



Climate change impacts

The impacts of climate change are already evident, and they will become even more pronounced in the future. One impact – the rise in sea level – represents a major threat to coastal countries. Sea-level rise and flooding affect wetlands, cause coastal erosion, increase salinity and make drainage more difficult. It is expected that, by 2100, the global sea level will rise by between 0.2 and 0.6 metres. The Arctic is one of the most vulnerable regions, although the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Sea regions also face the same threat.

Read the extract below and try to imagine yourself in the place of the inhabitants of Tuvalu, who have lost their homes to climate change.



Tuvalu: The first casualty of climate change



It's too late for Tuvalu, a small island nation in the Pacific. Ten thousand people, Tuvalu's entire population, are packing their bags as their homes among nine low-level atolls are being swallowed by the rising sea. These are the facts of life: the Earth is warming, sea levels are rising, and Tuvalu is quietly being erased from the surface of the Earth.

The Tuvalu islands are only the first casualties of climate change. Experts predict a 50 centimetre to 1 metre rise in sea levels over the next century. A rise of 1 metre would place 17.5 percent of Bangladesh, 6 percent of the Netherlands, and 80 percent of Atoll Majuro in the

Marshall Islands under water, according to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Low-lying coastal zones of developed countries and small islands could also be seriously affected. Rising sea levels are only part of the problems that are caused by climate change. The 1.4 to 5.8 degrees Celsius rise over the next century will also increase flooding, the intensity of storms, and droughts in Asia and Africa. It will also change the distribution of rainfall. This is only the tip of the rapidly melting iceberg.

The disappearance of Tuvalu introduces a host of other questions that need to be dealt with, and fast. What happens when more of these island nations disappear, potentially displacing 7 million people? Can there be compensation for the loss of a country, its history, its culture, its way of life? How do we put a price on that? Who will pay it?

Climate change is not a future concern; it is an immediate national security threat. The diaspora of a people is being created. The Tuvaluan people need to build new lives in a new land. Australia and New Zealand have begun to take in environmental refugees, but they will have to adjust to the cultures that will surround them. After having lived in relative isolation, difficulties are inevitable.

The Tuvaluan people will enter into a world that is not their own. The burden of maintaining their culture and religion without a geographic centre will be set upon them. On the other hand, the Tuvaluans will need to preserve their past. The collective memory of a small society will be cleaved as its people are forced to take refuge in separate lands. And memory is all that the Tuvaluans will have left of their homeland. Their burial grounds, their schools, their homes, their churches will be enveloped by the ocean. The Tuvaluans can never go home again.

We must ensure that Tuvalu is our only casualty. Climate change and sea level rise should force all of us to face up to our complicity in destroying cultures and the need to accept responsibility for ensuring the safekeeping of a people. We should set up funds for those who are losing their homes. It is time to realise: "Climate change ... is nothing less than a form of slow death."

Eun Jung Cahill Che, *The Japan Times*, August 26, 2001 (excerpt)