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Statement by His Excellency Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Nepal at the 2nd Intersessional Meeting of UNCSD on Rio+20 Conference (New York, 15 December 2011)

Mr. Co-Chair,

Let me begin by thanking you for the excellent preparation for this meeting. Nepal as a landlocked mountainous country attaches high importance to the Rio+20 conference, as we take up the issue of sustainable development and poverty alleviation in an integrated and holistic manner. In our view, sustainable mountain development constitutes a fundamental part of the global sustainable development agenda.

Mountains have particular characteristics, which provide us with both the opportunities and challenges. Today, 12 per cent of the global population lives on mountains and almost 50 per cent of the global population depends upon mountains for water and other eco-system services. Besides that, mountains are home to many cultural and ethnic groups, reservoir of biodiversity, renewable energy, destination of eco-tourism. Mountains also represent great spiritual and aesthetic values, which we are all proud of. Yet, topography and gradient of the land, poverty of the people, tenuous ecological balance, and difficulty in building infrastructure are its inherent challenges. As such, mountain people are closer to the nature, yet poorer in economic terms than those living on the plains across the board. Moreover, in recent times, food insecurity, outmigration, climate change impacts and other stresses and pressures, including unsustainable use of resources and economic globalization have put the mountains under stress. Land degradation, landslides, glacial lake outburst floods and severe and frequent disasters have become a recurrent phenomenon. Most importantly, there is a real danger of losing the perennial source of water, because of the melting of glaciers due to the rise in global temperature. We have a very low capacity to control and manage expanding ecological footprints of economic globalisation. There is a strong need for special safeguard measures, and global commitment to ensure the protection of environmental resources of the environmentally vulnerable countries, and safeguard the livelihoods of these countries from the pressures of economic globalisation and global climate change.

Therefore, sustainable mountain development agenda must be high on the global sustainable development agenda. Unfortunately, Mountains have not received due attention and priority that they deserve as part of the global consciousness on their importance to all of us. We, therefore, call for a holistic approach. The Rio + 20 conference should therefore provide a priority consideration to the mountain issues.

The chapter 13 of Agenda 21 provides for sustainable mountain development agenda. But when we look at the global efforts to deal with mountain issues over the last two decades, it remains an unfulfilled agenda. Over the years, some national, regional and global efforts have been made to enhance knowledge and research about mountain eco-system and promote livelihood of the people. Similarly, there is a growing recognition and support for ensuring the rights and benefits to the mountainous people for their resources and eco-system services. However, there is much to be done to effectively mainstream mountain issues in global environmental, economic and social agenda in an inclusive manner.

The recent report on sustainable mountain development submitted by the UN Secretary General aptly sums up the challenges faced by mountain countries and peoples. I quote "Despite increased recognition of mountain issues and tangible results, significant constraints remain to alleviating poverty, averting environmental

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degradation and attaining sustainable mountain development in line with MDGs... There is a clear need therefore for higher level of funding and investment in the mountain areas, enhanced collaboration and coordination and stronger enabling environment with more supportive laws, policies and institutions at various levels. Mountain issues should be prioritized within development agendas and processes dealing with poverty reduction, water, food security, climate change and other issues critical to sustainable development."

When we look at the important conventions such as UNCCD, UNCBD and UNFCCC, we see very important contributions and close relevance of mountain countries for the success of these conventions.

In my own country, which is mountainous, landlocked and LDC, we face many challenges of sustainable mountain development. Access to food and nutrition, education and health situations of the mountain people are more challenging. Building infrastructure and connectivity is cost intensive. Poverty level is higher in the mountain people than elsewhere. Globalisation and outmigration are having their negative effects. Climate change is already causing a serious impact. The Himalayan glaciers are melting. Floods, land degradation, landslides and other disasters are more frequent and severe than ever before.

Let me quote IPCC Chair "in case of mountain areas there is high confidence that changes in heat waves, glacier retreats and/or permafrost degradation will affect high mountain phenomena such as slope instabilities, movement of mass and glacial lake outburst floods" unquote.

In order to sensitize the international community about our challenges as well as many services that we provide to the global community, we started the mountain initiatives since COP 15 in Copenhagen. An international conference of the mountain countries was held in Nepal on the Green Economy and sustainable mountain development, which came out with the Kathmandu declaration. ICIMOD, a renowned organization with a strong track record on integrated development of mountains, is headquartered in Nepal, which took a lead role in the conference. We are planning to organise another conference on mountain countries in April 2012. The Lucerne World Mountain Conference held in Switzerland in October this year, which many mountain countries including Nepal participated in, has also come out with a call for action on mountain issues at the global level. We also appreciate the Mountain Partnership for highlighting mountain issues and promoting network among mountain countries.

When we look at the integrated approach to sustainable development, we believe that the mountain countries face various challenges more severely than others. As the ability to address financial, food and energy crises in mountainous countries are limited; there should be a mechanism to help these countries to come out of the crises and improve their future resilience. And because of the growing vulnerability of both upstream and downstream populations, and the threats to the availability of mountain ecosystem services, all global stakeholders should agree on updating the mountain agenda under Chapter 13 of the Agenda 21.

Finance, transfer of technology and capacity building for mountain countries are therefore crucial to reduce poverty and build resilience, promote sustainable development and pursue a low carbon and greener path. They have to be pursued in a coherent manner. All the stakeholders should be made accountable towards fulfilling their commitments. Partnerships and collaboration with all Major Groups and financial institutions should also be strengthened. We are encouraged by the fact that out of 678 submissions, already 70 submissions have been made on mountain issues.

Therefore, we hope and believe that Rio+ 20 will come out with, not only a renewed political commitment, but also a stronger Sustainable Mountain Development agenda reflecting these new challenges and opportunities. It is also important to make sure that we have a stronger action plan for the effective implementation of the outcome document that will ensure sustainable livelihood of the people of mountains as well, in an integrated and inclusive manner. We have too much at stake here. We cannot ignore the particular vulnerability of the mountains, their eco-system services and contributions of the mountain people to the larger international community. International community in return must respond to the concerns and interests of the mountain countries in a responsible manner, especially when many of them are also least developed or developing countries.

Thank you.