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## Global Warming Will Affect the Poorest

By Zack Gross

We often say “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer”, but this will become “the poor get dead”, according to a report by the international organization, Christian Aid. A global conference in Bonn, Germany on climate change received the Report, “The Climate of Poverty: Facts, Fears & Hope” earlier this month. It predicts that global warming will lead directly to the deaths of 185 million Africans during this century.

Dramatic average temperature rises (four degrees Celsius in most areas, but 7 to 8 C. in Africa) and rainfall declines will create crop failures (a loss of up to 30%) and famines more massive than anything ever experienced previously. Severe water shortages will follow the unprecedented growth of African deserts, such as the Sahara, while low-lying areas in Asia will flood due to the melting of the polar ice caps, causing the rising of the oceans.

A more vulnerable population will be more prone to disease, and malaria, dengue fever and cholera will reach epidemic proportions (affecting up to 70 million people in the 2080s) as mosquito-infested areas grow. All of these factors will lead to a jump in the number of refugees, as populations move to find better conditions. Conflicts will arise as people fight over scarce resources – land, food and water.

One hundred ninety states, gathered in Bonn, agreed that to slow and turn around this destructive situation, rich countries must aid poor nations in adopting non-fossil fuel energy sources, such as solar, wind and wave energy power. The Kyoto Protocol on cutting carbon dioxide emissions will expire in 2012 and little support has been generated for the treaty.

One of its main boosters, Canada, has a new government that has reversed the country’s commitment to Kyoto, following the lead of the United States that has always rejected it. Many Western countries continue to push for unbridled economic growth worldwide, without taking our global ecological dilemma into account.

Christian Aid studied Kenya in East Africa for its report on global climate change. Drought has come to northern Kenya and the region is littered not only with the carcasses of cattle, but as well with the bodies of their nomadic herders. Not only is a lack of food and water killing the inhabitants, but people are literally killing each other over waterholes, as well. The glaciers are melting on Mount Kenya and threaten to dry up the famous, popular and historical resort city of Mombasa on the Indian Ocean.

Temperatures could rise into the high forties Celsius this summer in Kenya, marking a year of relentless poverty, insecurity and a hellish environment. Last July, fifty-six people, including twenty-two children, were killed in a tribal battle over water

access for grazing in just one community. In December, another seven were killed in a gun battle over a bore hole, but this also caused 9,000 villages to flee, thus becoming refugees. These are not isolated incidents.

African academics connected with international science and climate think tanks advised the Bonn meetings that rapid, negative changes have taken place in Africa's environment over the past half century. They insist, against the nay-sayers from large polluting corporations and their Western government backers, that climate change is not just temporary weather fluctuation, but is long-term and planet-changing. For instance, rather than just receding, Mt. Kenya's glaciers are actually disappearing. Extreme weather is intensifying, especially drought, and Kenya, with only two percent of its land under tree cover, will be badly affected. At Independence, in 1963, forest cover stood at ten percent.

In Asia, says Christian Aid's report, Bangladesh is the country at greatest risk. Millions of people will be forced into refugee status in coming years, as one-fifth of its land mass disappears under rising sea levels, frequent floods and erosion. Bangladesh is already one of the poorest countries in the world so, like many nations in Africa and Asia, has little to invest in technological change or infrastructure such as dikes.

Many local and global organizations are taking up the cause of aiding developing countries' efforts to deal with climate change. Projects include building efficient stoves that use less wood and, thus, keep forest cover alive, and tree nursery initiatives to bring along fast-growing varieties for shade, combating erosion, and fuel.

Efforts are also needed among rich countries to limit their greenhouse gas emissions that are the crux of the problem. A follow up to the Bonn meetings later this month will set in motion a process for renewing the Kyoto Protocol and bringing more countries on side after 2012, but that could all take years – years that observers tell us we don't have.

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