



# Global Warming

JUSTICE Briefing No 4

## Climate Change and Africa

“The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” Psalm 24

### AFRICA IS PAYING THE COST of Global Warming.

Africa produces less than 4% of the world's greenhouse gases yet nowhere else are the effects of global warming more visible. The snowy caps of Mount Kilimanjaro are melting. Lake Chad is half the size it was 35 years ago. The Sahara desert is advancing at the rate of about six kilometers per year. Overall Africa's deserts claim twelve million hectares of land annually.

For political, social and financial reasons Africa is least able to adapt to the negative impact of Global Warming. Climate change is not only destroying Africa's land it also exposes Africans to health risks associated with heat waves, floods, wildfires, changes in infectious disease patterns, worsening food yields and due to the loss of livelihoods. The World Health Organisation estimates that climate-related disease risks will more than double by 2030.

**Climate change is already causing migration** and the socio-political and ethnic tensions that inevitably accompany the movement of peoples. Rainfall in the Sahel region on the southern edges of the Sahara has been dropping since the 60's and has contributed to conflicts in Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. The UN has stated that *“Climate change will cause additional environmental stress and social crises (e.g. drought, harvest failure, water scarcity) in a region already characterized by weak states (e.g. Somalia, Chad), civil wars (e.g. Sudan, Niger) and major refugee flows”*.

UN figures show that the number of refugees worldwide grew from 9.9 million in 2007 to 11.4 million in 2008 and identified climate change as one of the leading causes along with conflicts and escalating food prices. **Africans account for about half of these refugees.**

**“Further global warming of 1°C defines a critical threshold. Beyond that we will likely see changes that make Earth a different planet than the one we know.”**

Jim Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute.



### BEYOND DENIAL

While denial that human activity is the primary cause of Global warming, which typified the response of big business and the US Administration during the Bush era, has all but ceased the debate has now shifted onto uncertainties regarding the speed and extent of temperature rise and the effect it will have on the earth's complex ecosystem. What is certain is that global warming has already caused a rise in sea-levels, is melting glaciers, and shrinking ice caps. There is also evidence of increasing temperatures and acidity in the oceans and of possible increases in the intensity of tropical cyclones.

The view that global warming is happening much faster than previously believed gained greater credence when in February 2009 scientists of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change revised their previous estimate regarding the melting of polar ice sheets – they now admit that they are melting much faster than previously thought and that Arctic sea ice which acts as a refrigerator for the world may be gone in the next five years. As a result global warming will happen even faster.

Some experts believe that we either have or are very close to reaching the first climate **“tipping point”** where as temperatures rise, changes are triggered in the earth's systems further contributing to global warming and potentially unleashing rapid, uncontrollable and irreversible change. With the melting of the ice we will not only lose its cooling effect on the sea but also the ability of its white surface to reflect heat back into the atmosphere. Instead heat will be absorbed by the sea contributing to further warming. What effect will this have? Will the ocean current system which has a huge effect on world climate and on the oceans ecosystems be altered? Some believe that if the Gulf Stream stopped flowing around Ireland winter temperatures would drop by between 10 and 15 degrees and bring us a climate similar to Alaska or the Russian Kamachatka Peninsula.

**Whether or not we have reached a ‘tipping point’ it is clear that action like that advocated by Oxfam (see over) to drastically reduce carbon emissions must happen very soon.**

Global Warming is an increase in global temperatures caused by the burning of fossil fuels. This has led to the "Greenhouse Effect" the build up of gases like carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which effectively creates a blanket around the world that allows heat from the sun in, traps it and thus causing temperatures to rise.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

### Triple Injustice for Africa

**Injustice one:** Climate change is hitting the poorest first and hardest – hundreds of thousands have already died from worsening floods, droughts, heat waves, cyclones and disease that global warming is unleashing. Those most at risk are the poor in Africa and Asia.

**Injustice two:** Those most affected did not cause it and are powerless to stop it. Climate change has been largely created through the burning of fossil fuels by industrialized nations, with the richest being the most culpable. A member of the Government of Tuvalu a Pacific Island-nation disappearing due to rising sea-levels points out: 'Industrialized countries caused the problem, but we are suffering the consequences. It is only fair that people in industrialized nations take responsibility. It's the polluter-pays principle: you pollute, you pay.'

**Injustice three:** the polluters are not paying. In fact, greenhouse gas emissions (of which carbon dioxide accounts for 80 per cent of warming, the others being methane, nitrous oxide and certain industrial gases) continue to rise in developed countries, despite their signing the Kyoto Protocol which was supposed to reduce them. Kyoto was also supposed to lead to financial support for poor countries like Tuvalu struggling at the sharp end of the climate crisis, but the international community has shown little interest. The G8 have so far pledged a shockingly inadequate \$6 billion — to be disbursed through World Bank loans, forcing affected countries to pay twice for their own suffering... When compared with the hundreds of billions being devoted to bailing out the banks and the injustice becomes even clearer.

New Internationalist Feb 09

## WARMING WARNING - OXFAM REPORT - April 09

A recent Oxfam Report: "The Right to Survive" projects that, by 2015 the annual total of people effected by climate related disasters will rise by 50% from the current 250 million to more than 375 million people.

The research undertaken by Louvain University was based on the analysis of 6,500 climate-related disasters since 1980. Launching the Report Oxfam's Chief Executive said;

*"The system can barely cope with the current levels of disasters and could be overwhelmed by a substantial increase in numbers of people affected. There must be a fundamental reform of humanitarian aid spending and the way it is allocated. Currently the Aid System is far from prepared to meet the challenge."*

The Report states that even in these daunting economic times, the world can afford to meet future humanitarian needs and fulfil the right to survive of vulnerable people. The humanitarian challenge of the twenty-first century demands a step-change in the quantity and nature of humanitarian response. The skills and resources needed to mitigate the threats from climate-related catastrophic events already exist. Some countries have already shown the political will to do just that, for example, investment by Bangladesh in cyclone protection and early warning measures have already proven that they can significantly reduced the death toll from storms. Whether or not there is sufficient will to do this on a wider scale will be one of the defining features of our age and will dictate whether millions live or die.

Oxfam has also launched a new campaign urging rich countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% on 1990 levels by 2020 to tackle the source of global warming.

For the purposes of the Report people affected by disasters are defined as "those suffering physical injury or illness, those made homeless or who required immediate assistance".



The next issue of the Justice Briefing "Global Warming II" will focus on Ghana and on efforts being made there to adapt to Climate Change .