

ADVANCE MEDIA ADVISORY
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Climate change set to overwhelm the world's poor

Brussels, 29 March 2007 – From 2nd to 5th April, the world's leading scientific experts are to gather in Brussels to launch the second volume of the UN's Fourth Assessment Report, which addresses climate impacts, adaptation and vulnerability. The report is expected to portray a bleak future for the world's poorest countries, which have done least to pollute the atmosphere. Despite the negligible historical emissions of greenhouse gases by the least developed countries, their people will suffer most from climate change, as they are the most vulnerable to the impacts and least able to adapt [1].

The second volume of the Fourth Assessment Report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group II provides the starkest warning yet on the threat of global climate change and predicts the severe consequences the planet will face unless world leaders take urgent action to cut emissions of greenhouse gases.

Friends of the Earth International's Climate Campaigner, Catherine Pearce, said:

"The scientific findings are stronger than ever. This report is likely to confirm that not only are we seeing the impacts of climate change around us already, but worse is yet to come and the world's poorest people are being hardest hit.

"The industrialised world, including the USA, must lead the way by making significant cuts in their greenhouse gas emissions and helping less developed countries to develop sustainable, low-carbon economies.

"Current efforts on adaptation, including available funds are clearly inadequate to meet the scale of what is required. Urgent assistance is needed for those developing countries, which have done nothing to contribute to the current threat of climate change and are already facing the devastating effects."

"In Bali this December, countries must launch negotiations for a more effective and stronger second round of the Kyoto agreement on climate change, which must start in 2013."

Last month EU leaders pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. They promised to increase this to 30 percent, if other developed countries did the same.

Roger Higman, Friends of the Earth's Head of Campaign Coordination in the UK, said:

"Europe is one of the regions most to blame for climate change. Now, it must cut its emissions and persuade other rich countries to match its call for 30 percent emissions cuts by 2020 through a strong international agreement for the next Kyoto commitment period."

The UN report - the second of a series based on the latest scientific literature - analyses how climate change is affecting natural and human systems, what the impacts will be and how far adaptation and mitigation can reduce the impacts. The report, which has taken six years to compile, draws on research by 2,500 scientists from over 130 countries and should shock the world into taking urgent action to reduce global emissions.

Government delegates from more than 100 countries are expected to agree that hundreds of millions of people are vulnerable to flooding due to sea level rise, especially in densely populated and low-lying settlements which already face other challenges, such as tropical storms.

The UN report is also expected to warn that projected climate change is likely to affect millions of people through increases in malnutrition, deaths, disease and injury due to heat waves, floods, storms, fires and droughts.

Worryingly, scientists are also expected to state that over the next half-century it is very likely that climate change will impede the achievement of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals. [2]

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Spokespeople in Brussels:

Catherine Pearce, Friends of the Earth International, will be in Brussels from Tues 3 to Fri 6 April.
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Roger Higman, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland, will be in London until 4 April, then in Brussels on 5-6 April. Mobile +44 7780 661807

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

[1] IPCC official website: www.ipcc.ch

[2] For more information on the Millennium Development Goals see
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

[3] A series of short articles on climate change available online at:
<http://www.foei.org/climate/pacific.html>

TESTIMONIES:

FROM NIGERIA:

"Climate Change in Nigeria is a ticking time bomb as there is little or no action aimed at mitigating its impacts," according to Nnimmo Bassey of ERA in Nigeria. For more information: Tel: +234 8037274395

FROM GHANA:

"A devastating sea erosion is taking place along the Ada coast in Ghana and is under-reported by the media. Over 5,000 metres of land had been submerged and there is a serious risk that the whole Ada land would be submerged in the short term. Coastal dwellers claim that the very existence of about 50 communities is under threat. It is absolutely essential to have a legally binding and effective global adaptation fund to address the urgent adaptation needs in less developed countries and small island states," according to Erasmus Aborley in Ghana. For more information: Tel: +233-21-286123 and +233-21-512312

FROM HAITI:

"One of the major impacts of climate change on small island states is the loss of biodiversity and its benefits. Due to their limited resources, climate-change related catastrophes negatively affect those states' capacity to limit damages, prevent epidemics and rebuilt infrastructure, economies and communities in the long term." according to Aldrin Calixte of Friends of the Earth Haiti. For more information: Tel: +509-4019684 or +509-7337377

FROM PERU:

"Glaciers in Peru are melting fast, bringing floods and destruction locally but also negatively affecting energy generation and water resources nationally. In Peru, 60% of the population and 70% of the productive activities are located on the coast, a desert strip whose water provision depends almost entirely on the mountain area. In addition, 70% of the electricity supply comes from that area. It is estimated that in next the 10 years all the glaciers below 5500m will disappear, meaning not only the disappearance of the water supply for human consumption, but also strong negative impacts on the national energy situation, and the economy, " according to María Teresa Colque Pinelo of Friends of the Earth Perú. For more information: Tel: + 51 54 781816

FROM MAURITIUS:

"Small island developing states (SIDS) are ecologically the most fragile and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. These countries are particularly fragile to climate variability and climate change is having profound effects on the economic and social conditions of coastal populations. Cyclones and climate change are taking a direct toll on the economy of these countries and negatively impact particularly subsistence farmers and artisanal fishermen (hence increasing poverty), creating food and water shortages and health problems. Due to their small size, islands like Mauritius are particularly exposed to climate change and have no defense against this phenomenon," according to Rajen Awotar, Executive Chairman FOE Mauritius / MAUDESCO. For more information: Tel: + 230 425-2417

FROM AUSTRALIA:

"Australia is the hottest and most water scarce continent in the world. Drought and bushfires have been part of our history. Climate change is making Australia hotter and drier. It is clear to anyone who is paying attention to the issue of global warming that there is a historical liability by the developed nations. Having created a disproportionate amount of greenhouse gases for many decades, which has allowed us to develop our economy, it would be extremely mean spirited for Australia not to commit to deep cuts in emissions as a way of acknowledging our historic and contemporary carbon debt. The developed world has benefited from our use of fossil fuels; the onus is now on us to make deep cuts while also helping other nations to do the same," said Cam Walker for Friends of the Earth Australia. For more information: +61- 419 338 047

CANADA:

"Canadians are clearly living with impacts of climate chaos and can expect more - milder winters are responsible for the ravages of western forests from the pine beetle and melting permafrost. Severe and extreme weather is already linked with premature death, illness and violence in our big cities. Vulnerable Canadians including senior citizens and those living with fixed income, low incomes or job loss are least able to cope with the increasing impacts we can expect from the warming climate. The upcoming IPCC report should be a clarion call to action by public health officials," said Beatrice Olivastri, Chief Executive Officer, Friends of the Earth Canada. For more information: Tel: + 1 613 241-0085 Ext. 26