

TOWARDS AND BEYOND BALI

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Voices of the South on Globalization is a monthly newsletter intended to inspire a meaningful North-South Dialogue by raising awareness for global interdependences and by offering a forum for voices from the South in the globalization debate. Each edition will present short analyses or commentaries from a Southern perspective on one particular issue of the globalization process.

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"VERY MUCH A MAKE OR A BREAK"

Interview with UNFCCC's Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer

International negotiations beginning Dec. 3 in Bali are crucial for saving our planet from the devastating effects of global warming, says Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Bali is "very much a make or a break" opportunity, according to the UNFCCC chief who hails from the Netherlands. The failure of government ministers and senior officials from around the world to reach an agreement would result in "loss of faith in the UN process being capable of delivering," de Boer said.

He also called upon developing countries like India "not to be as wasteful as the West". "My ambition would be for India to become the richest country in the world with the lowest per capita emissions," de Boer told IPS European director Ramesh Jaura during an extensive interview conducted at UNFCCC headquarters in Bonn.

Some excerpts from the interview:

Q: A lot has happened since the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Japan ten years ago. What does it mean for Bali?

Yvo de Boer: It means that a lot of pressure is beginning to build on governments to really come to grips with this issue and design a long-term response that measures up to what the scientific community is telling us. A climate change policy is very much a science-based policy. It draws on a better understanding of science. Gradually the intergovernmental panel on climate change has managed to paint a clearer picture of what the impacts of climate change are likely to be.

What you now also see is that it is becoming less and less a science that relies solely on models but a science where the models are validated by what is happening all around us.

I think what you have seen certainly in the course of this year, is a growing political realisation or awareness of that scientific message and an increasing realisation that something needs be done in response to it and that applies around the world -- rich, poor, North, South. Realisation is growing everywhere.

Q: Are you saying that there is no longer a North-South gap on these issues?

YdB: No. There are huge divisions on this issue in the sense that you have the European Union saying that we should limit temperature increase to two degrees, and representatives from small island states saying: "Well if you let that happen then our countries will disappear." You have one group of countries saying we should act urgently on this issue and other countries saying we rely economically entirely on the export of oil. "What are our economic prospects?"

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"VERY MUCH A MAKE OR A BREAK"
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Then we have people in the United States saying "why should we act on this issue, destroy our economy and give our jobs to the Chinese". And we have the Chinese saying "why should we be acting on this issue -- we didn't cause it -- and be lumped in the same basket with the United States.

We have the people in India saying: "You people mention China and India in the same sentences implying we are the same. But in fact we are completely different." Obviously there are huge divisions on this issue, which is what makes it so complicated.

Q: Won't the tensions that you describe stand in the way of Bali?

YdB: I think those tensions will make a decision difficult because countries will rightfully point out that financial commitments in the past have not been met and they don't believe they will be met now. Countries are rightly saying: why should we now potentially constrain our economic growth to solve the problem that somebody else has caused.

I think the problems, the tensions are right there with us. But I do have the feeling that seeing the evidence of climate change in everyday life, recognising the very clear message that the scientists are providing politicians around the world, is saying that we have to stop bickering and start working on solutions.

Q: So what do you expect Bali to result in?

YdB: Bali I hope would result in a first step on a long road to really come to grips with climate change. I read occasionally in newspapers that people expect Bali to agree on targets and finalise a regime. That's not my expectation.

I would be happy leaving Bali if there is a decision to launch negotiations, if the agenda for those negotiations is agreed and if a date for those negotiations to be completed is agreed. It is after that real work begins. The real work just in two years -- before the end of 2009 -- is designing a global agreement that encompasses every country while recognising the need of different approaches with different people. The interests at stake are very different and you have to find your way through those major conflicting interests.

Q: But what if that objective is not achieved? Will you convene Bali two?

YdB: I hope not. I think we have developed a certain critical mass that can either lead to an agreement in Bali or it can cause disintegration in the form of loss of faith in the process, and loss of confidence in the UN process being capable of delivering. So for me Bali is very much a make or a break.

Q: What about the U.S.? Do you see any change for the better in their attitude?

YdB: There is a change in the attitude in that the U.S. is now indicating a willingness to negotiate. But there are still fundamental differences in the approach favoured by the U.S. on the one hand and the Europeans and the developing countries on the other. Europeans and many developing countries feel that industrialised countries should take on internationally binding targets. The U.S. still favours an approach whereby a target is adopted voluntarily when written into legislation at the national level. So, in both cases it is legally binding. But the level at which it is binding is different. And that is part of the hard work, which I think has to be done after Bali in designing a regime.

I personally think that form follows function and that we should first decide on the substantive elements of a regime and then decide whether it needs to be national, international, legally binding, non-legally binding, and what sort of differentiation you actually need within the regime. I can't conceive long-term policies that measure up to the scientific challenges being posed in a one-size-fits-all-approach. Developing countries like China and India are making very very clear that it is not appropriate for them to make the same kinds of commitments rich industrialised countries make, and it is not appropriate for India to make the same kind of commitments as the Maldives.

Q: The forthcoming Human Development Report is calling for a Climate Change Mitigation Facility -- with an annual financing mechanism which will have between 15 and 20 billion U.S. dollars per annum -- for the transfer of low-carbon technologies, or for finance to support the deployment of low-carbon technologies in developing countries. Will this bring us forward? How far?

YdB: Some countries are emphasising that we should create a new international fund that would buy down intellectual property rights. I personally don't quite see how that would work. To my mind technology is owned by the private sector. Private sector is not interested in selling technology at cut rates. The private sector is interested in investment opportunities. The clean development mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol whereby rich countries have the opportunity to reduce emissions more cheaply by investing in developing countries has already created a market-based mechanism that opens up investment opportunities that allows technologies be transferred through market. So I think that market-based mechanisms, putting a price on carbon, creating a high demand for emissions reductions in the North will fuel the flow of technology. I would very much favour that doing through the market.

The 20 billion dollars you referred to is more than one-third of the total of official development assistance. So if
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"WANTED DECISIVE ACTION"

Interview with Kevin Watkins, director of the UN's Human Development Report Office

Rich nations are responsible for fighting climate change that threatens to usher in large-scale, irreversible changes in human development, says Kevin Watkins, lead author of the report. Watkins was in Berlin to highlight salient features of the report -- titled 'Human Solidarity in a Divided World' -- that was released Nov. 27, one week before the Global Climate Change conference begins in Bali, Indonesia. IPS European director Ramesh Jaura spoke to him at length. Here some excerpts:

Q: This is the first time that a Human Development Report has chosen to focus on climate change. It is also the first time it has been released jointly with UNEP. What motivated you to focus this time on climate change, especially as the problem has existed for years and years?

Kevin Watkins: I think two things. First of all the problem has existed for years and years and I think it is legitimate criticism to make why we have taken so long to take up climate change as a central theme. Of course we have covered it in previous reports but not in detail. What we have seen in the last few years is a number of major developments in climate change debate.

We had the fourth assessment of IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] which has established a clear and a very strong scientific base for understanding climate change and the processes that are driving it. We have had the Stern Review commissioned by the British government which has looked in detail at the economics of climate change, the cost of action and of the benefits of action.

What we wanted to initiate with the [new] Human Development Report is to ask a very basic question on the basis of the science and economics. What does climate change mean for the world's marginalised people, the 2.6 billion who survive on less than two dollars a day. . . . We wanted to bring a distinctive human development analytical framework to the problem, and what came out of the analysis is that we are dealing with a systemic threat to development to which there is no obvious historical precedent and no parallel.

Q: What is the central message of the report, eighteenth in the series since 1990?

KW: The central message of the report is that we are heading rapidly towards the point at which large-scale, irreversible changes in human development will become inevitable. When I say irreversible changes I mean changes for the worse. There is a very real danger that in the second half of the twenty-first century the big development challenge will not be accelerated human progress as part of the Millennium Development Goals The big development challenge will be international action to slow the rate of decline.

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countries are having trouble in meeting their 0.7 percent on official development assistance I don't know where they are going to find another 20 billion a year. If you bear in mind that a single power plant costs 500 million dollars, then a fund of that size wouldn't go an awfully long way. The International Energy Agency has calculated that in order to supply the energy that you need to fuel the world economic growth you want for the next 25 years, 20 trillion dollars is going to be invested in the energy sector and if that 20 trillion dollars is invested badly it would push the CO2 emissions up by 50 per cent instead of down by the 50 percent the scientists are calling for.

So the challenge for me is how you change the direction of that investment super-tanker. That I think you do by giving very clear political signals to the market, by expanding market-based mechanisms as we know them at the moment, by introducing standards at the international level so that you have a level plane field, and by introducing taxes where you feel taxes can influence consumer behaviour. We need the whole toolbox of taxes, markets and standards to drive that investment super-tanker in a different direction.

Q: The lead author of the Human Development Report has said (in an interview with IPS): "The European Union cannot demand from India that it deprives some 400 million people of access to energy amidst such high levels of poverty."

YdB: He is absolutely right. But the question for me is if you have 400 million who don't have electricity at the moment, can you help them to skip the copper age? That is, skip connecting them to the established electricity grid. . . and get them straight into locally generated, decentralised power which is much cleaner? Definitely it should not be about denying people access to energy, but supplying people with access to a modern source of energy.

India should be allowed the same per capita emissions as industrialised countries -- statements like this from an ethical point of view are perfectly correct. But then think that through: that would imply that India's energy bill will be 11 times what it is today. And, in order to get there India presumably will be burning a high ash-content coal. What would be the air quality consequences? What would be the impact on India's public health bill? From an ethical point of view every human being has the right to emit the same quantity. But my ambition would be for India to become the richest country in the world with the lowest per capita emissions. I think the ambition should not be to be as wasteful as the West -- the ambition should be to be as wealthy as the West, but to continue a very good tradition more prevalent in developing countries, to be frugal in what you use. ☑

"WANTED DECISIVE ACTION"

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For the past 150 years we have had a pretty concerted linear progress in human development, in health and education, in poverty reduction, in many other dimensions. Of course the progress has been uneven. In some parts of the world it has been far too slow. Of course there have been setbacks because of HIV/AIDS and so on. But this is really the first time that the world as a whole, the human community has faced the real prospect of a systemic reversal in human development in our lifetimes. It is a reversal that will be followed by potentially catastrophic ecological risks for future generations.

I think it is this twin concern about social justice between countries, the opportunities for human development today and social justice for future generations, for the people who are not born, our children's grandchildren, that make this a very real human development issue. And I think climate change asks us very fundamental questions about what it means to be part of a human community, what is our ethical responsibility, what are our obligations.

Q: What does it mean in terms of population? I am thinking of Malthus' population theory according to which among others only natural causes and misery could check excessive population growth.

KW: I think Malthus was motivated by very different concerns. And I think the theory about population, or the theory about contradictions between growth of population and food supply, has historically been proven not to hold. Across most of the world, humanity has been able to raise productivity more rapidly than the population growth. And it is an example of how human ingenuity has tackled head on what was perceived as a great problem more 200 years ago.

Now in terms of climate change, of course population growth is an issue, particularly in high growth countries. So we shouldn't sidetrack the fact that in some of the world's poorest countries where there is a high rate of population growth the average per capita carbon footprint is one tonne per person or less whereas in the United States and Canada it is 20 tonnes or more. In other words, an American leaves a carbon footprint 20 times deeper than an average person in a country like India. . . .

But there is, as the report says, an inverse relationship between responsibility, and the problem and the suffering that will come. It's not the small-scale farmer in Gujarat that carries the responsibility for global warming, it's not people living in the drought-prone areas of the Mekong delta, or in rain-fed agricultural areas of the eastern highlands in Ethiopia. Historic responsibility for this problem rests overwhelmingly with rich countries. And the rich world has accounted for 70 percent of cumulative greenhouse gas emissions now on the earth. The

capabilities to demonstrate leadership and initiate deepest and the earliest cuts for climate change mitigation. In our report we call for that leadership.

Q: What do you suggest the rich and the poor should do to tackle the problem of climate change?

KW: The underlying goal that we suggest in the report has to be to keep climate change to a threshold of less than 2 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. We're already at 7 degrees centigrade and time is running out. There is a window of opportunity but that window is closing. ... Rich countries will need to cut their emissions by at least 80 percent by 2050 in relation to 1990 emissions, with cuts of 30 percent by 2020.

Of course it is very deep cuts we are calling for on the rich world but they have the financial and technological resources to achieve those cuts. For developing countries it will only be possible to mitigate on the scale that is required if rich countries create the financial and technological incentives for that to happen.

Q: How much money do you think this will involve?

KW: Well, we call in the report for a Climate Change Mitigation Facility which will be an annual financing mechanism which will have between 15 and 20 billion U.S. dollars per annum for the transfer of low-carbon technologies or finance to support the deployment of low-carbon technologies. The mechanism would also in some cases provide guarantees and leverage for private capital investment in low-carbon technologies. But, the critical point is that this really has to be viewed as the entry price, if you like, for developing countries into a multilateral agreement. The rich world having created the problem, cannot start making demands on countries like India and other developing countries that are not commensurate with the very huge human development priorities of countries like India.

Q: But the rich world does.

KW: Well some parts of the rich world historically have made unrealistic demands on the developing countries. You can't go to a country like India from the European Union -- in India where we have 400 million people without access to electricity, where we have a per capita carbon footprint which is one-twelfth of that in the European Union. The European Union cannot demand from India that it deprives people of access to energy amidst such high levels of poverty. And I think basic equity demands that the entry of any country like India has to be contingent on northern government financing for the global public good that India has been asked to provide, the global public good mitigation commitment that will help the world achieve climate security over time. ☑

"EU LEADERS FAIL PLANET"

By David Cronin

Europe is not displaying sufficient leadership ahead of the Bali conference on climate change, according to Mary Robinson, the former United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR).

In March this year, the European Union's governments committed themselves to reducing the bloc's greenhouse gas emissions 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. A cut of 30 percent was promised if other industrialised countries agree to similar targets.

Robinson, who was also Ireland's first female president, said she is disappointed that the EU is making part of its reduction targets conditional on the behaviour of countries in the wider world.

"We still don't have the political leadership we need," she told IPS. During recent discussions, EU finance ministers have rejected proposals for revising taxation on cars to take account of their emissions of carbon dioxide - the main gas triggering climate change. "A willingness to agree a carbon tax would have hugely beneficial consequences," said Robinson. "That's part of leadership."

Still, she welcomed a statement earlier this month by José Manuel Barroso, the European Commission president, that a failure by rich countries to reduce their emissions would hinder the fight against world poverty and hunger. Scientists estimate that 75-200 million Africans will have their supply of water threatened by climate change within the next decade.

"It (climate change) very much is a development issue because there is a complete nexus between energy and poverty," Robinson added. "There are 1.6 billion people who have no access to electricity. Unless we change our habits and get real political leadership, the expert projections are that in 2030, there will still be 1.4 billion people with no access to electricity. "If we see climate change only as an environmental challenge, we will approach adaptation in terms of sea-walls (to address rising sea levels) and seeds that don't need as much water. Climate change is a political and social and human rights challenge."

Robinson took part in a Nov. 23 conference in Brussels. It examined the issues facing the 180 countries that will be represented when talks on framing a successor to the Kyoto agreement on climate change kick off in Bali, Indonesia next month.

Oxfam spokesman Alexander Woollcombe said that the poor "who have done the least to cause the situation we are in are suffering the most and are suffering now. "This is a point that is well-known and well-accepted. But it is not being addressed."

He cited estimates that 50 billion dollars per year are needed to help poor countries adapt to climate change. But just 148 million dollars is now being given in aid for that purpose, he added, underscoring that assistance earmarked for dealing with climate change must not be

at the expense of funds for combating poverty.

Margot Wallström, the European Commission's vice-president, defended the EU's decision to make its reduction targets partly conditional on efforts undertaken elsewhere. "It would be more difficult to get business on board, if they have a 10 percent higher target than the rest of the world," she told IPS, arguing that firms would regard such a goal as "distorting competition". Wallström nonetheless acknowledged that she was unhappy with how EU governments have balked at introducing a carbon tax on vehicles.

"Economic incentives would be the most forceful ones," she said. "I hope that public opinion will lead to pressure being put on decision-makers and that we will see moves in the right direction."

Wolfgang Gregor from light bulb-makers Osram said that up to 40 percent of energy from lighting could be saved. The resulting cut in carbon emissions would be equivalent to those released by Canada and two-thirds of Russia. Describing low-energy bulbs as a "new sexy business", he stated that the 1.6 billion people without electricity use 77 billion litres of kerosene per year, resulting in 190 million tonnes of carbon emissions.

"The level of trust in business is not as high as we would like it to be," said Andrew Fisk from Procter and Gamble, the washing powder firm. It has been necessary for his company, he added, to have external studies conducted to convince consumers of the benefit of washing clothes at 30 degrees Celsius, the lowest level on many washing machines.

Toyota's Graham Smith said there could be 1.2 billion cars in the world by 2020, a rise of 71 percent from today's levels. "It is obvious that for mobility to be sustainable, we must all focus on reducing vehicle emissions," he added.

Teresa Fogelberg from the Global Reporting Initiative, which has developed a system for calculating the environmental impact of businesses, said a number of measures have been taken voluntarily by companies to inform consumers about their greenhouse gas emissions.

Air France and the Dutch carrier KLM have put details on carbon dioxide on their passenger tickets, for example. Ultimately, though, 'sustainability reporting' may have to be mandatory, she added. The lack of compulsory measures means that firms that have not improved their environmental performance "can hide behind a smoke-screen", she said, adding that "there would be a more level playing-field if companies that are more hesitant are pulled on board". ☑

EMISSIONS QUOTA DEBATE HEATS UP IN ICELAND

By Lowana Veal

"I am of the opinion that Iceland should not ask for a repeat of the Iceland Provision in the upcoming climate change negotiations," says Iceland's environment minister Thorunn Sveinbjarnardottir.

The Iceland Provision was the exemption given to Iceland when the Kyoto Protocol went into effect in 2005. Because Iceland derives 72 percent of its energy needs from renewable energy and had little heavy industry at the time the Protocol was agreed, the country was allowed to increase its greenhouse gas emissions by 10 percent from their 1990 level, rather than decrease emissions by at least 5 percent like most of the other signatories are required to do.

During the first commitment period, 2008-2012, the Iceland Provision allows for emissions averaging 1.6 million tonnes annually of carbon dioxide from energy-intensive industries that had not existed prior to 1990.

Iceland now lags behind other European countries when it comes to reducing greenhouse gases, Left-green politician Kolbrun Halldorsdottir pointed out at a recent Althingi -- parliament -- discussion.

Iceland churns out 12 tonnes of greenhouse gases per capita, she said, while the European average is 11 tonnes.

In Iceland's case, the figure will rise to 17 tonnes per head when the Fjarðal smelter in East Iceland becomes fully operational in early 2008.

"We need to shoulder our environmental responsibilities, and the same is true for all other nations," Sveinbjarnardottir says.

Sveinbjarnardottir's view is not shared by the Prime Minister of Iceland, Geir Haarde, who in reply to a parliamentary question, said he felt that Iceland should attempt to ask for the Iceland Provision at the end of the next negotiation round, which is expected to take place in Copenhagen in 2009.

Haarde says that the ruling coalition have not yet made a firm decision on the matter, but four ministers are working on it.

Sveinbjarnardottir and Haarde are from the Broad Left Alliance and the right-wing Independence Party respectively. The two parties make up the ruling coalition in Iceland.

Sveinbjarnardottir and her colleagues, who had previously been part of the Opposition, have always been against the Iceland Provision, while Independence Party members have generally been in favour of it. At the time the Kyoto Protocol and the Iceland Provision were agreed, Iceland's ruling coalition consisted of the Inde-

pendent Party and the right-wing Progressive Party, who also support the existence and extension of the Iceland Provision.

In total, Iceland has been allocated 10.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions for the period of 2008-2012. These gases include: nitrous oxide, methane, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulphur hexafluoride and carbon dioxide.

The bulk of these emissions, 8.6 million tonnes, has recently been assigned to five plants: the Alcan aluminium plant in Hafnarfjörður, just outside of Reykjavík; the Century aluminium plant in Grundartanga, West Iceland, and its neighbour, Iceland Alloys; the Alcoa aluminium plant in Reyðarfjörður, East Iceland; and the Iceland Cement factory in Akranes, West Iceland.

Four companies requested permits but were denied them. The denied proposals include: the proposed Alcoa aluminium smelter at Bakki, North Iceland; the Century aluminium plant at Helgúvík, south-west Iceland; a possible Alcan aluminium smelter at Þorlákshöfn in South Iceland; and the Tomahawk Development silicon refinery at Helgúvík where solar cells would be manufactured.

These companies will have to buy allocation permits from the market if the projects are approved to go forward.

"But," says Arni Finnsson from the Iceland Nature Conservation Association, "it's important to realise that Iceland will exceed its Kyoto commitments if the aluminium plants at Helgúvík and Bakki are built, although the 8 million tonne limit of carbon dioxide will probably not be exceeded before 2012."

The projected Alcan plant at Þorlákshöfn has encountered further problems. Landsvirkjun, Iceland's national power company, has just decided to provide energy to customers other than aluminium smelters when -- and if -- its proposed series of hydroelectric plants in the Lower Thjorsa river in South Iceland come on line.

Up till now, these had been intended to provide energy for the now-rejected expansion of the Hafnarfjörður smelter or other possible aluminium plants in South Iceland. Landsvirkjun now favours the development of a silicon refinery and a server farm on the abandoned U.S. military base at Keflavík.

Thorsteinn Hilmarrson, information officer for Landsvirkjun, says that higher electricity prices can be achieved from silicon refineries and server farms than from the proposed aluminium projects in the south of Iceland.

U.S. KEY TO BALANCED CARBON BUDGET

By Haider Rizvi

Calls for profound change in the environmental behaviour of the United States are on the rise. "The U.S. has a unique responsibility to 'climate proof' its growth, not only to protect Americans, but also to prevent reversals in health and education for the world's poor," said the authors of a UN report released Nov 27.

The 2007 Human Development Report, entitled "Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World", urged the United States to "take the lead" in balancing the global carbon budget by cutting emissions by 80 percent by 2050. Despite the fact that it is responsible for about 25 percent of carbon emissions, which play a significant role in global warming, the United States is the only nation in the industrialised world that continues to reject global calls for mandatory cuts in carbon emissions.

Until a week earlier, Australia was the only other industrialised country that sided with Washington on the issue of climate change. Canberra has now taken a different position, with the new government declaring that it would set targets for cuts in carbon emissions.

As the world's largest polluter, the United States has consistently argued that legally-binding cuts in carbon emissions would hurt the U.S. economy and that the best way to address the issue of climate change is to adopt voluntary measures.

This approach, according to many international scientists and economists, including those associated with the UN, is not only hindering global efforts to fight climate change, but also poses serious risk to economic and social development in poor countries.

"Climate change is a threat to humanity as a whole," said Kemal Dervis, head of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) that prepared the annual report, adding that it could cause serious setbacks to the efforts for economic and social development in poor countries.

The authors of the UN report warned the industrialised countries that failure on their part to take drastic measures against global warming now would lead to disastrous consequences not only for the developing countries, but for them too.

There is a very "narrow window to act", they said in the report, adding, "if that window is missed," a potential increase in temperatures of up to four degrees C. could see no less than 600 million people in sub-Saharan Africa go hungry.

Not just that, they said. Within the next 10 years, more than 200 million people in the region will have no homes and another 400 million no protection against dangerous diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, according to the report. "The carbon budget of the 21st century is being overspent and threatens to run out entirely by

2032," said Kevin Watkins, the study's lead author, referring to the possibility that emissions levels could rise up to the critical level of four degrees C., if not checked in time. Like many other researchers, Watkins has no doubt in his mind that it's the world's poor who are going to suffer the most from the effects of global warming, even though "their carbon footprint is the lightest" compared to the rich.

According to the UNDP report, the 19 million residents of New York State have a bigger carbon footprint than the 766 million people living in the world's 50 least developed countries. "An average air-conditioning unit in Florida emits more CO₂ in a year than a person in Afghanistan or Cambodia during his or her lifetime," the authors said.

A study released this month by the Centre for Global Development, a Washington-based independent think tank, revealed that on average, each individual in the U.S. is responsible for about nine tonnes of emissions every year. The reports sets out a checklist for U.S. officials as they prepare for the Bali Conference, which will decide what further actions need to be taken after the Kyoto treaty expires in 2002.

The U.S. has refused to endorse the treaty and has given no indication as yet of its willingness to go along with the rest of the world in forging a new pact to fight climate change. The Kyoto treaty requires five percent cuts in carbon emissions below the 1990 levels until 2012. The UN report calls for the U.S. to agree on at least a 30 percent reduction by 2030 against the base line.

In addition, the UN experts on development also want the U.S. to invest and promote the deployment of carbon capture and storage technology (CCS) and commit to increased usage of renewable energy sources.

However, mitigation alone is not enough. The report concludes that even the most stringent cuts "will not start to have a major impact" until the mid-2030 and that temperatures will continue to rise through 2050.

The report criticised the U.S. for its reliance on coal-fired power plants to meet energy needs, as these plants are a leading source of carbon emissions. The U.S. is considering proposals to build over 150 coal-fired power plants, with a planned investment of 145 billion dollars over the next two decades. The current U.S. strategy on mitigating the impact of climate change is based on reducing greenhouse gas "intensity", not the level of emissions, a unilateralist approach that many experts see as deeply flawed. ☑

CHINA AND INDIA CAN DO MORE

By Marwaan Macan-Markar

A United Nations official has urged Asian giants China and India to shoulder greater responsibility for a healthier earth. "China and India are large emitters of greenhouse gases (GhGs), so they have to be much more forthcoming than in the past," Han Seung-Soo, the UN secretary-general's special envoy on climate change, said in an interview. "The leaders of India and China should view this not as a problem facing themselves, but a problem facing the world."

"As global leaders they have to take part in it more actively," added Han, shortly after delivering a speech on the opening day of a three-day regional meeting in the Thai capital. The Bangkok event, hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), aims to examine much needed responses from countries across the region to meet the challenges posed by environmental damage.

Currently, according to available reports, Asia produces 34 percent of the world's GhGs. And China ranks alongside the United States as one of the world's leading producers of GhG due to its soaring demand for fossil fuels to run its economic engine.

By 2009, the Asian powerhouse is expected to top the global list of GhG producers. India is expected to be close on China's tail in over a decade, given the expected increase in coal usage to meet the domestic energy demands on the South Asian sub-continent.

Yet at the same time, the UN official told the Bangkok meeting that Asia's quest to reach new development targets for its people cannot be ignored. After all, the region is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population, of which some 600 million go without safe water and over 800 million lack access to electricity. "We have to find a new paradigm for some complementarity between growth and the environment," he said.

Han's comments offered a clue to the range of debates expected to unfold during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali. The world body is hoping that the international meeting, due to draw government representatives from over 180 countries, will serve as a platform to draft a new global blueprint to stem the tide of devastation expected in the coming years as the earth's temperature rises.

The urgency for an international pact that all countries agree to implement is reflected in a steady stream of studies and reports on the perilous state of the world's environment being released ahead of the Bali conference. Asian and Pacific countries are already feeling the effects of the warming global environment, as witnessed from the extreme weather patterns that have shattered communities, the reports argue.

This region is "already the major victim of extreme weather events," noted a study released by ESCAP for this week's meeting. "In 2006, the region accounted for

74 percent of over 21,000 casualties from natural disasters in the world." Glaciers melting in the Himalayas are "projected to increase flooding, and rock avalanches from destabilised slopes, and to affect water resources, within the next two to three decades. This will be followed by decreased river flows as the glaciers recede," it adds.

The environmental damage will be as dire on the other end of the topography, closer to the sea. "Coastal areas, especially heavily populated mega-delta regions in South, East and South-east Asia will be at greatest risk owing to increased flooding from the sea and, in some mega-deltas, flooding from the rivers," reveals ESCAP.

Another report, 'Up in Smoke: Asia and the Pacific', which was released Monday, mirrored a similar concern. "Vietnam will encounter some of the worst impacts due to rising sea level," it states. "Should climate change result in a one-metre sea-level rise, Vietnam could incur losses totalling 17 billion U.S. dollars per year and lose more than 12 percent of its most fertile land."

This stems from the most productive agriculture land in this South-east Asian nation being spread across the low-lying areas of the Red River and the Mekong Delta, adds the report, which was published by a coalition of leading British environment and development groups. "Over 17 million people could lose their homes, 14 million of whom live in the Mekong Delta region."

As worrying, according to this report, is the perilous state of the continent's small farms in the face of a deteriorating environment. "To cope with a changing environment, Asian small-scale agriculture will need dramatically increased support," where "locally adapted crop diversification that boosts biodiversity" is encouraged, it states.

After all, the region is home to 87 percent of the world's known 400 million small farms, most of which depend on a regular pattern of rainfall to water their fields, adds the global report. "China alone accounts for almost half followed by India with 23 percent. Many Asian countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh and Vietnam are also home to millions of small-scale farmers."

In fact, the price that Asia's poorest countries, like Bangladesh, will have to pay due to climate change will continue to remain disproportionate to the damage they cause to the environment. ☐