

# World finally agrees that global warming threatens everyone

By Charles Clover, Environment Editor and Bruno Waterfield in Brussels

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Climate change is already under way and the Earth [faces water shortages and famines in the poorest countries](#), plus huge floods and [species extinctions](#) if no action is taken to slow it down, scientists and officials from more than 100 governments agreed in Brussels yesterday.

It could lead to 50 million people, the equivalent of the population of England, becoming environmental refugees by 2010, a senior UN official warned last night.

Dr Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the UN convention on climate change, said the number of environmental refugees — from deforestation and desertification as well as climate change — was likely to exceed the number of traditional refugees by the end of the decade.

He was speaking after scientists and officials from more than 100 countries —including the United States — agreed the bleakest assessment yet of the changes likely this century if fossil fuel emissions continue at present levels.

Climate change is expected to form a large part of the agenda of the Group of Eight countries meeting in June.

An unprecedented consensus on the mounting threat posed by global warming was unanimously approved, even by the United States, China and Saudi Arabia. Their officials had spent four days and two nights challenging the more dire predictions line by line.

The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that global warming will hit hardest in the Arctic, sub-Saharan Africa, on small islands and highly populated river deltas in Asia.

It says, for example, that 600 million more people could suffer from droughts in Africa and billions will face risks from coastal flooding by the end of this century.

The 21-page "policymakers summary" of a full report to be published later this year charts the impact of temperature rise over the past 30 years and calculates the implications of the rise of about 3C by the end of this century forecast by another IPCC panel in January.

Rajendra Pachauri, the chairman of the panel, said: "It's the poorest of the poor in the world, and this includes poor people even in prosperous societies, who are going to be the worst hit. This does become a global responsibility in my view."

Prof Martin Parry, co-chairman of the panel's working group on climate change impacts, said evidence of changes already taking place that could be attributable to human influence had been found in 29,000 sets of data.

advertisement "For the first time we are not just arm-waving with models," he said.

Prof Parry said actions to adapt to climate change, such as sea defences and new



Scientists predict millions will face extremes of drought and flooding

forms of agriculture, should take priority over efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, which would take years to have any impact. He said: "In the near term, adaptation is vital. The sooner we get on with that the better." Dr Pachauri revealed that the process had been a "complex exercise". Many scientists objected to an unprecedented level of interference from government officials in arriving at what is meant to be a scientific summary.

Prof Parr said: "I don't think it is the right thing to say the message was watered down."

However, he conceded: "It is hard work, you do lose things. Two tables were boiled down into one, we lost a lot. But it tightened it up and governments bought into it."

He revealed that a graph showing that billions would be at risk of coastal flooding by 2080 was changed to read "millions".

Joseph Alcamo, an American-born professor of environmental science and engineering at the University of Kassel, Germany, said: "I question why it needs to be such a difficult fight to get the science out there. Scientists have to play a role we are not really trained for. It is a dilemma for us." Prof Alcamo chaired the working group studying changes in Europe. He explained that he had appeared on the podium to confront sceptical governmental delegations at 2am.

He was asked to justify the use of the word "unprecedented" to describe the heatwave in Europe in 2003 which claimed up to 35,000 lives.

He explained that it was "outside the frequency distribution of current climate". The phrase stayed in. The same delegations, which he did not name but others say included the United States, China and Saudi Arabia, queried whether it was right to say "wide ranging" impacts had been observed in Europe.

Prof Alcamo said that it included shrinking glaciers, longer growing seasons, storminess and the range of plankton. "Some delegations do believe in wearing down us poor old scientists. We don't let them get away with it," he said.

In Washington, the Bush administration indicated that the United States, which refused to ratify the Kyoto climate change treaty in 2001, still planned to tackle limiting carbon dioxide emissions on its own rather than support global mandatory caps.

"Each nation sort of defines their regulatory objectives in different ways to achieve the greenhouse reduction outcome that they seek," Jim Connaughton, chairman of the White House council on environmental quality, said.

### • **The scientists' grim prediction**

For the first time, the scientists broke down their predictions into regions, and forecast that climate change will affect billions of people.

Africa will be hardest hit. By 2020, up to 250 million people are likely to be exposed to water shortages.

In some countries, food production could fall by half, the report said.

North America will experience more severe storms with human and economic loss, and cultural and social disruptions. It can expect more hurricanes, floods, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires, it said. Northern Europe will at first experience some benefits, such as a reduced demand for heating, but southern Europe will face more heatwaves and drought, with a reduction in crop productivity.

Parts of Asia are threatened with widespread flooding and avalanches from melting Himalayan glaciers. Europe also will see its Alpine glaciers disappear.

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