

UN seeks better data on hurricanes, droughts

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Environmental activists display effigies of, from left to right, U.S. President Barack Obama, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi during a demonstration calling for the world leaders to take immediate action against climate change in Jakarta, Indonesia, Saturday, Aug. 29, 2009. The demonstration marked the hundred days countdown to the U.N. climate change summit that will be held in Copenhagen in December. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

(AP) -- The United Nations opened talks Monday on setting up a better weather surveillance system worldwide so all nations can get earlier, more accurate warnings about hurricanes, droughts and floods.

About 1,500 officials, diplomats and scientists were attending the weeklong meeting in Geneva, which aimed to help the world better adapt to [climate change](#).

This week's meeting will not discuss the controversial issue of cutting [carbon emissions](#) - those talks will come in December in Copenhagen.

Instead, the World Climate Conference seeks to help developing countries generate better data on their own climate issues and share that information with other countries.

A large U.S. delegation is attending, eager to highlight the new Obama administration's commitment to combatting climate change.

"Around the world, the costs for adapting to climate change will run to several tens of billions of U.S. dollars every year, with more than half of the expenditure being required in developing countries," host Swiss President Hans-Rudolf Merz said.

Merz, whose country donated \$1.7 million to the conference, said better weather forecasts and hazard maps "could also prevent deaths and reduce the extent of the damage."

"We all want our societies to be able to withstand the consequences of climate change," he said. "Scientists and experts will have to provide the information that makes this possible."

The meeting is expected to agree on a "Global Framework for Climate Services" to ensure that early warnings for tsunamis and hurricanes reach everyone, and that farmers even in remote African regions know about upcoming droughts and floods.

Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, noted before the meeting that decision-makers need reliable information about the current and projected impacts of climate change, but many countries lack basic information about their own climates.

"Until now, the way that we deliver climate information to some sectors has been ad hoc," Michel Jarraud, head of the U.N.'s World Meteorological Organization, said Monday." What we need is a formal system that all people can trust to access vital information that can save their lives and protect property and economies."

Jarraud says hydrological networks in Africa are "totally insufficient" and that "many water basins are managed without any information about precipitation and the runoff amount of water in the underground water table."

Governments across the globe are facing a December deadline for separate U.N. talks aimed at forging a new accord to replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gases blamed for global warming and climate change.

Organizers of the Dec. 7-18 U.N. meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, hope to reach an agreement on limiting the warming of the Earth's temperature to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above levels 150 years ago.

The U.N. says global warming will continue even if Copenhagen is a success. It says rising sea levels may prompt some countries to build more dikes, relocate residents from low-lying islands and ensure that health services can cope with spreading diseases such as malaria.

This week's conference brings together about 15 heads of state, including those from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Togo, as well as 80 ministers. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is to speak Wednesday.

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