



March 4, 2011

To Participants of the Women of Mountains Conference:

First for my Kyrgyz friends who are participating, let me say “spraznikum”! It was a special privilege meeting and talking with you in Washington; thank you for participating in the Open World program. I also want to make special mention of Ambassador Abdrisaev for organizing the second of these successful conferences, and to him, Rusty Butler, and UVU President Matthew Holland for their great vision in seeing the special place mountainous region throughout the world hold for all our benefit.

Please accept my apologies for not joining you in person today. The situation in Washington is complicated and the ongoing budget issues and other demands kept me from where I would prefer to be – in Orem, Utah, at this conference.

Let me touch on a few points that I believe stand as a challenge for you today. Last year at this conference, the group recommended an aspirational menu of actions at the regional, national, and global levels that nations and the world community should take. Among them were:

- Special approaches for development in mountain regions
- Upstream and downstream stakeholders involved in conservation
- Charters, conventions, and integrated policies among states sharing mountainous areas
- Delegation of political decisions to the lowest level
- More investment in mountainous areas
- Local stewardship, local development

I suggest the group take inventory to measure the progress toward these goals. I believe it may be useful to take a particular example of problems in a region and analyze what led to that issue and how it might have been mitigated through preventive action in advance of the difficulties. Building on that scenario, you may consider laying out specific actions that participants may take in their own regions that are feasible and reportable at next year’s meeting.

With half the mountainous population vulnerable to food shortages and chronic malnutrition, children are especially at risk and the burden of care falls disproportionately on mothers. The winter difficulties experienced in Tajikistan not long ago stand as just one example of how remoteness, challenging terrain, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of preparedness for this kind of disaster multiply the suffering and long term negative consequences for any mountainous country.



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This sad example may serve as a way of approaching in a very practical way the steps today's participants can take and encourage their governments to take in anticipation of the consequences of severe winter, natural and man made disasters, or other slings and arrows that mountainous regions are subject to.

My strong suggestion is that each group seize on a particular issue and structure a solution that has some hope of accomplishment in a year's time. When we gather together next year for this conference, I hope many can step forward with strategies that worked successfully for small problems that then will allow us to take on the larger issues.

My best wishes for a productive and enlightening meeting.

With great respect and warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John O'Keefe".

John O'Keefe
Executive Director