

The World Mountain Forum Conference in Chambéry

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The World Mountain Forum Conference in Chambéry

ANEM and its role

The World Mountain Forum (WMF) held in Chambéry, France, from 5–12 June was initiated by ANEM, the French Association Nationale des Élus de la Montagne (National Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Areas). ANEM includes 4100 French localities, 42 county councils, 10 regional councils, and 240 Members of the French Parliament. It was created in 1984 to promote recognition of the identity and specificity of mountains and more generally to lobby for mountain issues at the national and European levels. ANEM promotes balanced sustainable development of each of the 7 French massifs (Vosges, Jura, North and South Alps, Massif Central, Pyrenees, Corse) to ensure the potential of these areas to fulfill their production, recreation, and environmental functions.

Chambéry, June 2000

The WMF set a very ambitious goal: to open an exchange among all areas of the world. The challenge is to transcend regional differences in order to unite people, to create a feeling of solidarity, and to foster a willingness to act together and cooperate within a common framework. The Forum concluded its week in Chambéry by agreeing to undertake 2 projects: a Draft World Charter for Mountain Populations and a project to create a permanent international forum supported by a foundation (WMF).

WMF participants came from nearly 70 countries. The Andes and Asia were well represented (Bolivia, 14; Ecuador, 12; Peru, 19; China, 9; Nepal, 18). Africa was underrepresented (with the exception of Morocco, which sent 22 delegates). The southern mountain

regions of Europe had the strongest representation (Italy, 56; Spain, 28; Belgium/European Union, 25; Switzerland, 20; Russia, 10).

The WMF is also linked to existing networks (nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] and research networks) that were involved in its preparation, particularly the Mountain Forum network.

A large field of issues

Workshops and sessions from the viewpoint of mountain communities—which broadened the approach usually taken at such events—focused on political, economic, and environmental issues related to organization, development, and protection in mountain regions.

The political issues discussed included governmental action, empowerment of local authorities, recognition and maintenance of local identities, action by the international community, and organization of mountain people. The workshops covered 6 economic issues: development of agriculture, controlled development of tourism, renewable sources of energy, development and integration of communications, hydroelectric resources, and exploitation of mineral resources. The 3 main environmental topics debated were management of forest resources, water resources, and mountain protection.

Meetings with the European Commission, NGOs, ski resorts and agropastoralists simultaneously enlarged the field of issues and exchanges between the institutions and organizations present.

Debate was wide ranging, as approximately 130 people (speakers, moderators, or presidents) chaired various sessions. Many spontaneous contacts were made

among people from the same region of the world. In response to demand, the organizers arranged several impromptu meetings by region (Andes, Himalayas, Africa).

A dozen cooperative projects involving different French mountain territories and representatives from the South were launched prior to the conference. The role of NGOs in specific implementation has been crucial, as most of the participants in these projects began decentralized collaboration long before the World Mountain Forum.

Proposed follow-up procedures

The main conclusions of the World Mountain Forum centered on the Draft World Charter for Mountain Populations project and the creation of an international organization. The participants agreed that the Charter would define the many facets of mountain evolution. Three main ideas emerged from the conference:

- Mountain communities should play a full role in society while preserving their own identity.
- Mountain communities should answer the challenges posed by economic liberalization and competition and modify the terms of exchange for their own benefit.
- Mountain communities should maintain control over their environment and the management of their natural resources while remaining conscious that such management must transcend their own needs for the benefit of the national and global communities.

Participants agreed in principle to create an international forum, to be funded by a foundation. This new organization is expected to have 3 main missions:

- Ensuring a voice for mountain regions at the international level, while working in close synergy with existing organizations.
- Encouraging governments and international authorities to become more involved in supporting mountain regions and recognizing their diversity.
- Creating a place for debates and exchange of information between mountain populations.

From the World Mountain Forum to “Montagnes du Monde”

The Draft Charter project specifies that the name “World Mountain Forum” must be abandoned to avoid any confusion with the existing Mountain Forum network (<http://www.mtnforum.org>). The

name “Montagnes du Monde” (“Mountains of the World”; “Montañas del Mundo”) was suggested for this new organization.

Publication of the proceedings of the World Mountain Forum has been scheduled for the end of 2000.

Final questions

The ANEM initiative was a fruitful exercise that should mark another step in creating awareness of mountain issues. Solidarity and communication were 2 key concepts debated at the WMF. It is expected that the next meeting will be held in 2002 in Quito (Ecuador) or Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan).

The Draft World Charter for Mountain Populations and creation of a new global association of moun-

tain communities proposed in Chambéry raised significant expectations. They also caused some concern in terms of procedure and content. The Mountain Forum, the Inter-Agency Group on Mountains, and the FAO need to join hands and work with ANEM and other proponents of these proposals in order to make sure that participatory and inclusive approaches are applied to develop them further. There is a need to ensure that these projects and initiatives are heading in a direction that leads to sustainable development.

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Stewardship and Human-Powered Recreation for the New Century National Mountain Conference (USA)

A National Mountain Conference in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, USA, was coplanned and cohosted by IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas, 14–16 September 2000, at Golden, Colorado. The partners in this effort were an alliance of The American Alpine Club, the American Hiking Society, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Colorado Mountain Club, and the Mountaineers. Ten members of IUCN’s Mountain Protected Area Network played a role in the program presentations.

Topics covered ranged from the threats posed by mining, logging, and motorized recreation to a consideration of the sacredness of mountains, the impacts of trophy homes, suburbanization, and gateway communities. Water and air quality problems were discussed along with alien species problems and habitat fragmentation. Twelve critical issues were identified as forming the basis of an action agenda, including drafting letters to the

presidential candidates in the November US elections.

These worrisome dozen issues are:

- Encroaching urban environment.
- Proliferating human infrastructure.
- Damaging natural resource extraction.
- Declining ecological diversity.
- Diminishing mountain air quality.
- Impairment of water resources.
- Changing climate conditions.
- Loving mountains to death through recreational overuse and misuse.
- Ballooning numbers of inexperienced users.
- Increasing user group conflicts.
- Losing access to public lands.
- Losing the mountain experience and solitude.

Examples of problems linked with these issues were presented from mountains all over the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii.

At the same time, there was also discussion of areas where progress has been made in retarding processes of degradation.

Larry Hamilton, Vice-Chair for Mountains in IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas, gave a keynote address on “A Campaign for the World’s Mountains,” which shifted the focus from the national to the international scene, and highlighted both the Mountain Chapter of Agenda 21 and the forthcoming International Year of Mountains 2002.

An all-day field trip into the heart of the ski development country and old mining area allowed participants to see first-hand and up close what shape these critical issues take in reality.

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