



20 March 2003

## **U.N. Official Calls for Global Action to Mitigate Climate Change**

### **Message delivered to mark World Meteorological Day March 23**

A U.N. official -- in a message to the international community to mark World Meteorological Day on March 23 -- said all nations need to work together to prevent and mitigate the adverse impact of climate-related events such as floods, droughts and tropical cyclones.

A press release issued March 20 says Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Godwin O.P. Obasi called for a strengthening of the international framework for coordinating national and international efforts to address climate change. Obasi said this would allow research results, observational data and other resources to be used "to the greatest overall advantage."

As an example of areas that need improvement, Obasi said that while advances have been made in observations from meteorological and environment satellites, essential observational networks in many developing countries have deteriorated due to a lack of resources. He said more data are needed also from polar and oceanic areas for better quantitative assessments of climate extremes.

Following is the text of the press release:

(begin text)

U.N. World Meteorological Organization  
March 20, 2003  
WORLD METEOROLOGICAL DAY: 23 MARCH 2003

"OUR FUTURE CLIMATE"

#### **WMO CALLS FOR TIMELY GLOBAL ACTION ON CLIMATE**

Geneva - We are all stakeholders in our future climate. It is to the benefit of all nations to work together to better understand our climate in order to adapt to it, and to prevent and mitigate any adverse impact. Recent occurrences of floods, tropical cyclones, droughts and other extreme weather - and climate-related events could well be glimpses of what a change in climate could bring upon us. The future cost of inaction to protect climate is expected to exceed by far the cost of timely action. This is stressed in the message of the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Professor Godwin O.P. Obasi, to the international community on the occasion of the World Meteorological Day (23 March 2003).

"The measures contemplated in mitigating climate change so far are inadequate to protect our future climate", according to Prof Obasi. "The international community should commence action now through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol to adequately curtail the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and other measures to reduce uncertainties in climate projections. For these purposes, WMO and the National Meteorological and

Hydrological Services will continue to take a lead role in addressing key scientific and technical issues."

WMO continues to strengthen its programs in the pursuit of three major goals. A first objective is to improve systematic weather and climate observations and to reconstruct past climate periods. Prof Obasi states that, while advances have been made in observations from meteorological and environment satellites, essential in situ observational networks in many developing countries have deteriorated due to a lack of resources. In addition, more data are needed also from polar and oceanic areas, for better quantitative assessments of climate extremes.

A second major objective is to refine climate modeling in order to reduce the uncertainties inherent in long-term climate prediction. Climate models must be further developed to better simulate regional impacts of climate change as well as changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Prof Obasi adds that such progress will be relevant also to the work undertaken by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for its Fourth Assessment Report. The Report, scheduled for 2007, will place emphasis on regional impacts of climate change and appropriate mitigation and adaptation strategies. The third objective is to ensure that advances in climate science benefit all people and contribute to sustainable development. WMO therefore assists countries in the application of climate data and seasonal forecasts for water management, agriculture and disaster mitigation.

"The international framework for the coordination of national and international efforts to address climate change should be strengthened," Prof. Obasi stresses, "so that research results, observational data and information and other resources may be used to the greatest overall advantage". He calls, in particular, for the necessary support to be given to the activities of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services.

The changes in climate observed over the last decades will continue, presenting urgent and growing challenges to many aspects of our lives, including health. Addressing those challenges in his message, Prof Obasi warns that "The most immediate threats to humankind relate to increased variability in the intensity and frequency of storms and other extreme weather - and climate-related events such as floods and droughts, heat waves in major urban areas and the impact of sea-level rise on low-lying coastal regions".

Already, over the last ten years, the number of disasters of hydrometeorological origin has increased significantly. Worldwide, recurrent drought and desertification seriously threaten the livelihood of over 1.7 billion people who depend on the land for most of their needs. The 1997/1998 El Niño event, the strongest of the last century, is estimated to have affected 110 million people and cost the global economy nearly US\$ 100 billion. Statistics compiled from insurance companies for the period 1950-1999 show that the major natural catastrophes which are mainly weather, water and climate-related caused estimated economic losses of nearly US\$ one trillion. A leading reinsurance company estimates global warming impacts could cost US\$ 300 billion annually by 2050.

Current projections show little change or a slight increase in the amplitudes of El Niño events over the next 100 years. But with higher temperatures, the extremes of floods and drought generally associated with El Niño events could be more severe.

Every year, World Meteorological Day (WMD) is celebrated to commemorate the entry-into-force, on 23 March 1950, of the Convention of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The theme of this year is "Our future climate".

A WMD 2003 ceremony will take place at WMO Headquarters in Geneva on Monday, 24

March, at 2:30 p.m. After a welcoming address by Prof. G.O.P. Obasi, Secretary - General of WMO, a statement will be made by the Guest of Honor, Ms Joke Waller-Hunter, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

(end text)

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