



Africa & the World

Climate Change - A Wake-Up Call

Many of us think of Climate Change as something far away in places like Africa.

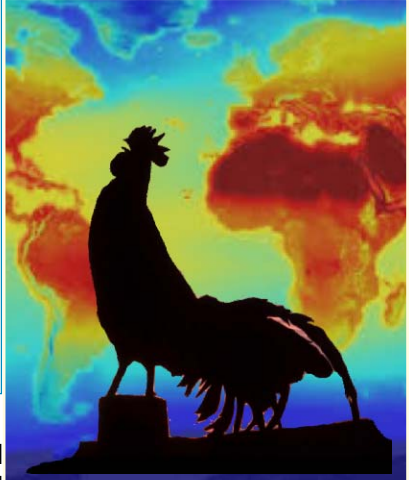
Up to now our relative wealth and geographical location have cushioned us from its worst effects. But this is changing. In this Briefing we recount events around the world that have taken place in 2017. These show that Climate Change is everywhere, even here in Ireland. It is a reality we need to wake-up to and act against.

Sweltering Heat

Unprecedented heat waves were experienced in 2017. These led to droughts, wildfires and deaths. In Australia temperatures reached 50 degrees Celsius in January 2017.

Southern Europe experienced summer highs of 40 degrees. There have been sixteen record-breaking years since 2000 with 2016 being the hottest yet.

World on Fire: Wildfires have raged and caused destruction from New Zealand to



Spain and Portugal; in California and even in Greenland. Global warming has been identified as an increased fire risk and has become a reality in many places. Fires - fuelled by strong winds - have wreaked havoc in Cape Town, South Africa.

Record Breaking Storms

Hurricanes Maria and Irma, which hit the Caribbean in August and September, were two of the year's most damaging weather events. The list of storms also includes Ophelia in Ireland, Harvey and Nate in Central America and the US, and Xavier and Sebastian in Germany.

Here in Ireland, Storm Ophelia evolved from the strongest East-



In 2017 Wildfires destroyed huge areas and thousands of homes in California, USA.



In October 2017 Ophelia, Ireland's worst storm on record struck. Three people lost their lives as violent winds of more than 96mph (156kph) in places swept across the country causing widespread damage to electricity networks, uprooted trees, damaged properties and caused widespread disruption.

ern Atlantic hurricane in a century and half of records.

Oceans at Risk

The high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere represent a major threat causing acidification of our oceans which are already in danger due to pollution, over-fishing and warming waters.

In 2017 evidence showed that the oceans are choking on plastic junk - to a much greater extent than previously thought. This is creating a hostile environment for sea creatures – entire ocean ecosystems are at risk. Scientists believe that up to 70% of Australia's Great Barrier Reef has been destroyed. It looks like this will increase to 90% by 2050. There has been an eight inch rise in global sea levels over the last century. The rate of rise has nearly doubled in the last two decades.



70% of the Great Barrier Reef has been destroyed

Struggle to Breathe

Deteriorating air quality causes thousands of deaths around the world every year, New Delhi, is one of the world's most polluted cities. In Nov. 17, large parts of northern India and Pakistan were engulfed by a blanket of thick smog carrying harmful particulate matter. Schools were forced to close, and hospitals were full of people with respiratory problems. Climate change not only damages the environment; it also involves human health. *“Ironically, human-made activities causes climate change which in turn affects human health - forming a cycle. If we were to act on the climate change problem, we would be able to live healthy lives in a healthy environment.”* (The Lancet Countdown Report 2017)



In Nov 17 New Delhi was the world's most polluted city

Floods and Mudslides

Super-storm's often trigger flash floods and mudslides. In late December, more than 230 people were killed when a storm hit the Philippines' second largest island of Mindanao - a tragedy exacerbated by years of deforestation. In 2017 severe floods also hit Vietnam, Peru and Sierra Leone where an estimated 1,240 people were killed by intense rain and mudslides in August. On the European continent, Greece and Germany also felt the damaging effects of heavy rain and flooding.

Ninety-seven percent of scientists agree that warming trends experienced over the last century are “very likely” caused by human activity.

Melting Antarctica

In July 2017 one of the largest icebergs ever recorded separated from the Larsen C ice shelf - one of Antarctica's biggest - reducing its area by more than 12 percent. While “calving” icebergs in Antarctica are part of a natural cycle, scientists have linked the retreat of several Antarctic ice shelves to global warming and are closely monitoring potential long-term effects. One such effect is that melting icebergs are causing sea levels to rise. This could cause flooding and erosion in low-lying coastal cities and countries. Global warming is already altering the habitats of many animals in polar regions.

Deadly Combination

Armed conflicts are pushing millions of people to migrate and live in precarious situations. Climate change is making it worse. Competition for natural resources, in places such as Sudan, Somalia and Northern Kenya is increasing the risk of conflict and makes life even harder for refugees. The number of undernourished people in Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated at 224 million which is 25% of the 815 million undernourished people in the world. (UN Report: FAO 2017)

“The realities of climate change being manifested in the dwindling rainfall patterns has challenged the project's response to poverty. The prolonged drought had a serious impact on the livelihood of the communities living in the arid and semi-arid areas of the Northern Kenya. As a result of the drought, every household in the affected areas has lost at least 50% of their livestock. For communities whose livelihood has entirely depended on livestock, the implication is increased poverty levels. This has been further exacerbated by inter-community raids in order to re-stock.

Excerpt from a 2017 Project Report of the Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation). Shalom works mainly in arid areas of Northern Kenya.



A Turkana man protects his livestock with an automatic weapon



Larsen Ice field, Antarctica - Ice Melt



Freetown Sierra Leone - Mudslides

Melting ice in Antarctica, mudslides in Sierra Leone, wildfires in America and Europe, extreme heat, record breaking storms and increased conflict over disappearing resources - all of these are Climate Change related events which took place in 2017. They cost many lives, destroyed forests, habitats, and property. They incurred an enormous financial cost and have also disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Some good news includes the increasing consciousness of Climate Change in all forms of media. Also in July 2017, the G20 Sustainability Action Plan embedded the Paris Agreement in G20 Policies. Many communities are also committed to action, on the local level.

However, it is *personal commitment and action* which will make all the difference. This is the central message of the SMA Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice: **“You can make a difference.”** The events of last year have shown that making this difference NOW is an urgent task.

Changes in our own lifestyles and acting to influence others and society to live in a more sustainable way is a *Mission* to which we are all called .

“In fact, it’s not just a question of finding techniques that can prevent environmental harms, even if it’s important to find alternative sources of energy and so on. But all this won’t be enough if we ourselves don’t find a new style of life,

- ***a discipline which is made up in part of renunciations:***
- ***a discipline of recognition of others, to whom Creation belongs just as much as those of us who can make use of it more easily;***
- ***a discipline of responsibility to the future for others and for ourselves.***

It’s a question of responsibility before Our Lord who is our Judge, and as Judge our Redeemer, but nonetheless our Judge.” Pope Benedict XVI

“Any harm done to the environment is harm done to Humanity.”

**Pope Francis, to the UN
2015**