

Disaster looms with rising sea levels: islands

Posted Tue May 12, 2009 4:07am PDT



The Funafuti Atoll, part of the South Pacific island nation of Tuvalu, pictured in 2004.(AFP/File/Torsten Blackwood)

MANADO, Indonesia (AFP) - Rising sea levels that could wipe whole nations off the map and displace scores of millions of people are being overlooked in global climate change talks, island countries said Tuesday.

Major emitters are pushing for greenhouse gas emissions cuts that are too low to prevent devastating sea rises, representatives said at the World Ocean Conference in Indonesia's Manado city.

"Dealing with environmental refugees will have a much more serious impact on the global economy and global security in fact than what wars have ever done to this planet," said Rolph Payet, a presidential adviser from the African island nation of the Seychelles.

Other nations under threat from even small rises in sea levels include the Pacific island states of Kiribati and Tuvalu, while heavily populated low-lying areas such as Bangladesh's coastline would also go under.

The five-day conference has attracted hundreds of officials and experts from 70 countries and is being billed as a prelude to December talks on a successor to the expiring Kyoto Protocol.

Payet said there had been "zero" serious discussions in top international forums on how to deal with massive flows of "climate refugees" from low-lying and drought-prone areas.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted in 2007 that up to 150 million people could be displaced by the effects of climate change by 2050, which include sea level rises of as much as 59 centimetres (23 inches).

The Alliance of Small Island States is pushing for 85 percent cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

But Payet said the December talks in the Danish capital Copenhagen look set to produce an emissions cut target that would be too low to avert disaster.

The European Union has promised to reduce its emissions by 80 percent by mid-century and US President Barack Obama has proposed his country make an 83 percent cut.

But the details of any global agreement that would include major developing nation emitters such as China remain unknown.

Copyright © 2007 Agence France Presse. All rights reserved. The information contained in the AFP News report may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without the prior written authority of Agence France Presse.