



Prepare for the Worst, Says Next Host of Climate Change Meeting

By Marcela Valente

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 22 (IPS) - In the past five international conferences on climate change, hopes have focused on attempts to get the United States and Russia to agree to cut emissions of greenhouse gases. But the wait has been in vain, and the global meetings flopped, one after another. The strategy at the next conference, to be hosted by Argentina in December, will be to change the central focus of the debate, on the premise that climate change is inevitable even if emissions are drastically cut, and

that developing countries must start getting ready to deal with the damages.

Instead of preparing for yet another meeting concentrated on bringing the Kyoto Protocol -- in which industrialised nations agree to meet binding targets for reducing emissions of the gases that cause global warming -- into effect, Argentina proposes discussing the creation of funds and mechanisms for "adapting" to the increasingly accelerated phenomenon of global warming. The Argentine government's initiative, which has the backing of non-governmental

Continued on page 2

Population Key Factor in Fighting Poverty in LDCs

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 22 (IPS) -- The eradication of poverty and the achievement of other development goals by the world's 50 least developed countries (LDCs) would depend in a large measure upon successful response to population and related issues in an integrated and coordinated way, Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, High Representative for LDCs, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, told delegates Monday. Addressing the 37th session of the UN Commission on Population and Development (CPD), Chowdhury said that development efforts of all three vulnerable groups of countries are closely interlinked with the many dimensions of the population issues - and continue to have serious impact on the attempts by these struggling nations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"I also believe that success in dealing with the challenges posed by the population issues could bring about positive results in many other areas," he said. It is undeniable that the fight undertaken by the LDCs to overcome poverty and free themselves from the

Continued on page 3

Fewer Players, Less Press Freedom

By Miren Gutierrez*

ROME, Mar 22 (IPS) - Comcast's 66-billion-dollar unsuccessful bid for Disney in February brought the issue of Big Media to the fore. To Comcast -- the United States' biggest cable company -- the deal made sense strategically. With 21 million cable subscribers, Comcast would combine its distribution power and technology with Disney's content businesses, said Brian Roberts, Comcast's president, in a widely published letter to Disney. Now that the bid has failed, Viacom, Liberty Media, Microsoft and even Internet firms like Yahoo and InterActiveCorp might make a play for the firm. Why should anyone care?

The principal reason people should care about the increasing concentration

of the media has to do with independent thinking, freedom of thought and ideas, says Chuck Lewis, executive director of the Centre for Public Integrity, in an e-mail interview. The fewer the outlets for information, the less intellectual range for political, ideological and other thinking, he adds. Multiple sources of information help us to better assess overall credibility. Abraham Lincoln once said, 'I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts', adds Lewis.

The marriage of media content (news, films, TV shows) with media distribution (TV or radio networks, Internet services and the like) further increases the control of media barons over the audience, as

Continued on page 4

INSIDE

Falling Levels, Wastage Make Water Scarce in UAE	3
Newsbriefs	6

Instead of the traditional series of speeches by environment ministers, Buenos Aires suggests setting up four panels comprised of six ministers and a moderator to discuss the four main areas of debate. All of the regions would be represented on each panel. "We must bring the big issues that were sent to the parallel meetings back into the conferences," Estrada Oyuela told the representatives of civil society Monday. He was referring to the forums in which NGOs, business chambers, and academics take part, and which have lately been joined by government officials. These parallel meetings have become increasingly attractive, drawing more and more participants, in contrast to the conferences of government delegates, which have failed to pull out of the Kyoto Protocol impasse, and continue waiting for the "rebellious" countries to agree to do their bit in fighting climate change.

POPULATION KEY FACTOR IN FIGHTING POVERTY IN LDCs

Continued from page 1

morass of hunger and disease is being seriously hampered by rapid population growth and its "dragging" effect upon all of their social and economic development efforts. Recognizing this fully, he pointed out, the Brussels Programme of Action adopted in May 2001 devoted a whole section to the "population" issues under the commitment entitled "Building human and institutional capacities". It reaffirms that the goals and targets of the Programme will be pursued in conformity with the Cairo Programme of Action on Population and Development and its subsequent five-year review decisions. The LDCs have committed to strengthen population policies and strategies consistent with internationally agreed goals and objectives, as well as with the particular circumstances and demographic trends in their countries as an integral part of their development policies, Chowdhury added.

In 2004, the population of LDCs stood at 736 million persons (that is 11.5 per cent of the world population). By 2015, it is projected to reach 942 million people (that is 13.1 per cent). This means that between now and 2015, when the MDGs are expected to be met, there will be 206 million more people living in the LDCs. Addition of more than two hundred million more in their populations would make it nearly impossible for the LDCs to achieve the MDGs. He expressed his deep appreciation for UNFPA's strong support to the LDCs, particularly at the country level. "In this backdrop, our participation at the 37th session of the CPD obviously becomes very relevant," Chowdhury said.

The serious challenges faced by the LDCs in their population growth are highlighted graphically in the Report of the Secretary-General before this Commission in document E/CN.9/2004/3. The study says that in the period between 1994 and 2004, the growth rate of the LDCs in particular remains very high at 2.4 per cent, especially when compared with the rate of growth in other parts of the world. Africa, the continent that hosts 34 out of the 50 LDCs, is the fastest growing major area, at an overall rate of 2.3 per cent annually. The galloping growth, since 1994, of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has made

population and development issues even more starkly dramatic for many of the poorest countries. The magnitude of the challenge becomes apparent when we find that 29 of the 53 heavily-infected countries are LDCs.

In four African countries, the size of the population will decline due to the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Revealing another dimension of the population issues, in the period 2000 to 2005, life expectancy at birth is estimated at 49.6 years in the LDCs, compared to 63 years in the developing regions as a whole. In ten years thereafter, life expectancy at birth is projected to reach almost 53 years in the LDCs. But marked differences exist between countries in this group. Of course, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is partly responsible for the high level of mortality experienced by many LDCs, he said. These staggering figures and statistics underscore very clearly the urgent need for enhanced support of the development partners to the efforts being made by the LDCs in implementing effective population policies in their countries. The interlinkages among the goals and objectives of the Brussels and Cairo Programmes of Action should be kept in focus in a coherent manner, he added.

Falling Levels, Wastage Make Water Scarce in UAE

DUBAI, Mar 22 (IPS) - Water consumption in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the highest in the world, but here and elsewhere in the Gulf, it may soon become a very scarce commodity. "We really had such a problem last month when water supply stopped due to some annual maintenance," said Shirley, an Indian homemaker who lives in Sharjah, one of the seven emirates. "We have taken our water supply for granted and have got used to consuming gallons of water. I shudder to think what would happen if we were to face such shortages everyday," she added in an interview. "No wonder the government keeps issuing notices about wastage."

Figures by the Emirates Industrial Bank say the UAE, with a population of 3.7 million people; has the highest per capita consumption of water in the world at 500 litres a day. In Britain, the figure is 330 litres a day, Spain 300 litres, France 215 litres and Jordan 150 litres. The UAE's water consumption is growing annually by eight to 10 percent. Equally alarming, groundwater levels have also dropped at a rate of one metre every year for the past 30 years. The estimated annual recharge for groundwater in the UAE is 20 million cubic metres and the rate of groundwater extraction has been around 880 million cubic metres a year.

Similar situations exist in the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. A recent report revealed that consumption of drinking water in member states rose from 1.9 billion cubic metres in 1958 to 3.9 billion cubic metres in 1999 and that the volume of potable water consumption would total 8.8 billion cubic metres by the advent of 2010. In order to meet this

Continued on page 4