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Editorial..

A new beginning:

Every new year brings hope for basic assurances to all mankind.

Sixty years ago, during the dark days of World War Two, President F.D. Roosevelt wrote the following words in his New Year Address:

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression - everywhere in the world. The second is the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way - everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want... The fourth is freedom from fear.

Will we ever reach these ideals is the uneasy question the new year of 2002 begs of all mankind?

We may well have our doubts in answering, but since God-given life

has been bestowed on us it is only fair that we should strive towards the noble goals the American President asked of the world so long ago.

2002 has been designated the international year of the mountains. This means that the world's mountain regions will be in the spotlight in 2002, an important aspect for both 'our countries' New Zealand and Switzerland.

What would the world be without its mountains?

Mountains account for a quarter of the Earth's total land area. They supply water to half the world's population and are often areas of outstanding natural beauty with a high degree of cultural diversity.

For Switzerland the mountains are the cornerstone to its identity. They are an integral part of its economy as well as home and living space for many of its inhabitants.

There is hardly a tourist that would not recognise Switzerland's most famous mountain, the Matterhorn.

The story of its inaugural climb is well documented in the Swiss history books. On July 14th 1865 the 26-year-old London artist and mountaineer Edward Whymper, in company with three fellow country men and three Swiss climbers conquered the Matterhorn for the first time.

Unfortunately the descent cost the lives of the three accompanying Britons and two of the Swiss guides. This tragedy did not deter thousands of climbers following in Whimper's footsteps in the intervening years. Frequent tragedies are common with dozens of lives lost during the intervening years to this date. The cemetery of Zermatt (the small town at the foot of the Matterhorn), with its many international surnames on the memorials, is witness to the magic of the mountain drawing mountaineers from around the world.

Mountains and their environments will in future demand ever increasing attention to ensure a clean and healthy climate. In the case of Switzerland this was recognised a long time ago. Swiss lowland and town dwellers are prepared to subsidise the mountain population as guardians in various aspects. But often even regular subsidies are inadequate to compensate for the harsh lives the mountain population has to endure.

Both Switzerland and New Zealand, with their splendid mountain scenery, offering summer and winter sports to tourists and locals alike, have in recent years greatly increased their tourism industries.

Both 'our countries' owe much of their appeal to the mountains.

Let's hope that this 'year of the mountains', will teach us renewed respect for the beauty of God's creation reflected in our mountains.

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