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**World Environment
Day special issue
on climate change**

MELTING ICE - A HOT TOPIC?



ask...
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A periodic update on the Geneva Environment Network and the International Environment House, Geneva

The opportunity for change

Sálvano Briceño, Director
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)

We are at a pivotal moment in history. This century, this decade, this year – is like no other in its importance to the future of human life on Earth. This year the science of climate change became unequivocal: our planet is warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed it. Inaction on climate change is no longer an option. But with this threat comes the opportunity for positive change: the opportunity to change the way our societies live with the natural hazards that are integral to our world. Inaction on disaster risks is also no longer an option.

The steps to combat climate change are well-known and must be taken quickly for our own good. The IPCC has also made clear that some climate change impacts are now inevitable. We must adapt and we must do so now.

What does adaptation entail? Adapting to climate change means reducing our vulnerability to natural events – droughts, floods, storms and heat waves – the types of events that have existed for eons but which are projected to become unnaturally more intense or more frequent in future. Adaptation means being better prepared for what we already experience, as well as being prepared for events outside our experience.

Extreme events are not new to us, and managing and reducing these risks is something that organizations and people all over the world are doing right now, for example through flood management, early warning systems and public education. But climate change will test our abilities to cope in the future. Some communities may be unable to recover before the next extreme event hits. Some may face hazards they have never



Children learning about disaster risk reduction through the "Riskland" game.

© UNISOPREINA PALMI



seen before. The best way to prepare is to use existing tools to build a deep-rooted resilience today to these hazards.

There is one aspect of climate change that will undoubtedly bring new threats. Sea-level rise will mean that land will be lost to the sea, land upon which a great part of our population lives, and that much of it will be become too saline for agriculture. A warmer ocean with an imbalanced pH level will result in the bleaching of corals and the possible loss of crustaceans. Millions depend on the fisheries for which corals act as nurseries. We must also adapt to these slow changes, which in their cumulative effect may be no less damaging for some communities than a violent tropical storm.

Reducing our vulnerability today entails establishing the right policies and implementing practical initiatives. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Reducing the Vulnerability of Nations and Communities to Disasters offers the right place to start, as Governments, organizations and experts have already agreed in this document on what must be done to reduce vulnerability. The first step is good governance: planning, budgeting and implementing policies to avoid settlement in hazardous areas and to ensure that hospitals, schools, transportation and water systems are hazard resistant, for instance. To ensure that such measures work, responsibilities need to be clear, enforcement effective and budgets appropriate. India, for example, has substantially upgraded its disaster management policies and institutions after its experience with droughts and floods over the last few decades, and is now able to manage extreme events like the December 2004 tsunami without requesting outside help.

A second step is to understand the risks we face and take action based on that knowledge. We need to use our knowledge of risk to develop effective early warning systems. When early warning systems provide information about a hazard to a vulnerable population, and plans are in place to take action, thousands of lives can be saved. Bangladesh has developed a warning and evacuation system that manages the severe flooding and sea surges that accompany tropical

NatureNotes



Barn swallows

A climate 'for the birds'

For the last twenty years, Geneva's birdwatchers have noticed some changes. Southern species have reappeared and some northern species no longer come to overwinter. Migrants such as the black kite *Milvus migrans*, the common cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, the common swift *Apus apus* and the barn swallow *Hirundo rustica* announce earlier springs.

cyclones from the Bay of Bengal, thus avoiding the severe losses of life that occurred in previous years. Likewise, after the terrible floods of 2000, Mozambique invested substantially in early warning systems, preparedness and flood management and now experiences fewer losses when floods occur.

A third step is raising awareness and educating young and old alike so that they can reduce their own vulnerability. Many countries are taking such steps, through the media and in schools.

The fourth step is changing practices and conditions that aggravate risk, such as environmental degradation and poverty. Protecting precious ecosystems, such as coral reefs and mangrove forests, allows them to act as natural storm barriers. Effective insurance and micro-finance initiatives can help to transfer risks and provide additional resources.

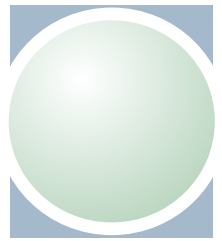
A fifth and crucial step is to prepare for the disasters that will inevitably strike by having contingency plans in place and emergency funds established, as well as by conducting regular simulation exercises. For instance, in Cuba the entire population prepares yearly for the hurricane season through a nationwide simulation exercise: students carry their desks to top floors, residents safeguard critical possessions and board up windows, and all seek shelter.

If we follow these five steps, as called for in the Hyogo Framework, we will reduce our vulnerability and be better prepared for climate change

impacts. However, we are not moving fast enough in this direction, and the vulnerability of populations is growing. By 2030, two-thirds of humanity will live in cities and more than two billion people will live in slums, according to UN-HABITAT. Climate-related hazards will increase the risks for the poor, already the most affected by disasters. Poor people too often live in high-risk areas such as slopes, flood plains and ravines, which are prone to landslides and floods. Climate change is not the only pressure on human settlement, but it will feed back into other pressures, such as environmental degradation and rapid urbanization, which in turn will create more disasters.

The need to take action is clear. Let us recognize this moment for what it is: an opportunity to reduce our vulnerability and to change our current unsustainable path.

The first session of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, which will take place in Geneva 5-7 June, will encourage countries and organizations to develop adaptation plans to climate variability and change. It will reiterate the need for immediate action by all stakeholders to decrease vulnerabilities, manage risk and reduce disaster risk, including climate-related disasters.



Towards a sustainable future

James Leape, Director General
WWF International, Gland, Switzerland

What sets this World Environment Day apart from those in past years? Since last year, the thinking of political leaders and citizens alike seems to have fast-forwarded and there are now the beginnings of an understanding about the escalating threats of climate change to both man and nature, and the need for all of us to find a more sustainable way to live.

Today, the devastating effects of environmental damage are being felt more widely than ever before. Deforestation continues at a rapid pace. Threats to species are at an all-time high. And glaciers are melting as a result of global warming – from Europe's Alps to Asia's Himalayas, from the Arctic to Antarctica – putting wildlife and millions of people at risk from floods, sea-level rises and water shortages.

Recent reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and WWF's own Living Planet Report – a biennial update on the state of the world's ecosystems – all throw into sharp focus the consequences if we fail to reduce humanity's impact upon the planet.

If we are serious about living sustainably, we need to re-think our concept of development and energy consumption or risk leaving future generations with a vastly different and depleted world.

The way energy is currently generated and consumed – and particularly our over-reliance on coal, gas and oil – accounts for almost half of our "ecological footprint", the demands

people place upon the natural world. A majority of the climate-changing emissions that continue to heat the planet comes from burning these fossil fuels.

The challenge that faces us all is how people everywhere can enjoy and continue to strive for a higher quality of life, given the limited resources of our only planet. We can meet this challenge, but the sooner we get started, the less costly it will be. First and foremost, we must change the way we use energy and the ways we produce it. In particular, industrialized countries must make a drastic and urgent switch from their current reliance on fossil fuel energy.

That will require the rapid deployment of low-carbon, renewable sources of energy and a serious commitment to getting more out of the energy we use – in industry, in our cities, in our homes and in our cars.

Some countries are heeding the call. In March, EU heads of government endorsed strong targets for reducing carbon emissions – a unilateral commitment to reduce Europe's carbon emissions to 20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and to reduce emissions by 30 per cent if other industrialized countries join in. This is the kind of leadership required to make real change, and will hopefully set the standard for future international climate negotiations and encourage other countries to follow suit.

But it is not only governments that need to be engaged in combating

climate change. The role of business and the private sector is equally important. In fact, changes in corporate practice are essential if there is to be real progress in tackling conservation challenges like global warming, moving to renewable energy systems and clean technologies, phasing out toxic chemicals and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources such as timber, fish and agricultural products.

WWF engages in challenging and innovative partnerships with business to drive change. These partnerships not only provide conservation benefits that help us carry out our mission, but also give us the opportunity to work with the business sector to increase its commitments to sustainable development and environmentally sound business practices, and, ultimately, to reduce their climate change impact.

We work with companies that demonstrate a real commitment to sustainability and are prepared to adopt challenging targets for change.

Through WWF's "Climate Savers" programme, large multinational corporations – Sony, Nike, IBM, Johnson & Johnson and others – are making sound business decisions that will eliminate millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

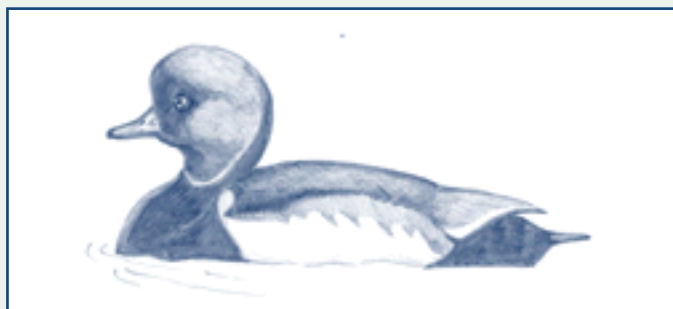
The time has come for tough decisions, for bold action by the private sector and governments alike.

The choices we make now will shape our opportunities far into the future. The cities, power plants and homes we build today will either lock us into a damaging pattern of over-consumption, eventually undermining our society as we know it, or they will help us move towards a sustainable future – one that allows us to live in balance with nature.

NatureNotes

Lake of plenty

Increasing numbers of ducks, including the red-crested pochard *Netta rufina*, are wintering in Switzerland instead of the Mediterranean. Higher temperatures encourage the growth of plankton and aquatic plants, offering them a better food supply.



Red-crested pochard



International trade and climate change: untangling opportunities and challenges in the Doha Round

Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz, Chief Executive
International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)

Action to address climate change seems to have at long last gained momentum, particularly at the plurilateral and domestic levels. Policy responses to the twin challenges of climate change and energy security have made headlines and sparked debate during the last year as never before. All this is occurring against a backdrop of intense negotiations aimed at clarifying the terms of the integration of national economies into global markets and of further reform of the international trade system.

At the global level, economic integration and climate change mitigation and adaptation are currently managed under separate and complex legal regimes. The UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol set binding targets for the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), but do not mandate any specific policies and measures. Countries are left with the task of finding ways to reach those targets within the framework of their own policies. In so doing, countries must observe their commitments under the WTO rules and respond to an increasing array of trade and investment arrangements. WTO rules to a great extent condition the op-



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Reforming agricultural subsidies could have positive effects on global carbon management.

tions countries have to use economic and regulatory tools through disciplines on subsidies, border measures, technical requirements, government procurement and taxes. The pursuit of climate change objectives is integral to economic and development strategies and international regulatory and policy frameworks must ideally supplement and complement each other. It is critical at this time for countries to pursue actively outcomes and conditions of trade negotiations that enable them to support climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The relevance of trade to the climate change debate

Mitigating climate-destabilising emissions will require curbing the growth in fossil-energy demand while diversifying energy supply towards low-or-no-carbon sources. But it would also require restructuring across a myriad of economic sectors from industry to transportation and agriculture. Energy production and consumption are a heavy weight in the balance. The International Energy Agency (2006) projects that with business as usual (Reference Scenario), the world will use 53 per cent more energy in 2030 than at present, while producing 55 per cent more carbon emissions. While the potential for emissions reduction could be enormous, especially with the scaling-up of energy efficiency in developing countries and the use of energy technologies such as wind, solar and modern biomass, there may also be enormous costs involved.

For instance, agriculture contributes over 20 per cent of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. Improved farm management can result in lower emissions of nitrous oxide, methane and carbon dioxide and increased soil carbon uptake. But achieving better

NatureNotes

A place in the sun

Both the black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and the Mediterranean gull *Larus melanocephalus* have appeared more frequently over the last two decades. Although they have different habitats, they both like a warm climate.



Black-winged stilt



agricultural practices would involve a change in production and management that may entail additional costs for farmers.

Accordingly, while a number of countries have introduced regulations that “push” the process of market transformation – including through mandatory minimum energy performance standards, labelling requirements for end-use electric appliances, and ambitious targets for renewable energies in their energy mix – they have also been concerned about their ability to make use of economic incentives, including trade-related policies, to “pull” the market in favour of low-or-no-carbon technologies.

Harnessing opportunities in the trade system

At least three areas of the ongoing WTO Doha negotiations provide an opening for countries to ensure that multilateral trade rules support climate change policy. Subsidy reform, an essential liberalisation component of the Doha Round negotiations, will impact on support programmes in the energy sector. The current negotiations on agriculture could lead to the restructuring of production globally, with associated changes in patterns of land use. Reforming agricultural subsidies may also provide an opportunity to promote genuinely sustainable agricultural practices that could have positive effects on global carbon management. Other opportunities relate to negotiations on the accelerated liberalisation of environmental goods and services (EGS).

Within the WTO, subsidies are governed by rules and disciplines under the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures and the Agreement on Agriculture. In the Doha Round, WTO Members have agreed to cut production-related Amber Box support but also to a “review and clarification” of criteria for Green Box subsidies, which had been exempted from reduction commitments on the basis that they have “no, or at least minimal, trade-distorting effects or effects on production”. The outcome of such negotiations could result in limiting the ability of countries to maintain certain support mechanisms currently provided to agricultural producers. On the other hand, it could also contribute to a filtering of domestic support

NatureNotes

Some like it cold

Some northern species are seen less frequently and in smaller flocks. One example is the white-fronted goose *Anser albifrons*, whose populations are nevertheless stable in northern Europe.

White-fronted goose



under the Green Box so as to promote agricultural and environmental practices that increase carbon sequestration effectively.

The negotiations on the phasing-out of tariffs and non-tariff barriers on environmental goods and services have the potential to promote sustainable forms of energy use and trade. Many proposals submitted by WTO Members included goods relevant to energy efficiency and renewable energies. At least two proposals have included biofuels as environmental goods themselves. A successful agreement on EGS could significantly expand markets for more advanced technologies by providing them with an advantage over outdated technology and thereby reduce the dumping of obsolete technology in poor countries. Coupled with new disciplines on subsidies and agricultural reform, liberalisation in EGS could provide the “pool” dynamics to drive market

expansion in a range of products and technologies which have a clear interface with the objectives of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol.

Stabilising the climate represents a major policy challenge and is an issue of concern to both individuals and societies: achieving it requires immediate attention. The complex interrelations between policy regimes at the global governance level require a shared vision of the future.

At this stage of the review and ongoing construction of global economic governance architecture, only clarity of purpose, political will and public policy objectives will lead to the reforms required in sensitive areas across the trade system. It is high time for governments and stakeholders in industry and civil society to rise above mercantilist approaches in order to ensure a realignment between the climate regime and the international trade system.

NatureNotes

Newcomers

Conversely, several Mediterranean species have been “overshooting” their traditional breeding grounds. These include the cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*, the little egret *Egretta garzetta* (a once-rare visitor), the slender-billed gull *Larus genei* or the red-rumped swallow *Hirundo daurica*. The spectacled warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* has even bred twice and the European bee-eater *Merops apiaster* now breeds regularly.



European bee-eater



Setting course for 2050

Stefanie Held
World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

Across the board, business is now contributing to the high-level discussions about what to do to tackle climate change. The next two years will set the stage for decades to come.

The fourth major analysis by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published in 2007, blames human activity squarely for global warming. Most humans suddenly seem to agree with this charge. And most thoughtful business people agree that the economy of the future is going to be carbon-constrained.

An unparalleled series of events have been slated for 2007 and 2008, leading up to the Summit of the G8

conference in Indonesia at the end of the year. The WBCSD's Energy and Climate Focus Area, bringing together 112 representatives from 54 companies and 11 national and regional business councils, is taking part in all these events.

In March 2007 the WBCSD and its 190 member companies published a business contribution to the dialogues on cooperative action over the next half century and stated their conviction that the only way to combat climate change is through decisive, concerted and sustained actions between governments, businesses and consumers. Building on the WBCSD's previous publications, *Policy Directions to 2050* explores policy ideas and concepts for the transition to a low greenhouse gas economy. Companies can agree on policies; now governments must do the same.

The Gleneagles Dialogue

One of the major efforts to provide a consistent business voice for practical efforts to reduce greenhouse gases is being carried out through a partnership between the WBCSD and the World Economic Forum (an independent, impartial and not-for-profit international organization committed to improving the state of the world by

engaging leaders in partnerships to shape global, regional and industry agendas). The G8 Gleneagles Plan of Action is the major driving force for developing a policy framework for climate change after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. The Gleneagles Dialogue on Climate Change, Clean Energy and Sustainable Development is a unique G8/G20 governmental process involving the world's largest energy producer and consumer nations. It is a public-private dialogue that intends to deliver recommendations for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in time for the summit.

A select group of 50 member companies is taking part in the public-private discussions to develop recommendations for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These proposals will be made available to Gleneagles Dialogue politicians to consider ahead of the 2008 Summit. Key industry sectors include: automotive, aviation, chemicals, energy, engineering and construction, financial services, IT and communications, logistics and transport, and mining and metals. Companies in these sectors with a significant presence in Africa, China, India and Latin America are of particular interest to the discussion leaders.

Other issues in focus

Other Forum initiatives on climate focus on standardization, notably the Global Greenhouse Gas Register, which works towards the standardization and transparency of corporate carbon footprints, and the Carbon Disclosure Standards Board (CDSB), which addresses project-based emission reductions in unregulated markets.

Some of the questions the WBCSD Focus Area is tackling include how the current climate change debate influences business decisions and the development of new business models; how clear leadership by today's business in energy and climate can be defined; and how this translates into business commitments and action.

The emphasis of these efforts is on developing a better understanding of the potential of technologies and related costs, the power of sectoral approaches and market-based mechanisms, and innovation and scale.

Long-term decisions and priorities affecting energy security, infrastruc-

"The only way to combat climate change is through decisive, concerted and sustained actions between governments, businesses and consumers."

major financial/industrial nations in Japan. Business organizations based in Geneva have committed themselves to being part of this dialogue – from the Glion Dialogues on energy and clean technologies organized by the WBCSD in April 2007, to CARBONEXPO co-organized by the International Emissions Trading Association in May 2007, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development that same month, the G8 Summit scheduled for Germany in June, and the Climate Change

NatureNotes

Hanging around

Many partial migrants are now staying all year, including the red kite *Milvus milvus*, the water rail *Rallus aquaticus*, the wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, the common stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*, the black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, the black cap *Sylvia atricapilla* and the chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*.



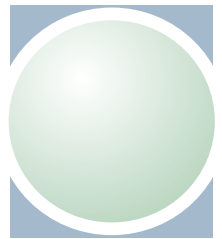
Red kite



Water rail

LIONEL MAUMARY

LIONEL MAUMARY



ture, energy mix and carbon mitigation and storage techniques must be established now to facilitate the flexible and cost-effective attainment of long-term objectives. By 2025 final decisions must have been made and implemented in order to allow accelerated technology deployment to 2050. No one single solution will trigger the transition over the coming decades while also sustaining economic growth. An integrated portfolio of technologies, policies and mechanisms and a balance of global, regional and national approaches will be required.

One of those responses to the challenge of climate change must be through communication. The WBCSD has teamed up with the BBC to take the Council's dialogues on the role of business in society to a global level. The WBCSD Executive Committee, meeting in Hong Kong in March 2007, organized a televised debate on business and climate change among member company representatives. It focused on the business of climate change, both from a supply and a demand side and from the point of view of investors and employees.

www.weforum.org/climate
www.wbcsd.org

Stephanie Held is in charge of the Energy and Climate Focus Area of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

This article has been reproduced from the book *Partnerships for the Planet – Stories from Geneva*. The full publication can be found at www.partnerships4planet.ch.

NatureNotes

Moving up

Many of Switzerland's familiar indigenous species – woodpeckers, warblers, tits, crows, jays, finches and sparrows – are colonizing higher altitudes.



New International Environment House website launched

The website of the International Environment House has recently been refreshed and revamped, with a new look, improved access to information and publications, additional functionality for signing up for events and newsletters, and a brand new Who's Who page of links to over 400 local environmental organizations.

www.environmenthouse.ch



On 5 June 2007, World Environment Day, UNEP released a special report *Global Outlook for Ice & Snow* to mark the outset of the International Polar Year 2007-2008. This new analysis focuses on the changes in ice- and snow-covered regions and highlights the consequences of those changes for the global community. It provides an up-to-date, concise review of the state of the environment and the trends in ice- and snow-covered regions (the cryosphere).

It features case studies, illustrations, graphics and maps and will serve as an educational and reference publication.

The theme of this year's World Environment Day is *Melting Ice, a Hot Topic?* More information can be found at www.wed.npolar.no. Copies of the report may be ordered from www.earthprint.com.



Upcoming environment-related events in the Geneva area

Date Organizer/event/contact

5 June	World Environment Day, GEN roundtable on climate change, Tel: +41 22 917 83 26, gen.secretary@unep.ch, www.environmenthouse.ch
5-7 June	UN/ISDR, The first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Tel: +41 22 917 89 08, isdr@un.org, www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform
5-8 June	UNECE, Inland Transport Committee, Working Party on Pollution and Energy, Tel: +41 22 917 24 01, info.ece@unece.org, www.unece.org
12-13 June	UNECE, Committee on Environmental Policy, Ad Hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, Tel: +41 22 917 23 47, info.ece@unece.org, www.unece.org
13-15 June	UNECE, Aarhus Convention, 16th meeting of the Compliance Committee, Tel: +41 22 917 23 84, public.participation@unece.org, www.unece.org
18-19 June	UNECE, Aarhus Convention, 4th meeting of the Contact Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, Tel: +41 22 917 23 84, public.participation@unece.org, www.unece.org
21-21 June	UNECE, Aarhus Convention, International workshop on involving the public in international forums, Tel: +41 22 917 23 84, public.participation@unece.org, www.unece.org
28-30 June	WTO Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Tel: +41 22 739 52 41, enquiries@wto.org, www.wto.org
2-6 July	UNECE, 31st Session of the Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, Tel: +41 22 917 2456, info.ece@unece.org, www.unece.org
5-7 July	UN Global Compact Leaders Summit, Tel: +44 1483 596502 info@globalcompactsummit.org, www.globalcompactsummit.org

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www.EnvironmentHouse.ch

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Find out more

Read about changing bird distribution in Switzerland in *Les oiseaux de Suisse*, L. Maumary, L. Vallotton & P. Knaus, to be published this year by the Swiss Ornithological Institute and Nos Oiseaux.

Know what to look for: a new illustrated calendar shows the expected dates of arrival of migrating birds.

You can follow the trends for yourself at the new bird island in Prévèrenge.



www.oiseaux.ch