

REPORT ON WARMING PAINTS GRIM PICTURE

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Body

GENEVA -- Tropical island paradises and glistening Alpine skiing retreats may be lost to future generations, while melting ice caps in polar regions could unleash **climate changes** that would continue for centuries, according to a U.N. report released Monday.

The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on **Climate Change** said poor countries would bear the brunt of devastating **changes** as a result of global warming. But it warned that the rich wouldn't be immune, with Florida and parts of the American Atlantic coast likely to be lashed by storms and rising sea levels.

"Most of the Earth's people will be on the losing side," Harvard University environmental scientist James J. McCarthy, who co-chaired the panel, told reporters.

Scientists meeting separately at a conference in San Francisco on Sunday said the melting of equatorial glaciers in Africa and Peru are another powerful indication of global warming. They said the white ice atop Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro, and others in Peru and Tibet, may be disappearing, the victim of a process of shrinking mountain glaciers everywhere.

Monday's Geneva report was a summary of 1,000 pages of research into "**Climate Change** 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability," conducted by some 700 scientists. Given the political sensitivities of the **climate** debate, the 19-page summary was subject to line-by-line scrutiny by government representatives during weeklong discussions prior to release.

"Projected **climate changes** during the 21st century have the potential to lead to future large-scale and possible irreversible **changes** in Earth systems," with "continental and global consequences," said the report, adding that **climate change** will lead to:

- . more "freak" weather conditions like cyclones, floods and droughts;
- . massive displacement of populations in the worst-affected areas;
- . potentially enormous loss of life;
- . greater risk from diseases like malaria as the mosquito widens its reach;
- n and extinction of species as their habitats are wiped out.

The report said global economic losses from so-called natural catastrophes increased from about \$ 4 billion per year in the 1950s to \$ 40 billion in 1999. Total costs were in reality twice as high, it said.

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The Geneva report followed one released last month in Shanghai, China, by the international **climate change** panel. That predicted that global temperatures could rise by as much as 10.5 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century. It said the increase was much higher than expected, with clear evidence that industrial and auto pollution, were to blame.

The third volume, on solutions, will be released in March. But effective international action remains elusive, in part because of U.S. reluctance to commit to firm targets to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, which trap heat in the atmosphere, and the push in developing countries like China toward economic progress.

Scientists have for years warned about the impact of global warming. What is significant about the new reports, however, is the degree of precision about the extent and impact of **climate change**.

"The effects of **climate change** are expected to be greatest in developing countries in terms of loss of life and relative effects on investment and the economy," said the report released in Geneva.

Changing rainfall patterns coupled with population growth would lead to huge pressure on water supplies, it predicted. It said that 1.7 billion people live in areas where water resources are tight. This likely will increase to about 5.4 billion in the next 25 years.

"Projected **climate change** will be accompanied by an increase in heat waves, often exacerbated by increased humidity and urban air pollution, which would cause an increase in heat-related deaths and illness," it said.

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