

## Stark reality: It's 'worse', not 'bad'

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Article

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A SELECT group of heads representing leading institutions of higher learning in the Asia-Pacific region was invited to the United Nations University's Institute of Advanced Studies last week to deliberate and act on the issues of sustainable development.



The focus of the meeting was on the roles of post-graduate sustainable development education and research.

It sought to initiate collective action through the formation of a network to urgently deal with the pressing issue.

The meeting concluded on a high note with an agreement on the charter to form a network for the promotion of sustainability of post-graduate education and research, or Prosper.Net.

This couldn't have come at a better time as the United Nations Conference on Climate Change will be held in Bali next week.

It is in consonance with what the UN panel on climate change has suggested—that "actions on an individual and group level must begin immediately to avert a global disaster" (International Herald Tribune, Nov 19).

Quite uniquely, even the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) shared similar concerns when it pledged to ensure stable petroleum supplies in the long-term, as expressed in the Riyadh Declaration issued at its summit recently.

The group also indicated its support in meeting international challenges on global environment issues.

Saudi Arabia alone would provide US\$300 million (RM1 billion) for research and development of technologies to control emission of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases.

The most recent report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released by the UN Secretary-General, describes the evidence for human-induced climate change as "unequivocal".

It forecasts that the rise in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere so far will result in an average rise of up to 1.4 metres in sea level.

Reportedly, it also acknowledges that the melting of the Greenland ice sheet could cause a substantive sea level rise over centuries rather than millennia.

According to the IPCC chairperson, things are getting "progressively worse" based on present knowledge.

Similarly, as the director of Global Climate Change put it: "And the new science is saying: 'You thought it was bad? No, it's worse.'"

Faster industrial development than expected in China and India, with all the polluting emissions accompanying

the use of coal, will make the situation even more vulnerable.

In fact, developing countries are predicted to be the worst hit due to inaction.

Already, the UN Secretary-General, upon completing a quick tour of some of the climate change hot spots, including the Antarctica, has described the situation as "frightening as a science-fiction movie". The reality however, is not a "science-fiction" or "a movie".

Succinctly, Jeffrey Sach, the head of the Earth Institute at Columbia University warned: "It's extremely clear and is very explicit that the cost of inaction will be huge compared to the cost of action. We can't afford to spend years bickering about it. We need to start acting now."

This is a message that would be worth remembering when the delegations from hundreds of countries assemble in Bali to begin discussions on a global climate agreement, especially following the expiry of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012.

It must also be taken heed at the G-8 summit in July where nations with the biggest emissions will be involved. Some say we are now at a defining moment. What we do today will determine the kind of future we will have globally.

As though to underscore the seriousness of the situation, more than 3,000 people died as tropical cyclone Sidr ravaged Bangladesh last week.

Dubbed as the worst cyclone to hit the country in a decade, some 1.5 million dwellers of the coastal region had to flee for shelters and sought emergency relief.

Tens of thousands of houses were destroyed and much-needed crops ruined.

The Ministry of Disaster Management said 2.7 million people were affected and 773,000 homes damaged.

The devastating impact of such natural disasters have always been regarded as compelling signs of what climate change can bring.

This in turn is linked to undue human-induced activities through unsustainable practices and development that are having a toll on humans.

We offer our deepest sympathies to the people and the government of Bangladesh for the destruction caused and the suffering and the loss of life.

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