

# Welcome Address

## Setting the Scene The Inauguration

Welcome Address - Egbert Pelinck      Keynote Address - A.Z.M. Obaidullah Khan

Opening Address - Savitri Kunadi      Inaugural Address - Manmohan Adhikari



# Welcome Address



*Mr. Egbert Polinch  
Director General  
ICIMOD*

I am delighted to welcome this distinguished gathering to the first 'Regional Conference on Sustainable Development of Fragile Mountain Areas of Asia'.

Asia has the largest, highest, and the most populated mountain systems in the world. More than two hundred million people live in the mountains and upland areas and another one billion people downstream are directly affected by the conditions of these mountain environments. Their uniqueness is also evident in other respects.

Ecologically, these are nature's banks for biodiversity and genetic resources. Environmentally, they are among the most fragile ecosystems in the world, extremely sensitive to scale and type of economic interventions. Culturally, these mountain areas are among the last repositories of rich and diverse ethnic traditions and practices in a world that is rapidly embracing a monoculture of industrialisation and urbanisation. And economically, the challenge of poverty alleviation for the men, women, and children in Asia's mountains is among the most serious in the world, in spite of the fact that large amounts of different resources are extracted from these very mountain areas for the benefit of lowland irrigation and industrialisation.

The physical isolation of the mountain areas in the past has caused their exclusion from mainstream development, resulting in continuing political and economic marginality. The transition from the fringe towards the mainstream can only be brought about through a systematic build up of useful knowledge and its applications and the development of mountain-specific policies, skills, and technologies, including a substantial strengthening of institutional capacities at various levels.

This Regional Conference is being organised as a follow up activity to one of the concerns of the Earth Summit which was held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro: a concern for fragile mountain ecosystems, as described in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21. There has been a growing anxiety that the momentum generated at the Earth Summit is not being adequately sustained, but this conference will, I hope, take it one step further, and ICIMOD is proud that it was asked by the UN to organise the first regional conference on

Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 in time for the next session of the Commission for Sustainable Development, which will review the progress made in implementing Agenda 21 at its next session in April.

The conference will focus, during two days of discussions, on different aspects of mountain development, and the third day is to be devoted to country statements on country-specific mountain issues and will make recommendations for accelerated action for poverty alleviation and environmental management at national level. Proposals for regional and subregional cooperation in support of national actions are also expected.

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***In order to demonstrate our concern for the mountain people in Asia, I would suggest that over the next three days we ask ourselves the following questions.***

***Firstly: How can sustainable development of mountain areas of Asia receive more attention at political and policy levels and be fully integrated in national development plans?***

***Secondly: In what way and in which fields should local, national, regional, and international institutions with a mandate for sustainable mountain development be strengthened?***

***Thirdly: How can networking and partnerships, so essential for information flow and cooperation, be established or strengthened?***

***Fourthly: What would be the justification for governments, NGOs, and donors allocating more financial resources to sustainable mountain development?***

***Lastly, and probably most important: How can the concerns and commitments to mountain development be translated into field-level action of direct benefit to the people of mountain areas?***

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I hope you will give some thoughts to these interlinking issues in addition to the specific scientific subjects that you will discuss. I sincerely hope that we have a very fruitful meeting during the next three days. We owe it to the future of the diverse peoples and the rich natural and cultural environments of the mountains of Asia.

Thankyou.

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# Opening Address



*Ms. Savitri Kunadi*  
*Vice-Chairperson*  
*Commission for Sustainable*  
*Development (CSD)*

It is indeed a great honour for me that I, as the representative of the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development, have come to participate in your conference. Dr. Klaus Topfer, the Chairman of the Commission, had desired to personally attend the conference but was unfortunately unable to do so. He has asked me to convey to you his warmest greetings and best wishes for useful and productive deliberations at this Regional Conference. The Commission on Sustainable Development was established as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1993 to effectively monitor the implementation of Agenda 21, solemnly adopted by one of the largest gatherings of world leaders ever seen at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. It has already held two annual sessions and the next session will focus on the issues of land, desertification, forests, and biodiversity. The Commission has acknowledged the valuable

contributions made to its deliberations as well as to the practical implementation of Agenda 21 by Non-Governmental Organisations and other major groups. The process of environmental protection and promotion being of necessity a continuous one, the Commission believes that intersessional activities, whether conducted by Governments, regional or even Non-Governmental Organisations are of crucial importance. In this sense, we are happy at the initiatives taken by ICIMOD and would look forward with a great deal of interest to the outcome of your deliberations over the next three days.

The United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development brought the issues of Environment and Development, which had first begun to gather attention at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, to the centre of the attention of the international community. It established the importance of sustainable development which envelopes the two concepts of development and environmental protection. It also forged the foundations of a global partnership for environmental protection based on the fact that the environment of the entire world was common. Both the developed and developing countries have a responsible role to play in ensuring sustainable development.

Much of the environmental degradation was due to either the unsustainable lifestyles of the industrialised world or due to poverty and underdevelopment which themselves result from inequitable growth patterns. However, consumption of natural resources by the poor cannot be confused with the unbridled consumption of certain countries. The historical and colonial legacy of pollution cannot be ignored and the development of the people has to be kept at the centre of our attention and activities.

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Adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development embodying 27 principles which are meant to govern environmental and economic behaviour of peoples and nations was one of the great achievements of the international community. The right to development was recognised and the essentiality of eradicating poverty stressed.

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Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 focusses on the 'Management of Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development'. It recognises that, as a major ecosystem representing the complex and interrelated ecology of our planet, mountain environments are essential to the survival of the global ecosystems. Mountains are, however highly vulnerable to human and natural ecological imbalance. The work of ICIMOD in this direction has received the accolades of the international community. It is important that ICIMOD now attempts to create a mountain perspective in the international community as we move towards the Third Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Third Session of the CSD would be focussing, as I said earlier, on the issues of land, desertification, forests, and biodiversity.

The role of ICIMOD in generating and strengthening the knowledge about ecology and sustainable development of mountain ecosystems has been recognised in Agenda 21, which calls on the national governments and international organisations to support it.

Even when the CSD considers the issue of forests or desertification, the mountains, as one of the richest forest cover areas and as an important source of water, can be ignored only at our peril. I would request ICIMOD to sensitise the international community towards this complex interlinkage between the activities in the plains which may be beneficial for the sustainable development of mountains, the effects of conservation of the mountain ecosystem on the plains and indeed the global environment, and similarly how the adverse activities of one have substantial and significant detrimental effects on the other. It is to this task that ICIMOD must devote itself in the coming months.

Development of the mountains has to be viewed in a holistic manner, encompassing economic development, technological improvement, environmental protection, and human resource development. All these activities are complexly interrelated and gains in one will produce benefits in others.

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I hope that your deliberations and the efforts of ICIMOD will be supported by the international community and prove beneficial to mankind.

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I wish you all success.

Thankyou.

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# Keynote Address



*Mr. A.Z.M. Obaidullah Khan  
Asst. Director General  
FAO*

I am grateful to Mr. Pelinck for giving me the privilege of addressing this distinguished audience of committed scholars and compassionate intellectuals. May I convey to you warm greetings from the Director General of FAO, Dr. Jacques Diouf.

On 14 April, 1994, in Kathmandu, at the Workshop on Indigenous Systems and Biodiversity Management, Mr. Pelinck, in his inaugural address, concluded that the challenge now being faced was how to build upon indigenous knowledge when responding to the rightful aspirations of the mountain people who, until today, have been excluded from making choices about their own lives and destiny. Confronting and surmounting this challenge represents a significant step in transforming what I hope is our mutual dream into a reality.

With respect to the sustainable development of fragile mountain areas we are expected to produce the following results. One, a better understanding of major issues affecting sustainable mountain development in Asia. Two, a set of recommendations towards accelerated action in poverty alleviation and environmental management in mountainous areas, and three, a plan of action for regional and subregional collaboration in sustainable mountain development.

Even beginning to generate these results is a tall order, but we have been charged with the responsibility of framing a plan of action to translate the July 1992 Agenda 21 into action, and, more particularly, with the responsibility of concentrating on Chapter 13 which focusses upon two broad areas: first, to generate and strengthen knowledge about the ecology and sustainable development of mountain ecosystems and second, to promote integrated watershed development and alternative livelihood opportunities to mountain people throughout the world.

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Honoured guests, I seek results which will be taken to the people as a humble submission, which they can totally veto, totally accept, partially veto, or partially accept. I want our results to serve as a menu for the mountain people which they can spice to their own taste or which they can declare inedible and unacceptable.

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Our results will not be bound like some holy book, but rather carried to the people in a looseleaf binder with no pride of authorship and with the full knowledge that the fragile mountain areas require dynamic initiative. We need some very specific results, but we need to face the concerns the indigenous people themselves have chosen to be their priority

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concerns and use science and modern techniques, after we have inventoried the indigenous knowledge base, to evolve the appropriate set of information to answer the questions the people have confirmed they want answered.

To catalyse our three-day effort, let me articulate some of my opinions and biases. First, both domestic and international financial resources are extremely tight, which means that we need to concentrate more than ever on financially viable initiatives that reward and inspire the people, that restore the ecosystem, and that impose a very heavy penalty on environmentally-unsustainable activities. Second, investment in primary and secondary education, particularly of women, is a must, and I recognise that education is not the purview of the FAO; but without access to education, the marginalised communities will continue to be excluded from decisions that affect their lives. Third, I appreciate the singling out of Women and Mountain Development as one of our eight topics, but women, who hold up half the sky must be integrated into every one of our eight topics. This is a rather dangerous idea for me to bring up; so I will do this on an off the record basis and in my personal capacity. Would it not be feasible to draft and frame the concluding country statements in a manner that describes the role of the female, the role of the male, and the roles they should both play? Fourth, malnutrition and disease take a savage toll in upland communities -- often two or three days' trek from the nearest doctor. Protein deficiency is common as wild game and domestic livestock get scarce. Yearly, thousands of these ethnic clusters die from lack of safe drinking water. Death through shrivelling away is not the stuff of headlines. But disease constitutes a form of ethnic cleaning in the uplands as brutal and deadly as the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia.

We must be aware of mountain specificities which, according to Dr. Jodha, are inaccessibility, fragility, marginality, diversity, niche, and human adaptation mechanisms. Another overriding consideration is the alternative livelihood opportunities to mountain people; these people need to have access to resources and unsubsidised incentives to formulate initiatives which will create off-farm employment opportunities generating income and surplus capital for the mountain regions.

The key ingredient for economic growth, particularly off-farm economic growth, is access to both sustainable credit and a sustainable pool of investment. Thus, a critical recommendation that I would suggest should emerge from our deliberations is a call on the local banking systems to design financially viable credit for the fragile mountain ecosystems. Let me mention two sectors that would appear to have immediate financial potential: tourism and honey.

Distinguished friends, as we brace ourselves for three productive days, please remember our vow of humility and the sound reasons for that. We must produce some results that can be field-tested and results which have a sustainable economic rationale. We may indeed spawn a report which will be admired by our headquarters or capital cities. Such results are fine only if they have the potential of improving the natural and human conditions of the fragile mountain ecosystems.

Thankyou.

# Inaugural Address



*Mr. Manmohan Adhikari  
Rt. Hon'ble Prime Minister  
Nepal*

I have the great honour and privilege to address this distinguished gathering. I would like to extend my heartfelt welcome to all the participants in this very important 'Regional Conference on Sustainable Development of Fragile Mountain Areas of Asia'.

Sustainable development has become a critical concept for our future. Humanity is at a very important crossroad as it prepares to enter the next century. Changes in science and technology, industrialisation, and urbanisation have been most rapid during this century. These changes are influencing every part of the globe and even the relatively isolated mountain areas. However, in many instances, not everybody has benefitted from these developments which have also been accompanied by increasing pollution and loss of natural resources, reduced biodiversity, and growing social tensions. With rapid growth of population and relatively weak economies, the challenge of sustainable development in mountain areas appears to be formidable.

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*Mountain people have in the past been able to cope with the harsh mountain conditions through hard work and intimate knowledge of their environment. However, the aspirations of the present and future generations can no longer be met through traditional lifestyles exclusively dependent on natural resources that are decreasing day by day.*

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Some mountain areas have performed reasonably well in not only improving their economies, but also in preserving their environment, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. It is absolutely essential that we learn from these successes, which often are based on the advantages that mountain areas have compared to the plains. But we are also together to learn from the failures of the past.

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*I urge the distinguished participants to review success and failures and to come up with workable solutions to sustainable development, in technologies, in policies, and in institutions.*

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Nepal is mainly a mountainous country and therefore improving the living conditions of the mountain people and mountain environment has been an important part of our development strategy. While we are making progress in some areas, in others we are eager to learn about the experiences of other countries in terms of how policies and programmes have been made more appropriate to mountain conditions. We would like to learn more about different types of poverty-reducing programmes, including those that have improved the conditions of women and children.

Without the participation of the people, very little protection of environmental resources is feasible and the experience of Nepal in community forestry and other types of participatory natural resources' management is hopefully of interest to other countries when identifying promising approaches for sustainable mountain development.

There is also a major role of the private sector in helping to reduce poverty and protect the environment through generation of investment and employment. There is a wide range of experience in Asia regarding development approaches and the efforts being made to mitigate different types of environmental problems. We should systematically learn from this rich experience. I look forward to your analyses, conclusions, and recommendations in this respect.

I must place on record my sincere thanks to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), located in Nepal, for inviting me and taking the initiative to organise this Regional Conference. Organisations like ICIMOD that are focussed on the Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas need much stronger support than in the past. I would also like to thank all the other organisations that have provided support for this Regional Conference. I thank all of you for your interest and participation in this important Regional Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I wish you a most successful deliberation. I sincerely hope your efforts will further the cause of mountain people and mountain environments throughout Asia. Lastly, I would also recommend that you take time off to see for yourself the mountain people and mountain areas of Nepal.

Thankyou.

