**PRESS RELEASE**

**Political leaders and international organizations express a renewed commitment towards snow leopard conservation in the post COVID-19 world**

***Snow leopard range countries and international partner organizations take stock of collective efforts to conserve snow leopards and their mountain ecosystems in High Asia***

23 October, 2020

On the occasion of the International Snow Leopard Day, Environment Ministers or their representatives from snow leopard range countries of Asia met to take stock of in-country conservation efforts and renew their commitment towards a healthier planet and safer environment for snow leopards and the mountain communities who share their habitats. For the first time in the last seven years, the Steering Committee meeting of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) – an inter-governmental alliance of the snow leopard range countries – was held virtually. The meeting was presided over by the Minister of Forest and Environment from the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal Mr. Shakti Bahadur Basnet and Mr. Mirslav Amankulov, Director of State Agency for Environment Protection and Forestry, Kyrgyz Republic, who serve as the present Chair and co-chair of the GSLEP Steering Committee respectively. Also present were the Environment ministers of the Kingdom of Bhutan and Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Vice Ministers from Mongolia and Uzbekistan, senior officials from all snow leopard range countries, and heads or senior representatives of international organizations such as the International Snow Leopard Trust, the GEF Small Grants Program, Global Tiger Initiative Council, Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit of UNEP and UNDP.

While appreciating the conservation work done by the countries and the GSLEP Secretariat, the Steering Committee drew attention to the conservation challenges and significant impacts on available funding for field conservation efforts posed by the COVID-19 pandemic; calling upon multilateral and financial institutions for renewed emphasis and urgent measures to strengthen conservation efforts in Asia’s mountains. Recognizing the close links between human health and the health of wildlife and ecosystems, the delegates of the meeting appealed the global community to intensify their support for snow leopard conservation and the welfare of local communities who live in high mountains, and support community-based conservation efforts. They called for stronger measures for the disruption of illegal wildlife trade and reduction in wildlife consumption; and significant steps towards green development in high mountains. They also expressed the need for prioritizing stronger disease research, surveillance and monitoring in snow leopards and other high mountain wildlife, and for strengthening the public and animal health infrastructures in Asia’s High mountains.

The dignitaries at the meeting appreciated the request of nearly 5,000 citizens from across 80 countries drawing the attention of national leaders and officials to strengthen snow leopard conservation efforts and minimize the risk of disease transmission between wildlife and people. A policy brief on managing snow leopards in conflict situations, and a new conservation education and awareness strategy that is sensitive to the COVID-19 related lockdowns and challenges were released. The meeting was organized on a virtual venue (<http://join.globalsnowleopard.org>) where the work being done by snow leopard range countries, conservation organizations and specific projects and programs are on display for delegates and visitors.

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The Global Snow Leopard and its Ecosystems Protection Program

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