UN CBD COP17
Presidency Side Event
Global Dialogue on Mountain and Related Freshwater Ecosystems

High-Level Launch of the COP17 Presidency Flagship Initiative
"Yerevan Platform on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems"

27 October 2026, 06:00 – 7:30pm
Blue Zone, Armenian Presidency Pavilion
Yerevan, Armenia

Format: Multi-stakeholder roundtable with a high-level launch event
Date and time: 27 October 2026, 06:00 – 7:30pm
Location: CBD COP17 Blue Zone, Armenian Presidency Pavilion (tbc)
Organizer: COP17 Presidency, supported by CBD Secretariat, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Relevant KMGBF goals and targets: Target 1, 2, 3, 14, 19, 22

Context

Mountains as "Water Towers": Mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems constitute strategic natural infrastructure, supplying water to more than 2 billion people. Mountains also support the livelihoods of around 1.2 billion people, including indigenous peoples and local communities, and are home to 25 of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots. Yet only 19% of mountain areas are currently protected, well below Target 2 set out in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems play a vital role in regulating downstream water supply, sustaining rivers, wetlands and lakes, reducing the risks of floods, droughts, erosion and landslides, providing critical habitats for biodiversity, supporting a range of livelihoods, and preserving cultural and ecological values for communities living in both mountain and downstream areas. However, mountains remain highly vulnerable to climate change, environmental degradation and natural hazards, while being poorly integrated into policy frameworks that shape biodiversity conservation, water resource management, climate change adaptation, infrastructure planning, protected-area design and management, as well as public and private finance.

Addressing growing vulnerabilities of mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems is becoming increasingly urgent. Glaciers are disappearing; permafrost is thawing; precipitation and

seasonal snow cycles are changing; high-elevation wetlands and grasslands are coming under pressure; and deforestation, forest fires and land degradation are increasing. At the same time, new post-glacial ecosystems, rivers, lakes and terrestrial habitats are emerging, which creates disaster risks and other challenges for adjacent communities and ecosystems. These changes are reshaping the ecological and hydrological foundations on which downstream communities, cities, agriculture, energy systems and biodiversity depend.

Given the growing political momentum and international commitment in support of mountains, and ahead of the Second Global Mountain Summit (Bishkek +25) on 21-23 October 2027, CBD COP17 provides a timely opportunity to position mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems as strategic entry points for advancing KMGBF implementation. This opportunity will be pursued through a COP17 Presidency Flagship initiative entitled "the Yerevan Platform on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems".

Building on existing, relevant global and regional frameworks, conventions, mechanisms, processes and initiatives aimed at protecting, restoring and sustainably managing mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems, the Platform seeks to enhance *policy coherence, support mountain ecosystem-specific policy dialogues and provide dedicated technical support to member states, with a particular focus on these vulnerable and neglected ecosystems.*

COP17 Presidency official event

The COP17 Presidency of Armenia, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the technical lead agency for the initiative, and with other key partners such as the Mountain Partnership, will convene a High-Level Dialogue on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems to support the acceleration of ecosystem-based implementation of the KMGBF. The Dialogue will bring together high-level representatives of various mountainous countries from around the world, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), civil society, representatives of indigenous people and local communities, women and youth.

The Dialogue aims to promote an exchange on experiences, share best practices, and identify opportunities and challenges related to ongoing policy implementation, capacity-building, and innovative approaches, as well as needs for financing conservation, restoration and sustainable development, with a focus on vulnerable mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems.

The Dialogue will also help to identify entry points for strengthening national and regional policy frameworks, improving access to technical support, and facilitating partnerships among countries, relevant partners, institutions and other stakeholders, as well as supporting possible implementation pathways.

A key expected outcome of the Dialogue will be the official launch of the COP17 Presidency's flagship initiative "Yerevan Platform on Mountain and Related Freshwater Ecosystems".

Objectives

- Official **launch of the "Yerevan Platform on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems" initiative as a sustained process** within relevant CBD processes on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems.
- Facilitate **high-level dialogue and exchange among various stakeholders** from diverse regions, including representatives of governments (including donor countries), IGOs, indigenous peoples and local communities, women, youth and other relevant stakeholders on the importance of mountain and related freshwater biodiversity within the framework of the CBD and KMGBF implementation. More specifically, the Dialogue will aim to:
    - Promote the multiple benefits as well as social and economic opportunities of conserving and restoring mountain and related freshwater biodiversity for water regulation, disaster-risk reduction, climate change adaptation, livelihoods and biodiversity values, thereby contributing to the achievement of Targets 2, 3, 8 and 11 of the KMGBF;
    - Highlight the opportunity to integrate the management of mountain and related freshwater biodiversity into long-term policy planning and the *policy coherence* agenda, including National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) under the UNFCCC, river basin management plans, protected-areas systems, infrastructure planning and disaster-risk strategies, in line with Targets 1 and 14 of the KMGBF;
    - Strengthen the economic, investment and business case for mobilizing finance for the conservation, restoration and stewardship of mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems, and for strengthening capacity building.
- Reflect on the discussions, outcomes and key messages emerging from the Mountain Ecosystem Day held on the 26 October in the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Pavilion, and incorporate relevant insights and recommendations into the High-Level Dialogue and the broader objectives of the Presidency's Flagship Initiative.

Expected outcomes

- Official Launch of the "Yerevan Platform on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems" Initiative as a sustained dialogue and targeted technical support programme on mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems, thereby establishing the Platform as one of the key legacy outcomes under the COP17 Presidency;
- Strengthened high-level political commitment to the mountain and their related freshwater ecosystems;
- Enhanced policy coherence across biodiversity, conservation, climate change, water resource management and sustainable development agendas, strengthening synergies across the Rio Conventions;
- Strengthened economic and investment case for mobilizing finance to support the mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems.

Draft Agenda (90 min)

Time	Segment	Details	Suggested speakers
5 mins	**Opening remarks**	**Opening and welcome remarks** Scene setting: Mountain and their related freshwater ecosystems as strategic natural assets	Ms Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, CBD (tbc)
25 mins	**Keynote speeches and Official launch of the Initiative** **Presentation of the Initiative**	**High-level political framing** set the political context for the high-level dialogue, highlighting the relevance of mountains and their related freshwater ecosystems within the context of KMGBF and the opportunity presented by COP17 Presidency to advance its implementation Official launch of the "Yerevan Platform on Mountain and Related Freshwater Ecosystems" Initiative Presentations of the initiative of the "Yerevan Platform on Mountain and Related Freshwater Ecosystems" and expected outputs	Mr Hambardzum Matevosyan, UN CBD COP17 Presidency, Minister of Environment of Armenia Ms Inger Andersen, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UNEP Mr Aram Meymaryan, Deputy Minister of Environment of Armenia, COP17 Presidency with Ms Susan Gardner, Director, Ecosystems Division (UNEP)

50 mins	**Multi-stakeholder dialogue**	**High level multi-stakeholder dialogue on mountains and related freshwater ecosystems: voices and perspectives from global leaders** Moderated discussion between Ministers/Heads of delegations from mountainous regions, donors, representatives of IGOs, and major groups and stakeholders including indigenous people and local communities, women and youth (maximum 3min per intervention) ● What are the key practical entry points for stronger policy coherence under KMGBF Targets 1 and 14? What is the single biggest policy gap preventing mountain and related freshwater biodiversity from being effectively integrated into national planning? ● How can NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs and other relevant national plans and policies work together rather than in parallel? How can community governance and stewardship be more effectively integrated into biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration approaches?	**Moderator:** Ms Doreen Robinson (Deputy) Director Ecosystems Division (UNEP) **Speakers:** Ministers of Environment, UN Agencies/IGOs, NGOs, finance actors, civil society representatives of women, youth, indigenous people and local communities (tbc)
10 min	**Closing remarks**	**Wrap up and closing remarks**	Mr Robert Abisoghomonyan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Armenia COP17 Presidency Armenian Youth from Mountainous regions (tbd)