

Climate change could 'cause war'

WORLD: Climate change is now seen as one of the defining challenges of the 21st Century, according to the 2007 *Global Risks* report, which says that if the world does not take effective action to mitigate its risks, then climate change will: "Almost certainly be a factor in major interstate and civil wars within the next 50 years."

Furthermore, the Global Risk Network (GRN) suggests that there is a "Fundamental disconnect between risk and mitigation," adding that: "Expert opinion suggests that all levels of risk are rising in almost all of the 23 risks on which the GRN has been focused over the last year – but mechanisms in place to manage and mitigate risk at the level of businesses, governments and global governance are inadequate." The 23 risks identified are outlined below.

The report does concede that some tactical gains have been made, especially with regard to international co-operation on the terrorist threat and in upgrading preparedness for identifying and isolating new diseases. There has also been major improvement in the understanding of the interdependencies between global risks and the need to deal with the root cause of such risks rather than merely

reacting to their consequences.

However, a note of warning is sounded: "Tactical gains may be illusory and are certainly temporary."

The authors of the report suggest that Country Risk Officers be appointed; these would act as a focal point for managing a portfolio of risk across disparate interests, setting national risk priorities and helping governments to start to manage global risks rather than just coping with them.

The report also says that: "At a time of acute global risks, the lack of decisiveness may have severe costs." One possible way of circumventing this lack of decisiveness induced by bureaucratic processes that require consensus to act, could be the establishment of a 'Coalition of the Willing' – involving different groups of countries and revolving around individual global risks.

The Global Risk Network report is published by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with Citigroup, Marsh and McLennan Companies, Swiss Re and Wharton School Risk Center.

Core Global Risks as identified by the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Network:

■ Economic

Oil price shock/energy supply interruptions;
US current account deficit/fall in US\$;
Chinese economic hard landing;
Fiscal crises caused by demographic shift; and
Blow up in asset prices/excessive indebtedness.

■ Environmental

Climate change;
Loss of freshwater services;
Tropical storms;
Earthquakes; and
Inland flooding.

■ Geopolitical

International terrorism;
Proliferation of WMD;
Interstate and civil wars;
Failed and failing states;
Transnational crime and corruption;
Retrenchment from globalisation; and
Middle East instability.

■ Societal

Pandemics;
Infectious diseases in developing world;
Chronic disease in the developed world; and
Liability regimes.

■ Technological

Breakdown of critical information infrastructure; and
Emergence of risks associated with nanotechnology.

in brief

EUROPE: More than 33 people were killed as violent storms battered northern Europe. Germany, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland and the Czech Republic were the countries worst affected.

INDIA: Seven people were killed when fire broke out in a disused flour mill at Howrah.

IRAN: A booby-trapped car exploded in front of a bus and killed 11 people in Zahedan, south-eastern Iran in February. Aid workers and Revolutionary Guards were among the dead, while a further 31 people were wounded.

NIGERIA: More than 200 people died in an explosion as they tried to collect fuel in buckets, cans and plastic bags from a punctured pipeline. Thousands of people have died in similar incidents in Nigeria and the government has promised measures to avoid future disasters.

PAKISTAN: Three people were wounded when a suicide bomber set off a bomb at Pakistan's Islamabad airport. Reports say that police stopped the bomber just outside the airport and he ran off, opening fire at the police officers before detonating his explosives.

BRAZIL: Several workers died when a subway building under construction collapsed, burying them under tonnes of earth. Four of those who were buried were inside a minibus. Construction companies blamed heavy rain, but other reports blame engineering flaws for the accident, which caused a massive crater.

THAILAND: Nearly 2,000 people have been displaced after flames swept through Bangkok's Khlong Toei slum. The blaze started in the early hours of the morning and its spread was helped by exploding gas cylinders.

Widespread global flooding

WORLD: In September 2006, NASA scientists identified the return of El Niño, which occurs typically every three to seven years, causing changes in weather patterns worldwide, writes *Izzy Kington*. Indications are that this El Niño is not as strong as the 1997–9 phenomenon, which caused disastrous weather events across a wide area of the globe.

Whether or not El Niño is to blame, the last few months certainly have seen some extreme weather conditions, especially severe flooding.

Mozambique has been hit hard by flooding along the Zambesi river; heavy rainfall was exacerbated by discharge from the Cahora Bassa dam upstream. The dam was reported to

have reached its capacity, so rainwater from nearby Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi was allowed to cascade into Mozambique. Localised flooding has led to evacuation of people whose homes were destroyed.

There has also been severe flooding in Indonesia this January – Jakarta is especially susceptible as 40 per cent of the city is below sea level, and it has poor drainage.

Meanwhile, there is concern over the outbreak of disease in Malaysia, following disastrous flooding in December. At its peak, over 100,000 evacuees sought refuge in emergency shelters. There have been cases of leptospirosis, malaria, jaundice and diarrhoea. Health workers were worried

about potential future outbreaks of typhoid and cholera.

South America has experienced widespread floods, especially in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Peru. In Bolivia, a National State of Emergency was declared on January 18.

Brazil had the highest death toll in the region, with at least 44 people killed by flooding and associated mudslides. The latter were especially dangerous in the Rio de Janeiro region, where many houses are built in high risk areas. Peru also suffered with floods and landslides, with at least 10 reported dead.

Meanwhile, as reported elsewhere in *CRJ*, USA and Europe have also suffered from violent storms.