

Carlo Alberto Pinelli's opening speech at the certificate award ceremony held on Sept. 11th in the hall of the Government Post Graduate College for Girls of Saidu Sharif.

In a nutshell, "Girls in Action 2025" is an all-women "mountaineering/environment friendly" initiative, conceived and organized by the Asian Desk of Mountain Wilderness International, in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism of the Government of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It can be rightly considered as our first commitment within the framework of the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Despite the very serious problems caused by unusually dramatic floods and by some unfortunate terrorist incidents, (which forced us to move from Chitral to Upper Hunza), today we can announce with great joy and pride that the advanced "Girls in Action" course has been a real success. A logistical success, a training success, and a spiritual success.

Thanks to our excellent all-women's trainer team we were able to pass on to our 24 trainees the more advanced techniques of safe rock climbing and glacier negotiation with ice axes and crampons. The mighty Passu glacier with its towering seracs was perfect for putting to the test the mountaineering bent of our brave young women.

We had theoretical and practical lessons on environment protection and conservation, on first aid and high-altitude medicine, on map and compass reading, on correct hiking behaviour. Handy printouts were distributed to all trainees about various mountaineering skills, on glaciers, snow and avalanches, as well as basic medical knowledge, and fixed ropes. We found time also for one lesson on basic Yoga stretching exercises and spent a relaxing half day on an educational treasure hunt.

We are confident that this course will benefit all trainees aspiring to become trekking guides, outdoor activity instructors for school groups, mountaineering expedition assistants, environmental sentinels, or national park rangers. In a cultural environment deeply conditioned by ancient traditions, all these teachings potentially amount to a true gender revolution. Trainees understood that there are no fields in human activities that cannot be successfully attained by women. In the mountains as well as elsewhere. Trainees coming from Swat and Chitral brilliantly assimilated all our teachings, learned quickly and did not forget what the instructors tried to convey to them.

But this was only one side of the experience. Maybe the minor part. What made this course unforgettable was the enthusiasm, mutual understanding and "sisterhood" that almost immediately tied together trainers and trainees, creating a sort of lasting spiritual and emotionally sound family. For me, for our Italian instructors, for our excellent Pakistani helpers, it was a moving experience that will not fade away in months and years.

But... who are we? Mountain Wilderness International is an association of expert mountaineers who combine serious skills in outdoor activities and mountaineering training with a commitment to preventing the deterioration of the natural mountain environment. MW is a non-governmental, non-commercial, and non-profit organization that, through a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding, aims to demonstrate that responsible behaviour and thoughtful planning can enable a growing number of tourists to enjoy mountain outdoor activities without compromising the spiritual value of the planet's remaining wild places. At the

same time, it seeks to acknowledge and wisely channel the socio-economic and cultural aspirations of local communities.

For several years our association has been active in Pakistan's mountain valleys (Swat and Chitral mainly, but also Hunza), with the aim of steering tourism development in a manner that prioritizes ecological sustainability and environmental responsibility. In order to gain the support of local communities of the Swat Kohistan in particular, Mountain Wilderness has identified and implemented, since 2018, various strategies including training courses for trekking guides, systematic exploration of potential hiking routes (with the involvement of over 60 European trekkers), urban and environmental restoration projects, and the publication of a hiking guidebook to the mountains of Upper Swat (to be published by the end of this year).

Now, with the recently signed MoU, our project is gaining much greater significance and scope, and will involve the entire northwestern mountain range of Pakistan, with a specific focus on Swat and Chitral. Our "Girls in Action" courses (two basic and one advanced) are an important step within the framework of MW's strategy.

Let me end by thanking prof Bakht Tasleem, Miss Farzana, Mr Ali Syed, Mr Afzel Sherazee, Mr Fazal Khaliq, Mr Tauqeer of the Pakistani chapter of MW for their help and wise support.

My best wishes to all our brave, intelligent and smiling trainees. They have found a place in my heart forever.

Instructors: Lorenza Pratali, Francesca Zennaro, Sara Pozzetti, Erminia Devoti, Sarah Haase.

Organizers: Carlo Alberto Pinelli, Francesco Cappellari, Afzel Sherazee, Fazal Khaliq.