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**Concept Note**  
**Side-event International Mountain Day**  
**"Tackling Climate Change and Building Resilience for Mountain and Rural Communities"**  
(11 December 2018, UNHQ CR9)

An increasing recognition of the importance of mountain areas to sustainable development prompted the UN General Assembly to declare 2002 the UN International Year of Mountains and in 2003 designated 11 December as "International Mountain Day". The celebration of this Day allows stakeholders to discuss new challenges and opportunities for preserving of unique mountain ecosystems and supporting mountain communities.

The importance of conserving mountain ecosystems' and their direct links to sustainable development has been underlined in such key international frameworks as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction for 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Covering roughly 22-27% of the Earth's land surface, mountains play an important role in broader efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. UN Member States have committed to achieving of SDG2 (Zero Hunger), SDG4 (Quality Education), SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG15 (Life on Land) through implementation of projects and programs that involve the more efficient and effective management of mountain area ecosystems and the services needed to support the lives and livelihoods of local communities.

The global theme of this year's International Mountain Day is "Mountains Matter". Several events are being organized around the world to celebrate this day. The theme of the New York side-event being held at UNHQ on 11 December is "Tackling Climate Change and Building Resilience for Mountain and Rural Communities". Responding to climate change and ensuring sustainable development requires a more rational and efficient use of natural resources and ecosystem services. The importance of better coordinated approaches supported

by the international development community has also been highlighted by the General Debate of the 73rd session of UNGA in September 2018: "Making the United Nations relevant to all people: global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies".

This side-event in New York will address the negative impact of climate change on fragile and vulnerable mountain ecosystems and the challenges and opportunities for mountain community development within the context of the 2030 Agenda.

The main goal of the side-event is to promote and strengthen partnerships that facilitate positive changes in the lives and livelihoods of mountain communities and increase resilience of mountain ecosystems, especially in the framework of the Mountain Partnership.

The objectives of the side-event are to:

- Celebrate International Mountain Day;
- Recognize the role of the Mountain Partnership as the only global UN alliance dedicated to promoting and advocating for sustainable mountain development.
- Exchange experience and good practices in the implementation of national, regional and international projects and programs aimed at conserving mountain ecosystems and assisting mountain communities, including soft launch of UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme partnership with FAO on promoting Mountain Products under the Mountain Partnership;
- Raise awareness of the fragility of mountains ecosystems and the need for targeted investments and pro-mountain policies, and discuss the interconnection between SDG2 (Zero Hunger), SDG4 (Quality Education), SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG15 (Life on Land).

## **Background on International Mountain Day 2018**

**#MountainsMatter**” is the theme chosen for this year’s 2018 celebration of International Mountain Day.

Even though they are mentioned in the 2030 Agenda, mountains are still often forgotten. Considering the crucial role they play in providing key ecosystem goods and services to the planet and their vulnerability in the face of climate change, we need to step up and raise attention to mountains.

**#MountainsMatter for Water** as mountains are the world’s ‘water towers’, providing between 60 and 80 percent of all freshwater resources for our planet. However, all available records indicate that glaciers in mountain ranges around the world are retreating and disappearing due to climate change. At least 600 glaciers have disappeared completely over the past decades, affecting water supplies relied on by billions living downstream.

**#MountainsMatters for Disaster Risk Reduction** as climatic variations are triggering disasters. Avalanches, mudflows and landslides are tumbling downstream, stripping bare forests, flooding communities and populations.

**#MountainsMatter for Tourism** as mountain destinations attract around 15-20 percent of global tourism and are areas of important cultural diversity, knowledge and heritage. Although mountain tourism has the potential to foster economic development in remote and isolated regions, many mountain communities are still not benefiting and live in poverty.

**#MountainsMatter for Food** as they are important centres of agricultural biodiversity and are home to many of the foods that come to our table, such as rice, potatoes, quinoa, tomatoes and barley. Yet, they are home to some of the hungriest peoples in the world with a high vulnerability to food shortages and malnutrition, and climate change is affecting mountain agriculture.

**#MountainsMatter for Youth** as despite the beautiful landscapes, life in the mountains can be tough, particularly for rural youth. Abandoning their villages in search of employment elsewhere has led to an absence of young people and an increasing labour shortage. Migration from mountains leads to an increase in abandoned agricultural, land degradation and often forest fires. At community level, cultural values and ancient traditions are lost.

**#MountainsMatter for Indigenous Peoples** as many mountain areas host ancient indigenous communities that possess and maintain precious knowledge, traditions and languages. Mountain peoples have developed remarkable land use systems and have a wealth of knowledge and strategies accumulated over generations on how to adapt to climate variability.

**#MountainsMatter for Biodiversity** as half of the world’s biodiversity hotspots are concentrated in mountains and mountains support approximately one-quarter of terrestrial biological diversity. Mountains are home to rare animals such as gorillas, snow leopards and the majestic tahr, as well as strikingly beautiful plants such as orchids and lobelias.