

UN warns climate change is drowning Senegal

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A man jumps over a pond of stagnant water in the suburbs of Dakar on October 9, 2008

The United Nations' head of disaster risk warned Tuesday that flooding caused by climate change had become an emergency in Senegal, with some towns finding themselves underwater for large parts of the year.

Margareta Wahlstrom, on a three-day visit as part of preparations for a new global disaster risk-reduction strategy, told AFP she had met mayors of coastal and riverside towns who said their streets were flooded ten months out of 12.

"There is a huge pressure for action. I think particularly the flooding issue is so critical... because it's very acute," said Wahlstrom, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

"Listening to the mayors today, some of them were saying 'we are underwater ten months out of 12'. I think that says everything. That's acute and it's why the country is giving full attention and full priority to flooding.

"The quicker the cities are growing, the more acute the problem will become."

Wahlstrom, speaking on the sidelines of a news conference in Dakar, said she had witnessed the impact of climate change on a trip to St Louis, a northern archipelago in the mouth of the Senegal River often referred to as the "Venice of Africa".

In 2008, Alioune Badiane of the UN-Habitat agency designated St Louis as "the city most threatened by rising sea levels in the whole of Africa", citing climate change and a failed 2003 canal project as the cause.

The city is plagued by flooding during the rainy season when the river overflows and scientists say [climate change](#) is exacerbating the problem with increasingly heavy rain and a rise in the sea level.

After the Indian Ocean tsunami that killed almost 230,000 people in 2004, the UN general assembly agreed the Hyogo Framework for Action

(HFA), in which 168 countries put their names to a 10-year commitment to disaster risk reduction.

Hyogo called for a one-percent allocation of national development budgets to risk reduction, along with 10 percent of humanitarian aid and 10 percent of reconstruction and recovery funds.

The HFA is set to be renewed in 2015, giving a greater role to private companies, which the UN sees as crucial as trillions of dollars are set to pour into "hazard-exposed" regions like west Africa.

Wahlstrom praised Senegal as an example of a nation taking an integrated approach to disaster risk through education, health services and urban planning but warned more action was necessary.

But Home minister Abdoulaye Daouda Diallo said a lack of nationwide coordination on civil protection remained a "major weakness" in the running of the country.

"We are thinking of setting up an office to provide more resources but we think we already have the means to put in place a national plan that can coordinate all government actions in the context of disaster risk management."

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