

## **UNFCCC COP28 High-Level Segment**

### **Statement by Ms. Alenka Smerkolj Secretary General of the Alpine Convention for publication on the UNFCCC website**

Mister President, your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I extend my gratitude to the United Arab Emirates COP Presidency and the UNFCCC Secretariat for their commitment and efforts in organising this crucial climate conference.

Transnational cooperation lies at the heart of our collective response to the climate crisis. It is the driving force behind both the Alpine Convention and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Alpine Convention, a treaty between the eight Alpine countries and the European Union born out of a shared vision in 1991, holds a singular objective: the protection and sustainable development of the European Alps.

Mountains are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. They experience faster and larger temperature rises and face an increased threat of natural disasters. Yet their significance extends far beyond their peaks. Sustainable water management in the mountains, for instance, is essential to prevent droughts or floods in the downstream regions.

Climate change exacerbates land-use conflicts in mountainous areas, as high-altitude habitats shrink, and trade-offs between renewable energy production, biodiversity, landscape protection, and other land uses are required. In the Alps, the hydropower potential is nearly fully tapped, leaving less than 10% of river stretches in good condition, highlighting the delicate balance we must strike.

Mountains, however, face an added complexity in terms of governance, often being part of multiple countries, sharing challenges across borders. It is imperative that we amplify their voice on the global stage, acknowledging their unique challenges and contributions.

I find encouragement in the rich programme of events dedicated to mountains during this COP, particularly today and tomorrow, as we celebrate International Mountain Day.

In 2019, the Contracting Parties of the Alpine Convention approved the Alpine Climate Target System 2050, implementing it through a concrete Climate Action Plan with clear implementation pathways. We emphasise the importance of working across all sectors of activity – such as energy, agriculture, and transport – and fostering collaboration across these sectors to achieve meaningful progress.

Allow me to highlight the commitment of the current, Slovenian Presidency of the Alpine Convention in the field of climate change, placing a priority on Climate Change Education in Alpine schools. Our exchanges reveal a high level of awareness and competence among educators and young generations, showcasing their goodwill towards a sustainable future. Education, as an investment in the future, is paramount.

COP28 must not only be a forum for dialogue but a beacon of hope for our youth. It is our responsibility to convey a clear message that Parties are taking urgent and decisive actions to achieve mitigation goals and reinforce adaptation efforts. Let us leave here with a renewed commitment to safeguard our precious mountains and the generations that will inherit them. Thank you for your cooperation.