



## Witnessing Climate Change

Climate change can be seen in the sky, felt in the air, heard, smelt and even tasted. Its effects on the natural world around us are already too numerous to count. Or hide from witnesses.

Abbot Ngawang Tenzing Jangpo of the Tengboche monastery in Khumbu, Nepal is one of them. The Tengboche valley, in the shadow of Mount Everest, is a place "as if descended from the realm of gods", as the Abbot himself put it in a poem.

But Khumbu, as he knows from his own experience, is also a place under threat - from "glacial retreat". As the glaciers melt in the ever warmer temperatures, meltwater creates big glacier lakes below, risking to destroy the villages below in torrential floods.

Others can testify to rising sea levels and coral bleaching, violent storms, deadly heatwaves and drought.

Rich, industrialized countries have contributed the most to the problem, but the negative impacts of climate change are already affecting those who have contributed the least the hardest - the poorest people in the poorest countries. The Pacific Region will be one of the worst affected by climate change. There are 22 Pacific Island states with approximately 7 million inhabitants. Although the Pacific Islands contribute the least to global greenhouse gas emissions (0.06% of the world's current emissions), they are among the most vulnerable to the effects of global warming.

Climate change is impossible to hide. And all of us are witnesses.

### **Pacific Island Nations:**

*Penina Moce, 43, is married and has five children. The family live in Udu on Kabara Island in Fiji. She was nominated as a WWF climate witness at a village meeting in October 2004.*

"We have begun to notice that the fish and shellfish we used to be able to gather so easily are getting harder to find. There also used to be colourful, live coral from the edge of the beach out to the reef. But now everything has gone white. The sea is slowly eroding our coastline. We used to catch enough fish in the shallows. But now we have to go further out, and the women are spending longer and longer in the seawater. Fish used to bite quickly, now we can spend more than an hour in the seawater before we get a single bite. The fish are often tiny. Barely enough for a meal. One of our great delicacies, the gera shellfish, is now very difficult to find. Another thing we've noticed is that the sea is slowly eroding our coastline and spreading the sand over our fishing grounds. The seagrass beds have also spread quickly, clogging up the natural flow of water within the fishing grounds and burying the coral."

*Fiu Mataese Elisara-Laulu is President of the Samoa Umbrella of NGOs (SUNGO) with a membership of more than 60 different NGOs and civil society organisations. Fiu has been following the issue of climate change for several years through a variety of roles: as past Director of the Ministry of Lands, Surveys and Environment in Samoa and as a staff member of the UNDP in Samoa.*

"Yes, Kyoto is the first step....because our own countries have been calling out and the whole process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change about greenhouse gas emissions cuts, and the Intergovernmental Panel of scientists working on this have said that we need 60% cut in greenhouse gas emissions to get back to 1990 levels. And yet the global dialogue right now is basically debating whether to accept 5.2% cuts. That does mean anything. That doesn't do anybody and good. It's a huge issue of injustice and inequity. For our small island countries in the Pacific, and in fact our alliance of small island developing states, where there are some 49 countries as a lobbying group in the global arena, we have been saying this all along."

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"...the whole issue of climate change is an issue of survival for us. ... Tuvalu, even with 10,000 people, even as a small country has a right to exist as a people, as a nation. They have a sovereignty claim to exist as a country. Who can tell us that Tuvalu, or even the Pacific Island countries, 22 of our countries and many territories, and those many hundreds of small islands in the Pacific. 7 million of our people, is it economies of scale that gives you justice to say that we don't have the right to exist."

*Siuala Toloa has lived for most of her life on Fanafofua, the main atoll of Tuvalu. She has been an active participant in community life in Tuvalu, as one of the founding members of the Tuvalu Association of NGOs and the Tuvalu Family Health Association. Siuala is a primary school teacher and in her spare time is also currently on the board of Island Care - one of Tuvalu's environmental organisations which is undertaking tree-planting to reduce the impact of erosion by the tides.*

"Tuvalu lives off a subsistence income and therefore is heavily dependent on their immediate surroundings: the marine and terrestrial resources. The people are noticing a marked decline in their traditional crops and marine resource harvest. In other words, there is a decline in local food security. It has changed the focus from subsistence to an increase in import of processed foods from shops. This is the biggest of the underlying problems Tuvaluans are noticing relating to climate change. "

"Tuvaluans become climate change refugees when the land of Tuvalu becomes uninhabitable. With this last resort adaptation to climate change we Tuvaluans lose our sovereignty, our traditional customs. I think you all know how important these are to us as native landholders. It is not our hope that this will happen, and it will not happen if you and I work together. Doing this will save us both, but particularly my small country of Tuvalu. "

### **Nepal:**

*The Abbot of Tengboche monastery, Ngawang Tenzing Jangpo, is the most revered monk in Khumbu, Nepal. He has lived there for over 30 years and witnessed floods from lakes bursting with glacial meltwater.*

"The temperature of the earth is rising. It is not natural. People are becoming materialistic and don't care. Climbing Everest has become a fashion. All people want to do is reach the top. And you can see for yourself that climbing Everest has become so easy today. I hear they can do it in eight hours! The glaciers are shrinking rapidly. This is because there is less snow. The Sherpas of Khumbu may not know everything, but they are suffering the consequences of the people's greed. We mountain people should be careful and take precautions. It is high time that Nepalese started to depend less on foreigners. Why do we need foreigners to come here and tell us that our glaciers are melting? The solution for the people in the Himalayas is not to move down to the cities. They will have more problems there. Kathmandu already has a water shortage problem. If we don't save Khumbu today our fresh water will dry up and the problem will be impossible to solve in the future. We cannot remain indifferent to each other's problems."

*Prakash Sharma is the Executive Director of ProPublic, Friends of the Earth Nepal. He recently visited London and Paris with 2 members of the Sherpa community to highlight the impacts of climate change upon Sagarmatha National Park and to deliver a petition to UNESCO to place the National Park on the World Danger List due to climate change.*

"Everyone has to think, not just governments, but individuals too," says Prakash. "Everyone has to try and reduce their energy consumption. The lifestyle of people is very different in Britain," says Prakash. "People leave their office lights on through the night. Railway stations have their lights on during the day. We were amazed to see these huge buildings blazing with light. We have come here to raise awareness of the terrible impact of climate change on our country, and here in the UK there is little awareness of how energy consumption increases global warming. Turn off your lights Britain!"

*Pemba Dorje Sherpa is also one of the UNESCO petitioners and the fastest ever climber of Everest, who has climbed the mountain four times.*

"Last year when Edmund Hillary came to Everest, he told me that so much snow had melted in the fifty years since he first climbed Everest. In 1953 snow and ice had reached all the way to base camp, but now it ends five miles above. Everest is losing its natural beauty. It's my livelihood, as a tour guide and climber, and if we lose this, there will be nothing for our children."

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### **India and Bangladesh:**

*Shitanath Sarkar and his large family lead a precarious existence in the Sundarbans delta, the world's largest, where the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers meet and flow into the Bay of Bengal. As storms and flooding get worse, he wonders what has caused "nature's fury".*

"The Sundarbans are my home. I've lived here since I was a child. Now I'm 65 and things have gone bad to worse. Inch by inch, my single hectare of land gradually disappeared in front of my eyes. I fear one day our whole village will perish under the waters. When cyclones come ashore we are flooded out for days on end, suspended between life and death. Embankments provide no security, they just buy a extra few hours. We are caught in nature's fury and can easily drown. We are bearing the brunt of nature. Seawater floods villages and the salt destroys crops. Our cows, goats and food stocks get washed away during storms. If we lose our land, we die. We have no alternative sources of income left. Traditional livelihoods, like honey gathering, logging and hunting have become impossible. We almost starve. There is water everywhere but none to drink. There used to be 18 huts in front my house, now everything has been washed away. Water is pushing us deeper inland. Many families have fled in search of safer areas. I'm too old now. I can't leave the village. Where would I go? I have ten mouths to feed."

*Tulsi Khara has lived all her 70 years in the world's largest delta, where the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers meet and flow into the Bay of Bengal. But now steadily rising water levels have engulfed most of the two hectares of land she used to own.*

"Of course I'm angry with the river. It has taken everything! But how can I fight it? How can I beat the Ganges? Life is harsh. Storms have become more intense than ever. We live on the edge. I couldn't believe my eyes-- the land that I had tilled for years, that fed me and my family for generations, has vanished. It was very distressing. We have lost our livelihood. All our belongings and cattle were swept away by cyclones. We have moved to Sagar Island and are trying to rebuild our lives from scratch. Overnight we became paupers. The islands were never this hostile. It wasn't like this when I was young. We are not educated people, but I can sense something grave is happening around us. Why is nature turning so violent? Things have changed on these islands. We are losing vegetation, and the weather and currents have become unpredictable. Maybe one of the goddesses, Banoobi or Maa Kali, is angry with us! I really don't know. Displacement and death are everywhere here. The land is shrinking and salty water gets into our fields, making them useless. We feel very insecure now."

### **The Arctic:**

*Sheila Watt-Cloutier is the elected Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, an organization that defends the rights of the more than 150,000 Inuit living in the Arctic. On March 3, 2004, she testified before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, chaired by Sen. John McCain. In her testimony, Ms. Watt-Cloutier stated:*

"For generations uncounted, Inuit have observed the environment and have accurately predicted weather enabling us to travel safely on the sea-ice to hunt seals, whales, walrus, and polar bears. We don't hunt for sport or recreation. Hunters put food on the table. You go to the supermarket, we go on the sea-ice. Eating what we hunt is at the very core of what it means to be Inuit. When we can no longer hunt on the sea-ice, and eat what we hunt, we will no longer exist as a people. Talk to hunters across the North and they will tell you the same story, the weather is increasingly unpredictable. The look and feel of the land is different. The sea-ice is changing. Hunters are having difficulty navigating and traveling safely. We have even lost experienced hunters through the ice in areas that, traditionally, were safe! The Premier of Nunavut, Canada, Paul Okalik, lost his nephew when he was swept away by a torrent that used to be a small stream. The melting of our glaciers in summer is now such that it is dangerous for us to get to many of our traditional hunting and harvesting places."

### **For more information:**

WWF climate witness programme

[http://www.panda.org/campaign/powerswitch/people\\_power/climate\\_witnesses.cfm](http://www.panda.org/campaign/powerswitch/people_power/climate_witnesses.cfm)

Friends of the Earth climate justice programme

<http://www.foei.org/climate/justice.html>