

Press Release UPEACE Symposium on Climate Change, Water Stress, Conflict and Migration

The Hague, 19 September 2011

On Wednesday September 21st, the International Day of Peace, the Dutch foundation Alliance for the University for PEACE (UPEACE, a UN mandated university in Costa Rica) organizes a symposium on climate change as one of the causes of conflicts and migration in various parts of the world. This event will be held at the International Institute of Social Studies, Kortenaerkade 12, The Hague.

The symposium focuses on the impacts of climate change on water: longer and more intensive droughts as is occurring in the Horn of Africa, severe floods as now taking place (again!) in Pakistan, loss of territory and salination of agricultural land by sea level rise as is happening already for years now in Bangladesh, Vietnam, the area around Jakarta, and the imminent disappearance of small island states in the Indian Ocean (Maldives) and the Pacific (Kiribati, Tuvalu and many others). Very problematic is the melting of the glaciers on the Tibetan Plateau, which feed the rivers on which billions of people in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and China depend for their water supply.

Also extreme weather events such as storms, hurricanes and cyclones will increase in intensity and frequency, with all sorts of consequences for the local population that, temporarily or not, has to leave for other places.

The symposium, organised in close cooperation with and with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cordaid, the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO, WWF Netherlands, the International Institute of Social Studies and the Institute for Environmental Security, wants to bring forward, by using concrete experiences, the interdependencies between climate change, water, conflict and migration, and also aims to formulate recommendations for present and future problems. Gen. (ret) Muniruzzaman, President of the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies will elaborate on the security risks in his part of the world.

One of the problems concerns the status of 'climate migrants' who had to leave their country. They cannot or only with difficulty be seen as refugees in the sense of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention which relates to people who had to flee their country because of political, ethnic or religious reasons, but they will have to be able to count on the support of the international community. The symposium will try to speak out on this.

Other problems to be discussed are the greater vulnerability of women and children for water stress caused by climate change, the importance of timely reactions by authorities to early warning messages on e.g. coming droughts, and ways to deal with emergency situations which are understandable for the local communities. Where possible, best practices will be mentioned.

At the end of the day Mr. Maas Goote, Netherlands Chief Negotiator in UN Climate Talks / former Lead Negotiator for the EU, will give a first reaction to the recommendations, followed by Prof. Rolain Borel on behalf of UPEACE and by Mr Marius Enthoven, Chairman of the symposium and Chairman of the Alliance for UPEACE.

The program and other background information can be found at www.allianceforupeace.nl.

For more information about UPEACE see www.upeace.org.

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