



Adapt or Surrender? The Challenges of Climate Change for Humanitarian Action

Thursday 5 June 2008

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

The fourth IPCC report points out that warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as it is evident from increasing global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level.

The exact impacts of changes in the world's climate are not easy to forecast. However, current knowledge shows that there are large risks, some of which are potentially catastrophic. In a recent report released by the German Advisory Council on Global Change, experts highlighted the problem that climate change will overstretch many societies' adaptive capacities. This could then lead to destabilization and violence, thus jeopardizing national and international security. Furthermore, the report stresses that such changes could exacerbate existing environmental crises, such as drought, water scarcity and soil degradation, and intensify existing problems. Weak and fragile states are those that are more exposed to the risks induced by climate changes, as their capacities to adapt may be rapidly overstrained, leading to increased instability. Also, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, stated during the recent Security Council debate on the impact of climate change that "when resources are scarce - whether energy, water or arable land - our fragile ecosystems become strained, as do the coping mechanisms of groups and individuals. This can lead to a breakdown of established codes of conduct, and even outright conflict".

Climate change generates a matrix of emerging threats and insecurities that require an in-depth understanding of its impacts. For this reason, the Interdisciplinary Programme on Humanitarian Action (PIAH) at the University of Geneva is organising a conference on June 5, 2008 that will bring together academic researchers and international organisations to discuss how climate change puts our knowledge base into question. The conference will debate the risks and challenges posed by climate change to international security and to the humanitarian aid system.

Session 1: Climate Change: challenges to our knowledge base?

This session is dedicated to an overview of the influence of human activities on climate changes, and the economic impacts that are related to such changes.

Session 2: Climate Change: what are the challenges in the face of new threats?

Changes in the climate system pose a long-term threat to human societies, and pose numerous challenges to humanitarian organisations.

What are the risks? What are the links between environmental factors and political instability, economic weakness, food insecurity and large-scale migrations? Which regions and countries face increased instability risks? Can scenarios be developed? Which adaptation strategies can be developed?

Session 3: Climate Change: what challenges exist for Humanitarian Action

In the face of new threats identified in Session 2, how do humanitarian organisations consider these challenges? How do humanitarian actors prepare to respond? What strategies are being developed by humanitarian organisations? A round table with various international organisations aims to propose ideas and strategies concerning their role when dealing with climate change.

The conference is open to the public and is free of charge. However, for organisational reasons we kindly ask participants to register by **May 31, 2008** by sending an email to the following address: piah@unige.ch