



FREAK TIDAL SURGES CAUSE HAVOC IN PACIFIC ISLANDS

POZNAN, Poland, December 12, 2008 - As UN climate negotiators neared the end of two weeks of debate over measures to deal with the impacts of global climate change, island nations in the North and South Pacific struggled to cope with a new round of devastating tidal surges that brought severe flooding to low-lying regions over thousands of square miles.

A low-pressure system, coinciding with high tides, generated nine-to ten foot waves and tidal surges that swept over atolls in the Republic of the Marshall Islands including its capital, Majuro. The system went on to cause flash flooding throughout the Federated States of Micronesia. Damage reports are still coming in from Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk and Yap.

Meanwhile, extensive damage was reported throughout a wide region of coastal Papua New Guinea, also caused by flash flooding brought on by high waves and tidal surges. At last report the number made homeless had risen to 50,000.

Andrew Yatilman, Director of Environment and Emergency Services for the Federated States of Micronesia Government and head of FSM's delegation to the climate negotiations, referred to the irony that such tragic events are taking place in the islands even as negotiators struggle to find breakthroughs that might lead to agreement over effective climate controls at next year's negotiations in Copenhagen.

"For nineteen years," he said, "the island countries have been calling attention to the increasing effects of climate change while both developed and developing countries have argued endlessly but have not really taken responsibility for the problem. Now that the rising oceans are literally washing over our islands as glaciers and ice caps melt all over the world, the events we are experiencing make us feel that tipping points must be drawing near. It is time to move beyond talk and to implement effective fast-action measures while we still can."

During the two-week UNFCCC negotiations in Poznan, Micronesia submitted a proposal emphasizing that "additional efforts are needed to promote fast start strategies with existing technologies to mitigate climate change in the immediate near-term. These strategies should include those that can start immediately, are effective and efficient, and have strong co-benefits for public health, local communities, and competitiveness." These include reducing black carbon, or soot, in the atmosphere, promoting biochar carbon sequestration, and strengthening the Montreal Protocol's climate mitigation potential.

Micronesia has been a leading voice in building support for fast-action strategies under the ozone treaty to provide significant benefits for both ozone and climate. In September 2007, Micronesia was one of the few Parties proposing to turn the Montreal Protocol into an explicit climate treaty. The historic agreement by the 191 Parties is estimated to benefit climate by mitigating up to 16 billion tonnes of CO₂-eq. by 2040. Last month, Micronesia, along with Mauritius and Argentina, submitted proposals under the Protocol that could provide an additional 6 billion tonnes of CO₂-eq. in mitigation by 2015, significantly more than the mitigation goals under the Kyoto Protocol. In both cases, the 193 parties to the Montreal Protocol agreed with Micronesia, and just last month added \$490 million to implement the strategies during the next three years.

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