defined a set of strategic objectives and identified actions to be taken by governments, the international community, NGOs and the

private sector for the removal of existing obstacles to women's advancement.

Perhaps it would be good to review the twelve critical areas of concern identified in the document. These twelve were obstacles that still needed to be overcome. They were: women and poverty, education and training, women and health, violence against women, women in armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child. Seven years after, you don't have to pore through any rigorous assessment to conclude that the twelve concerns continue to be obstacles to the advancement of women, including mountain women.

While the UN document is important and we all have to be engaged in ensuring it does not remain a piece of paper to be forgotten by our governments and the international community, I would like to draw your attention today to what the NGO Forum plenary sessions identified as the five global forces that have a great impact on women's lives. I bring them to your attention because as mountain women you are all touched by these forces, some more strongly than others, but touched by them nevertheless.

At the NGO Forum, women discussed their hopes and fears about the future in the midst of the rising tide of conservatism sweeping the world; the globalisation of the economy, including the speed and nature of the technological revolution and its impact on work; the breakdown of political systems and alliances and the emergence of new ones, bringing questions about governance, including citizenship and political participation; and the homogenisation of culture, media and communication.

Certain cross-cutting themes emerged with broad implications for the future of the women's movement. These included issues of identity, an issue of great importance to this conference. Because of the rise of conservatism, people are being forced into increasingly narrow definitions of self, such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. As the world shifts and turns, the issue of identity comes to the fore even more sharply. Wars of recent memory have been fought over the issue of identity.

The question of how to create unity while accommodating differences becomes a central problem for the future of the women's movement. But for women who are even more invisible than others, it is quite disconcerting to talk about unity because they fear this will result in their retreating into the shadows even further. For the issue of identity cannot be separated from the struggle for visibility. It is therefore necessary that within the women's movement, as we continue to create strategies to resist narrow definitions of what a woman is, we have to keep pulling other groups of women from the shadows into the sunlight of visibility. I hope that in the next few days our



conference will be able to create effective strategies to make mountain women and their issues visible.

The second emerging issue was human rights, which this conference is also addressing. Throughout the past two decades, women have been struggling for a re-definition of human rights to include women's rights. This reached its peak at the UN conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1995, where wide recognition was gained for women's rights as human rights. However, at the NGO Forum, panellists spoke of the continued erosion of such rights resulting from the wide range of negative circumstances now facing women.

The unregulated labour markets and the failure of development policies to provide sustainable livelihoods have eroded our rights. The ascendance of repressive politics which threaten women's reproductive rights and access to health care have eroded our rights. The rise of homophobic, racist, and nationalist assaults which target the most vulnerable have eroded our rights. So has violence against women, including violence that results from warfare and ethnic conflicts, domestic abuse, and sex trafficking across national borders. Last but not least, the treatment of women as objects in the media has eroded our rights. In discussing human rights, women have gone beyond questions of individual rights to those of collective rights, especially indigenous people's rights to the natural resources that have sustained their communities for millions of years.

The third emerging issue was about the roles and responsibilities of governments and NGOs. There was strong concern about the nature of the contract between governments and civil society. With the expansion of transnational activity not subject to the laws of nations, the responsibility of governments to ensure justice, and to protect people from policies that threaten their livelihoods or their lives has become more urgent. The strategies that women have used, and might use, to engage and confront the private sector, the state, and international organisations are critical to the future. The role of NGOs in bringing about change and promoting democratic values was also a strong concern. NGOs can play their role effectively if they remain independent of governments and donors, are self-sustaining and accountable to their constituencies, especially grassroots women, and act vigilantly as pressure groups to make governments accountable.

Finally, the issue of institutional transformation was repeatedly brought up as an issue of concern. The struggle continues for women to have access to and representation in institutions of decision-making, whether economic, political, professional, governmental, inter-governmental, or non-governmental; and at all levels, from local, to national, to global. However, the emphasis is not only on mainstreaming, but also on transforming these institutions, and through them the structures of inequality and oppression in society.

Seven years after Beijing and two years into the new millennium, we find that the five global forces identified by women at the NGO Forum seem to have intensified and widened. The flirtation with globalisation has become an engagement — with uneven results, depending on a country's capacity and the political will of its leaders to take advantage of liberalised economies.

So how can we as women, and you as mountain women, respond to these forces?

Having read the draft Thimphu Declaration, it would be imprudent of me to offer any comments on the substantive issues you have listed. You are the experts. And you are spending the next few days sharpening your understanding of your issues. I cannot and will not subtract or add to the 'what' of the declaration. But because along with the substance must also come the strategies, would you allow me to be so bold as to offer you my personal reflections from my almost three decades spent in organising women. These are some of the important things I have learned working to make women speak with their own voice.

- 1. In the beginning is the word.** It is important to *name* what we want or don't want. For example, "personal is political", "gender", "women's rights are human rights". If we can't name it, we can't get it. It's as simple as that. This naming constitutes a paradigm shift. It is hard to transform difficult and complex demands into a simple message but if we can't express it, it will be difficult to create the public consciousness that will lead to its acceptance.
- 2. Deconstruct to construct.** This is related to my first point. One of the most amazing things I have learned, as a feminist is the ability — and the necessity — to deconstruct in order to construct. Why, you ask? And here I am going to mix my metaphors. Can't we just get the blocks that will help us construct the edifice we want? Alas, as women, there is so much baggage we need to throw out. Deconstructing is the necessary first step to empowerment because as women we have had the scripts written for us from the day we were born.
- 3. Start where the women are, but don't end there.** Your entry point to organising is always what women say they want the first time you ask them what they need. Usually it is most obvious: water, credit, childcare. But as they gain experience and confidence, they will have to move on to confronting what are called the 'strategic needs'. These are needs for equality and voice, for dismantling the structure of exploitation and oppression. Conferences like this one enable women to move their agenda toward these strategic needs.



**4. Two types of help to avoid: the 'helping hand strikes again' and the 'small islands of peace and happiness'.** The first type is that one that creates dependence among those it purports to help. It is the kind of help that devastates people's dignity and self-respect. The second one goes merrily along, feeling very helpful indeed because it reached 500 women with its day care centre, its livelihood project, and its revolving loan fund. It doesn't go beyond its secure borders to see what is going on in the other village and communities. Nor does it question why the women are poor in the first place.

**5. Underdevelopment and gender inequality are about power.** Think about any issue confronting you today. Land tenure. Work. Food. Culture. Knowledge. Health. Environment. Rights. All the problems in these areas are about power and powerlessness: who has it, who wields it, how, and for what purpose.

There is most decidedly tremendous resistance to our demands to equalise power. But there is an equally tremendous struggle among women to *claim* power. Women have shied away from power because it has always meant control, domination, and manipulation. As I talk to women about power, I realise that there is a need to re-define it. Remember: "in the beginning is the word". "Deconstruct to construct".

Would you claim power if it meant manipulation, domination, and control? No, you would not.

How about this? Power is the potency to act for what is good. The operative words are 'potency', 'act', 'good'. If this is what power is, would you claim it? You most certainly would! The politics we want needs new rules, not just new numbers; new goals, not just new actors. From the likes of Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, to the Panchayat Raj women leaders in India, there is much evidence that in positions of power, women want to make the world "less brutish, less dangerous, less un-giving, less unreasonable," as someone once wrote about Mary Robinson's goals.

I contend that women's political voice is still weak in most parts of the world in both developed and developing countries, including my country, the Philippines, despite currently having a female president, the second in our history. I believe, therefore, that this is one of the significant areas for intervention not only because the numbers on women's political representation are dismal, but also because of the high impact on society of an improvement in women's political participation. For example, Transparency International writes that there is now evidence that as the political participation of women increases, corruption decreases. Priorities and styles of governance change too.

Regarding public representation, Dr. Pippa Norris of Harvard University has a starkly simple statistic that says it all. She says that since 1975 or the year the UN declared International Women's Year, there has been a one per cent increase every *decade* in the numbers of women in positions of public leadership. This is clearly and totally unacceptable.

When power is based on women's vision and values, it is transformative. Politics and governance will most decidedly change when women engage in public discourse and play a significant part in decision-making. As we continue to search and work for development that is humanly meaningful and ultimately sustainable, the political space opened by women from the grassroots to the highest reaches of government is the one space where women must belong.

And while we are discussing power, let me share with you the ten qualities of an empowered woman I have put together from all these years of being with women as they empower themselves. They may not find their place in the Thimphu Declaration but I hope they will be helpful in developing our individual and collective strategies and tactics to reach our goals. You may wish to add your own to these ten I have listed.

**First, an empowered woman lifts up other women.** There is enough for everybody. Sometimes women tend to fight for the little piece of the pond. I say, enlarge the pond so that we can all play!

**Second, an empowered woman inspires others and mentors young women.** Libby Roderick, a wonderful feminist singer and songwriter, has a beautiful song entitled, "Inspire Me". The song goes:

*Everybody needs someone to show them what is possible  
Everybody needs someone to go as far as she can see  
I need to stand up on the shoulders of giants  
I need a woman who's as big as me  
When I was a little baby sittin' on my Mama's knee  
I looked around to see just what the future had in store for me  
I need to see women who are living without limits  
I needed to see women making history*

So I said

*Give me a woman who can climb the tallest mountain  
Give me a woman who can swim across the widest sea  
Women need women who lead lives of boldest daring  
Tell me their stories, they inspire me.*

And so mountain women must continue to tell their stories.

**Third, an empowered woman never feels guilty.** Why? Because it is a useless feeling. It has been used against women for so long. Women are made to feel guilty that they are neglecting their family because they go out to work, that they are loose women because they like a good time; that

they are a liability as workers because they get pregnant and have to take maternity leave; they are not ladylike because they speak their mind and show their brains. I tell you this. Develop a conscience. Follow your conscience. But after you have decided on a course of action, don't allow others to make you feel guilty.

**Fourth, an empowered woman does not try to be a superwoman.** That's only for comic books or the movies. The difference between a female and a male is only two chromosomes but because of those two chromosomes the world thinks that we can work in the fields, sell vegetables and chickens in the market, take full responsibility not only for home and children but also for livestock; be a volunteer in our church or temple; and mediate all manner of conflict at home and the neighbourhood. Unless we stop being superwomen, our men will not be fully human.

**Fifth, an empowered woman lives the truth of the saying:** don't agonise, organise. If something is wrong, she does not bellyache. She sees it as an opportunity to gather others to right the wrong. She lights the fire.

**Sixth, an empowered woman honours diversity.** When society does not consciously manage the need for distinct identities among various groups and people, conflict and war will result. When managed well, it can lead to an increase in productivity, peace, harmony, and a rich collective life.

**Seventh, an empowered woman has the capacity for intelligent rage.** We must feel a sense of outrage against injustice and violence, a sense of outrage that leads to political action. An African-

American writer and law professor, Patricia Williams, has called it the "girl of intelligent rage". It is so difficult for women to rage because they have been taught to accommodate, and even to suppress their anger. "Love and anger", a feminist writer once said, "are both emotions of the free will, yet only love is acceptable for the powerless to express. For women or any category of people whose fair treatment would upset the social order, anger becomes the most punished and dangerous emotion." But such expressions are valid and, in the end, utterly liberating.

**Eighth, an empowered woman knows and claims her rights, not just her obligations.** We have been trained since childhood to subsume our welfare to the welfare of others, especially family members. When we become adults, this sense of duty is so strong that often it is difficult to claim our rights. Equality and non-discrimination form the cornerstone upon which all human rights are constructed. An understanding of these concepts is central to the exercise of the social, political, economic, and cultural rights of women and girls.

**Ninth, an empowered woman claims power.** When you walk out of here today, you are going to take steps to claim power because that is what mountain women need. Remember, power is the potency to act for what is good. Can you imagine how transformed the world would be if we all claimed that kind of power?

And lastly, an empowered woman says, *no more waiting!*

And on that note, thank you so much. More power to mountain women!

## **Valedictory Address, Ms. Catherine N. Cooke**

Your Royal Highness,  
Excellencies,  
Respected Colleagues,  
Esteemed Women from the mountains of the world  
It is a great honour to be with you,  
To hear your voices, in many languages, in harmony,  
Planning a better future for the mountains, which  
will affect communities all over the globe,  
Who are inspired by the beauty of your high peaks,  
Who rely on your water and timber,  
And who have realised during this International Year  
of Mountains how very important your homelands  
are.

Although the official thanks will be delivered in  
another address, I would like to take just one minute  
to recognise all of the partners who have made this  
conference possible...especially ICIMOD, directed by  
Gabriel Campbell, my mentor on mountain issues,  
the remarkable Phuntshok Tshering and Ojaswi Josse  
(who have continued to smile through every  
challenge) and the rest of the team!

I know that we have in our gathering many  
representatives from non-government  
organisations, and generous funders and service  
providers. We also have real mountain women, who  
are the heroes of this conference and the reason  
we have gathered. These stories from five continents  
are for you.

Gathered during our four days together, each story  
is different...and yet they are also the same. See if  
you can hear the repeated themes.

### **From the Andes Mountains, Columbia, South America**

'Mientras las guerrillas estaban destruyendo los  
pueblos,  
Nosotros — las mujeres — planteaban flores en al  
Montana.'

(While the soldiers were destroying the villages,  
We — the women — were planting flowered on the  
mountainside.)



**Ms. Catherine N. Cooke**

Flowers in  
Caldrono,  
Colombia, are  
becoming a new  
cash crop to  
replace the  
declining coffee  
industry there.  
These women —  
Hermanas — are  
here in the  
audience.

### **From the Zagros Mountains, Kurdistan, Iraq**

Once upon a time there was a young Kurdish girl,  
Living with her family,  
In love with a young man.  
She was soon to celebrate her wedding.  
The soldiers came and took everyone from the  
village,  
But the girl ran away, high into the mountains.  
She ate wild food and was afraid of the wolves.  
Missing her family, she made a bed for them each  
night.  
Years later, she led a large group of women  
On a fifty mile walk to demand  
That the Peshmergas — fighters — stop the war.  
Three women from Kurdistan are here with us today.

### **From the Appalachian Mountains, Kentucky, USA**

Last year a young mother who could not read to  
write

Wanted a better life for her own young daughter.  
A teacher came up the mountains.  
They read books about brown bears; and drew with  
pens.  
Today the little girl — and her mother — can read.  
That teacher, who also grew up in those same  
mountains,  
Is here today.

### **From the Himalayan Mountains, Chitaha, Nepal**

A strong woman wanted more for her family.  
She helped organise a women's cooperative group  
To produce 'allo', a strong, soft fibre that grows in  
the mountains.  
Weaving the beautiful scarves and garments like  
this one,  
The community raised enough money to build a  
small village school.  
That mountain woman is here with us today.

There is struggle in these stories, and some sadness.  
But there also is joy and hope. Seeds of hope have  
been sown at this conference, and like the flowers  
of Caldrono, Colombia, may they grow. But we know  
that seeds are not enough. They must be watered,  
fed, cared for if they are to bloom. What will bloom,  
like flowers on a mountainside, from our time  
together?

The Thimphu Declaration is the first blossom. In  
just a moment, our global gathering of women will  
adopt the document that everyone has produced.

Many, many voices — yours — have been heard here.  
What you have said will travel to far away Bishkek,  
Kyrgyzstan, where the declaration will become a part  
of the last world summit for this important  
International Year of Mountains.

What you have dreamed, and said, and written,  
began in your own mountains...all over the world,  
the ideas came with you to Bhutan, and now they  
will travel to the north towards China, to Bishkek,  
another land of high mountains and strong women  
who understand the struggle.

What else will bloom from these seeds? We must be sure that action follows the declaration we take to Bishkek.

Your hard work here, and in your communities, must move forward. In each gathering in the tents and in the conference hall nearly all of you committed to real action when you leave...at your community level, at the regional level, some at the global level.

Already many of the partners who organised this gathering are discussing how best to follow up — with action as well as words, and regional activities are being planned. I am also privileged and very happy to announce another small action step that will begin today. In response to some of the mountain women's telling us that a small amount of financial support for entrepreneurial projects would help, I invite the mountain women in this room to describe women's projects that you have dreamed of doing, or have already worked on in your village.

If you could receive a small amount of financial support, how could your work help the women and families who live in your community? Would it buy a loom, bring in training, start a women's cooperative?

Talk to one of our conference partners today or tomorrow and complete this one-page paper. Fax it to The Mountain Institute by November 15<sup>th</sup>. Every idea is a seed that might grow.

One of your wonderful 'seeds' will receive a small grant of \$5000 from The Mountain Institute. It is a symbol for today, to show our respect for each of you, mountain women. It celebrates your hard work and your good ideas. It will produce action and we hope it will grow into something important.... as very small seeds often do.

These papers will also be available back in Paro, on the registration table. Take one back to your community, and send us an idea.

I close with the words of a Chinese poet named Lu Xun:

"Hope is like a path on the mountainside.

At first there is no path.

But then there are people passing that way,

And then there is a path"

We are all on that path of hope on the mountainside. We are travelling together, to Bishkek and beyond. The road is long; but the road is clear. Let's move forward together.

## **Closing Address by RGOB representative, Her Royal Highness, Ashi Chimi Yangzom Wangchuck**

Honoured Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen —

After very hectic but fruitful sessions at Paro, I am glad you now have an opportunity to see yet another part of our small kingdom.

As participants of “Celebrating Mountain Women,” you have just adopted the Thimphu Declaration, a document I am confident will bring about positive changes in the lives of mountain women. The success of its recommendations will depend on our own commitment. We can ask our governments, development partners, and international agencies to help bring about change, but as you will agree, it is our own personal commitment to the betterment of the lives of mountain women that will make it a reality.

As a woman from a mountain country, I have had the privilege to grow up around women from



**Her Royal Highness,  
Ashi Chimi Yangzom Wangchuck**

different social and economic backgrounds. I know that the lives of most women in Bhutan and their sisters in mountain areas and other countries are hard. Despite setbacks, women have made great strides in many parts of the

world, moving beyond the domestic and household realms to assume integral roles in local and national decision making institutions. This conference has, more than ever, demonstrated that there is much we can learn from one another through the sharing of experiences and best practices. Let us maintain and use the links established in Bhutan over the past few days, and seek to enrich them further.

I feel that there is a great role for young women in mountain communities. With greater access to education and modern tools, many of us have the advantages that our parents lacked. There are also more civil societies and institutions to guide and to assist us in our just cause. Networking and information sharing is more common now than before. If we are able to utilise the wisdom and experience of the older generation and combine it with the miracles of technology we can make a difference in our communities.

We are all brought together by our common love for the mountains and by our determination to enjoy their immense opportunities, beauty, and wealth, as well as to face the challenges. As a young person, I look for inspiration from the participants gathered here today. Each one of you has taken on leadership roles and will now take the goals of the Thimphu Declaration forward.

I would like to thank and congratulate Dr. Gabriel Campbell, Director General of ICIMOD, and other partners for not only making this event possible, but for drawing it to a successful conclusion. I would like to thank each and every one of you for coming to Bhutan and for contributing towards the adoption of the Thimphu Declaration. It was an honour and pleasure for the people of Bhutan to receive you and discuss our role in preserving the mountains that we hold so close to our hearts.

Thank you all and Tashi Delek!



## Closing Remarks from the Director General of ICIMOD, Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell

Your Royal Highness,

Distinguished Officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan,

Astonishingly varied and wonderful participants of Celebrating Mountain Women,

Ladies and Gentlemen —

We are at the close of an extraordinary event. For the first time, 250 mountain women, and people who care deeply for mountain women, from 35 countries from every continent of the globe, have gathered together to celebrate mountain women — to find a common voice for their unheard concerns.

Through dialogue, debate, exhibitions, films, and days of informal interaction, we have celebrated the wonderful diversity of mountain women. We have worked hard to bridge perspectives from the South and the North, from the grassroots to academia, from the specific stories of mountain women, to the varied natural and social environments in which all of you live.

We have marvelled, with smiles of appreciation glued on our faces, at the beauty and creativity of mountain women's dresses, of mountain crafts, of worlds revealed to us in eyes, expressions, films, and photographs.

We have formed friendships across mountain ranges, across languages, even across gender barriers. We have listened, learned, and found ideas to help each of us in our individual work and lives.

With hard work and intensive discussions, all of you, representing the mountain women of the world, have come together to find common concerns and shared views of life, to create the Thimphu Declaration and a set of detailed recommendations.

This declaration will be carried to the rest of the world as one of the crowning achievements of the International Year of Mountains. Most immediately, it will be presented at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit by an ideal spokeswoman from Bhutan, Ms. Netan Zhangmo, and the Cabinet Secretary of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Through Bishkek, and most importantly, individually and collectively, we all are challenged and energised to translate this call for action into realities — realities that will make mountain women's lives better. The Mountain Women's Partnership launched here can become a dynamic network. Through this partnership we can act on our own, and together, can share problems and solutions to build synergies between our actions. We can create a global voice for the cause of the mountain women of the world.

Much more work is still required to shape and energise this network into a linked set of concrete actions and advocacy at the global, regional, national, and local levels. Special efforts will be required to ensure that the momentum built here continues to build after we

leave this beautiful country and its gracious, and incredibly hospitable people.

As the main organisers of this event, with the magnificent cooperation and initiative of the Royal Government of Bhutan, we at



Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell

ICIMOD know our work is really just starting.

Most immediately, we are responsible for producing a number of tangible outputs together with the help of many of you. These include:

- Copies of the Thimphu Declaration, hopefully before you leave Bhutan
- Additional CDs of the 39 papers prepared for this meeting for those of you who did not get a copy or who are unable to download them from the website <[www.mountainwomen.net](http://www.mountainwomen.net)>
- Selected photographs from this extraordinary event to be sent to all of you, and additional photographs for electronic downloading to be posted on the site
- A video of CMW prepared by Live Wire Images, the release of which will be announced to all of you over the next six weeks
- Highlights of the conference for your reference
- Proceedings in the form of a resource kit by Missing Link

In the intermediate term, we look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Mountain Forum to maintain an active list serve for mountain women. Through this medium, Bishkek round table sessions, and active dialogue with interested partner institutions and individuals, we hope to jointly evolve mechanisms that will enable CMW to grow and work together; to become an active and path-breaking global partnership that will make a real difference in the lives of mountain women. A partnership that supports and energises the efforts of governments, parliamentarians, NGOs, grassroots' groups, development programmes, entrepreneurs and artists, and researchers and educators.

And, or course, in our own Asian and especially, Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, we will follow through with specific operational programmes to support and implement many of the excellent recommendations that fit with our mandate, inspire our partner interest, and that are within our capacity.

It would have been satisfying to have these mechanisms and follow-up programmes already defined. But then we would have either had to stay here for at least another week or have assumed the results before you created them. I am not sure that even friendly Bhutan could have handled that much

female energy for so long, and I know our budget couldn't.

So our real work begins now that we have laid the framework, discovered our paths together, and know each other in conference rooms and dance floors.

The real measure of what this conference accomplishes depends on what each of you take from it, create out of it, and do in your own mountains.

For this reason, I must first of all, and most fervently, thank you, the participants. You have been thoughtful. You have been creative. You have been patient and forgiving when travel and organisational arrangements have been difficult and less than perfect from our side. You have pitched in to help produce the results, to translate for your sisters, to adjust to changes in schedule and programme. You have shown me, and all of us, the strength, resilience, and beauty of mountain women of the world. You have proven that mountain women are indeed worthy of celebrating.

Thank you all so much. Please join me in appreciating each other and all of you for coming so far and making CMW such a special event.

We hardly have words to adequately express our deeply felt gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting this event. The word hosting does not begin to capture the warm welcome, the outstanding arrangements, the generous hospitality and the hard work that so many officials and citizens of Bhutan gave to CMW.

The Bhutan CMW Secretariat, especially established to host his event, began work long before our arrival, along with the Bhutan International Year of Mountains Committee. The government generously invited all of us as special guests and waived the substantial fees that would normally be required for us to visit this spectacular land. Hotels forewent their high season rates and made room for us to take over Paro. The government of Paro went to special lengths to provide a spectacular welcome and ensure our security and comfort. Computers were installed; telephones provided, volunteers mobilised, and most valuably, a number of Bhutanese women joined us to provide local knowledge and insight.

We were personally welcomed by the Right Honourable Prime Minister and are graced today by Her Royal Highness. The Secretary of Agriculture and Cabinet Secretary joined us throughout.

Inspiring traditional ceremonies of welcome and closing, along with a beautiful procession and decorated paths have enriched and awed us with their mysterious beauty and demonstration of a living mountain heritage.

We could not imagine a more generous host, a more beautiful country, or more gracious companions than you have provided.

We express our gratitude especially to:

Her Royal Highness Ashi Chimi Yangzom Wangchuk,

His Excellency Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji,  
Dasho Sangay Thinley,  
Ms. Netan Zhangmo,  
Ms. Deki Pema,  
Ms. Tshering Gem,

and wish to offer them a very small token of our appreciation.

We also thank Dongkar Drukpa and other staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and the very helpful officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We especially thank the Dasho Dzongdhag of Paro and the other local authorities of Paro and Thimphu – and wish to recognise the Dzungda also with a small gift.

We thank Bhutan Tourism Corporation and the Olangthang Hotel for going out of their way to accommodate our conference, exhibitions, and many demands with great courtesy and special efforts.

We also thank the other eight hotels in Paro, Druk Airlines for their special arrangements during this tourist season, and the travel agencies for all their hard work.

Would you all please join me in expressing our great and lasting appreciation to Bhutan.

We have also been blessed with the generous and caring support of our donors and partners, who from the beginning demonstrated their deep commitment to mountain women and the International Year of Mountains by enthusiastically providing financial and technical support. Without you, this would not have happened. With you, we gained not only the means to carry out this conference, but we gained the participation of mountain experts.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with special funding from the Government of Japan, provided initial substantial support. Mr. Phrang Roy, the Assistant President, took a personal interest, and Dr. Ganesh Thapa represented IFAD at CMW.

I hope there is a representative of the Japanese Government to whom we can express our thanks here today.

The South Asia Office of UNIFEM, the United Nations agency devoted to women, joined in the first organising meeting and provided a generous grant. We are especially grateful to Ms. Chandni Joshi for her personal interest and support, and special effort to participate in the first three days of the conference.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has long been the energising force behind mountain development and the principal supporter of the International Year of Mountains. Dr. Ulrich Lutz, here with us throughout this conference, has been the man behind this mountain changing effort. We are honoured to have him here and thank him not only for his commitment to sustainable mountain development, but for his special concern and support for CMW.

Thank you Uli!

We also want to give special thanks to our long-standing partner, and close friend, The Mountain Institute. Ms. Catherine Cooke's personal enthusiasm for CMW was more than evident in her beautiful valedictory address. We treasure this partnership as an institution, just as I value it deeply at a personal level. I thank Catherine and her wonderful colleagues at The Mountain Institute for all they have done to plan, support, and bring many special participants here.

Thank you Catherine!

We also are privileged to thank someone who is better known to those of you in Bhutan than to most of us. Except, that is, to those of us in ICMOD who know her as the Chairperson of our ICIMOD Support Group. Dr. Brigitte Dekroute is responsible for Austrian Government Cooperation in Bhutan. We thank her for her assistance in providing support for Bhutanese participants and for her continuing commitment to mountain development and mountain women.

Thank you Brigitte!

Although there is no representative present, we also express our appreciation towards ICCO of the Netherlands for providing support for participants from Nepal and India to attend.

There are so many other people to thank that this could take all morning. I hope you will forgive me if I have to leave off mentioning all of you by name.

Celebrating Mountain Women started with an intensive meeting of the Organising Committee at Hattiban, Nepal. We are most grateful to all of them, whose names are enshrined in our documents.

The work of this committee was passed on to a sub-group, the Steering Committee, who worked throughout the last year-and-a-half to make this conference happen. They have given so much of their time, wisdom and effort to CMW that I hope you will agree they are more than deserving of very special recognition and gratitude.

In alphabetical order, we thank profusely:

Anita Anand, who spent many months directly working with us in liaison with the committee;

Elizabeth Byers of TMI and the Global Server Node of the Mountain Forum, who has given generously of her time and effort in both capacities;

Francoise Mees, of the European Mountain Forum, who organised a special preparatory European meeting in Chambéry, France;

Easter Njiro, who worked especially to ensure Africa's representation; and

Josepha Nolte, who brought us Latin America along with her advice and guidance.

I ask all of you to join me in very special appreciation for these wonderful, committed, and wise women. We wish to express our gratitude with a small mountain token.

Thank you Anita, Elizabeth, Francoise, Easter, and Josepha!

I would also like to thank Ms. Irene Santiago for her awe-inspiring keynote address, where she shared with us the ten qualities of an empowered women and urged all women to play an active role in transforming their society for the better.

A great deal of work has also gone into compiling research for CMW. For that I would like to thank Dr. Govind Kelkar and her team, who coordinated research on the five theme areas from different regions of the world. Thank you so much for all that hard work!

Without the active participation and outreach of the media, the voices of mountain women gathered here would not be heard.

We thank each media person from Kuensel, BBS, BBC, Nepal, Hong Kong, Italy, India, and the USA for joining us here. We hope you have benefited from the opportunity and will serve as objective, and hopefully friendly, partners in the cause of mountain women.

We are also very grateful to:

Women's Feature Service for their press service;

Himal Association for a fantastic and inspiring film festival on mountain women;

Missing Link for their documentation service and the resource publications they will produce to enable us to remember and keep in touch;

Live Wire Images for the video film, which we are all eagerly looking forward to seeing;

The creative, hard working, and superb facilitators of each of the theme sessions;

The drafters of the Thimphu Declaration who worked long and late hours;

The many wonderful and creative exhibitors who showed us what mountain women can create and gave us such a wonderful ambiance in which to meet and learn; and

Each of the costume bringers and wearers, who provided us with the highlight of the entire CMW event.

Thank you all!

Finally, it is my great pleasure to thank my colleagues in ICIMOD who have worked so hard for so long, with so much patience and commitment to organise Celebrating Mountain Women.

Ms. Phuntshok Tshering, who provided guidance from the beginning, and so ably shouldered the huge job of organising this conference when it was moved to Bhutan, her native country, is first to be appreciated and thanked.

Ms. Ojaswi Josse, who has provided full-time coordination over this last year-and-a-half, no matter

how onerous the task, or how long the hours, or the number of emails required.

We would like to present you two mountain women with a small token of our deep appreciation.

Thank you so much Phuntshok and Ojaswi!

Finally, I thank my other colleagues who have worked so hard both before and during this conference. In

alphabetical order,

Jane Dermer,  
Prativa Chhetri,  
Melinda Nicholls,  
Kiran Shrestha, and  
Atsuko Toda.

Thank you colleagues, and thank you friends one and all!