

# Statement from Basanta Shrestha, Director of Strategic Cooperation, ICIMOD

Made during the webinar on

**Role of transboundary cooperation in mountain biodiversity restoration and preservation as important contribution to sustainable development and struggle against COVID-19**

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**Your excellencies, ambassadors, distinguished dignitaries, friends of mountainous countries, colleagues, and participants,**

**Namaste and greetings from the Himalaya and a very happy International Mountain Day!**

At the outset, I am delighted to bring the perspective from ICIMOD and wish to draw your attention to the Hindu Kush Himalaya, which provides ecosystem services to almost two billion people, more than any other mountain system in the world.

ICIMOD, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, brings together a partnership of eight Regional Member Countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.

ICIMOD's mission is for "**mountains and people**" through knowledge and regional cooperation to support policies and practices for sustainable mountain development. Fostering transboundary cooperation has been the hallmark of ICIMOD for resilient and sustainable mountain development.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya is home to diverse life, culture, and beauty and is bestowed with immensely rich biodiversity. The region is known to be a microcosm of the world. The region includes 4 out of 36 global biodiversity hotspots, with about 40% of its area under various protected area categories.

However, the biological diversity of the region is subjected to development pressures and impacted by climate change, land use and land cover change, rapid urbanization, pollution, and not to mention the COVID-19 pandemic that also highlighted the increased risks of zoonotic and other emerging disease due to biodiversity loss and habitat degradation.

Together with its member countries, ICIMOD has adopted the transboundary landscape approach across different transects of the Hindu Kush Himalaya with an aim to improve transboundary cooperation among the Regional Member Countries. Sustenance of mountain ecosystem services and equitable livelihoods have been the key focus of these programmes, and we are actively working in four transboundary landscapes at present, from the eastern to western Himalayan region.

I also wish to reiterate that ICIMOD has released a comprehensive assessment report in 2019 – [The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment](#) – which underpins three key regional policy imperatives for conserving mountain biodiversity:

- The mountain ecosystems of the HKH need an integrated and transboundary conservation approach at a landscape level.
- Transboundary cooperation is essential to enhance the resilience of mountain ecosystem, especially to deal with climate change and extreme events.
- Investments in mountain ecosystems is needed, with particular emphasis on nature-based solutions.

I am also pleased to report to this august forum that the [HKH Ministerial Mountain Summit](#) was held on 15 October this year where eight ministers from the region signed a significant declaration to strengthen regional cooperation for improving policies focusing on environment and livelihoods and assessing the feasibility of establishing a regional institutional mechanism. To this end, ICIMOD is playing a catalytic role, learning from the Alpine Convention and the Arctic Circle.

Furthermore, we believe that the ministerial endorsement of the [HKH Call to Action](#) provides impetus for greater transboundary cooperation for preservation and restoration of mountain biodiversity.

I also wish to mention that ICIMOD is actively working with the UN and international bodies to contribute to global processes such [CBD](#), [IPBES](#), [GLF](#), and [GBIF](#).

Lastly, ICIMOD greatly appreciates this opportunity and expresses gratitude to the Government of Kyrgyzstan and the organizers. We look forward to working together to advance the mountain agenda and conservation of mountain biodiversity.

Thank you!