

Climate Change and Air Quality Testimonies



Haze covers the Victoria Harbor skyline, Hong Kong on December 22, 2019. Photo by Winson Wong

“Often, I don’t take my baby outside as I am so concerned about [the effects of poor air quality] on him. I wear a face mask on the days it is above an orange rating. I often have a bitter taste or thick feeling on my mouth and tongue when I walk home at rush hour. This is a serious and scary problem, it’s obvious in the pollution visible on buildings, skin problems, difficulty breathing, chest pain and coughs.”—**Anonymous, Hong Kong, China** ([The Guardian](#))

“Alireza Raessi, Deputy Minister of Health said, ‘33,000 people die annually in the country due to air pollution.’ In the span of the past 10 months, since spring 2020, only 15 days of clean air have been recorded in Tehran. This is even though the coronavirus epidemic has caused a significant reduction in traffic in Tehran, with the closure of schools and universities.”—**Hassan Mahmoudi, Human rights activist, Tehran, Iran** ([Eurasia Review](#))

“This winter authorities closed the capital’s schools for two full months in a desperate attempt to shield children from the toxic air. It’s unclear how effective that measure is. Hospitals are stretched far beyond capacity, as pneumonia cases, particularly among the youngest, spike every winter. I no longer know what a healthy lung sounds like, everybody has bronchitis or some other problem, especially during winter.”—**Dr. Ganjargal Demberel on coal-based air pollution in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia** ([National Geographic](#))

“The scientific evidence is unequivocal: air pollution can harm health across the entire lifespan. It causes disease, disability and death, and impairs everyone’s quality of life. It damages lungs, hearts, brains, skin and other organs; it increases the risk of disease and disability, affecting virtually all systems in the human body.”—**Air Pollution and Health, A Science-Policy Initiative** ([Vox](#))

Climate Change and Water Quality/Access Testimonies



People lining up for water at a borehole in Epworth, Harare, Zimbabwe. Photo by Zinyange Auntony

“[My husband and son] died because of the water problem, nothing else. The water was like poison. It is better now, but still, it is not completely drinkable. It is alright for bathing and washing the dishes. The water used to be rusty, we could not even wash our hands or feet with that kind of water”—

Sushila Devi on drought induced lack of water and polluted city sources, Delhi, India ([Reuters](#))

“[I] allowed [my] three children just one cup of drinking water a day, and one toilet break. We’re seriously restricted from living our lives... water is life.”—Susan Chinoda, **on the climate change induced drought in Zimbabwe** ([New York Times](#))

“The major climate related risks to South Africa’s water resources include: increased incidence of drought due to a decrease in rainfall in many areas; increased incidence of floods as the incidence of very heavy downpours increases; and the increased risk of water pollution, linked to erosion, disasters, algal blooms and saltwater intrusion due to rising sea levels. These climate change impacts on water resources will have both direct and indirect effects on the socioeconomic and biophysical environments, such as the risk of food shortages due to a reduction in available irrigation water, or an increase in household poverty due to rising food prices.”—**“Water Impacts and Externalities of Coal Power” written by Life After Coal: Impilo Ngaphandle Kwamalahle, South Africa** ([Centre for Environmental Rights](#))

“Water quality will be affected by increased water temperatures and a decrease in dissolved oxygen, leading to a reduction in the self-purification capacity of freshwater basins. We will see increased risks of water pollution and pathogen contamination caused by floods or higher concentrations of pollutants during periods of drought. In addition to the impact on food production, the effects on physical and mental health – linked to disease, injury, financial loss and the displacement of people – are therefore likely to be considerable.”—**“Launch of the UN World Development Report on 22 March 2020”** ([UNESCO](#))

Climate Change and Drought Testimonies



Sheep and goats which have died because of the continuous drought situation in Somaliland. Photo by Oxfam

“This is the worst drought we’ve ever had. We’ve lost absolutely everything. If things don’t improve, we’ll be forced to migrate somewhere else. We can’t go on like this.”—**Eduardo Mendez-Lopez, farmer, Guatemala** ([National Geographic](#))

“Five, 10 years ago, no farmers would’ve believed in climate change - they were saying these are just weather cycles. Now they accept it, they talk about it - and they want action. The shift, is because farmers are seeing the devastating impacts of extreme weather on their land, as a prolonged drought cripples vast swathes of the nation.”—**Will Graham, cattle producer, Australia** ([BBC](#))

“One hectare in some years yielded as many as 8,800lbs of corn. In the past five years, with luck that hectare yielded 1,543lbs. The corn harvest has shrunk because in the months of June, July, August and September there was no rain. Our lives center on corn, so what do we do without it?”—**Porfirio Garcia, farmer, on global warming fueled drought, Mexico** ([Al Jazeera](#))

“This drought is slowly killing everything. First it ‘swept away’ the land and the pastures; then it ‘swept away’ the animals, which first became weaker and weaker and eventually died. Soon, it is going to ‘sweep away’ people. People are sick with flu, diarrhea, and measles. If they do not get food, clean water, and medicines, they will die like their animals.”—**Mahmoud Geedi Ciroobay, nomadic farmer, Somaliland** ([Oxfam](#))

“Even before her 15-month-old daughter, Yamilet, died of malnutrition, María Clara Palmar Fernandez would sometimes have days when she could not provide any food for her children. [She’d] hug them and cry because [she] could only give them water. To prevent deaths such as Yamilet’s, Colombia should ensure that communities such as the Wayuu, heavily impacted by climate change, are able to adapt to the harms that droughts and warming will cause, and secure their rights to water, food and shelter. The lives of many children depend on it.”—**Alia Sunderji, pediatric emergency physician, and Hilary Rosenthal, HRW fellow, on climate change driven drought in Colombia** ([Washington Post](#))

Climate Change and Natural Disasters Testimonies



Survivors of Cyclone Idai inspect flood wreckage in the village of Kopa, Zimbabwe. Photo by Aaron Ufumeli/EPA

“We heard the earth just groaning like a tsunami was coming our way. That’s really how I would liken it. It was a tsunami. And my daughter and I had our moment of we are probably not going to live through this. That’s how it sounded. The two houses just across the street from me had a creek behind it. It sheared their houses almost in half. One couple was fine. The other couple was washed away. The wife landed up against my house. Her husband was missing.”—**Rita Bourbon, resident and homeowner, on the 2018 landslide catalyzed by a wildfire and heavy rains, Montecito, California** ([NPR](#))

“The biggest problem that is worrying us is food, things to eat are very scarce... We cook our food without oil... Before the cyclone we were farmers, we had bananas, we sold our bananas for our survival. We cultivated sesame and we sold it as well as maize, even vegetables and onions, we sold them, that’s what helped us a lot, goats, and chickens to sell. But all of these things we don’t have anymore.”—**Albertina lives with her five children in a resettlement camp, a survivor of Cyclone Idai that hit Mozambique on March 14, 2019, killing 603 people and injuring 1,641** ([Save the Children](#))

“Once Mallacoota’s firestorm had passed, we looked around the town. Small fires were still burning. Many houses were completely flattened but some stayed intact. Strangely, there never seemed to be a half-burnt house — it was either completely destroyed or still standing. Over the coming days, we became accustomed to a war-zone-like atmosphere. Volunteer firefighting trucks continued to race around town suppressing spot fires.”--**Johnathan Vea, resident of Darwin, a town in northern Australia ravaged by the 2019 Australian bushfires.** ([Vox](#))

“[Hurricane] Irma knocked out power and Maria affected community water supplies. It has been 60 days since our communities had any power or water, and food is running scarce. Our government burnt more than 900 bodies and there are more than 100 bodies in the morgue right now. 1.1 degree is already killing us.”—**Katia Aviles-Vazquez, activist, Puerto Rico** ([Friends of the Earth International](#))

Climate Change and Rising Ocean Levels Testimonies



In Kiribati, an island republic in the Central Pacific, large parts of the village Eita (above) have succumbed to flooding from the sea. Photo by John Glatzer

“The land here used to be 1 km out to sea... We lost mosques, a school, shops, farms. We are scared of the sea now. Gradually it comes closer to our homes. When we sleep, we are scared. Every year the tide rises more and comes in further. Next year this village may not exist.”—**Mohamed Rashed, coastal inhabitant, Bangladesh** ([Greenpeace](#))

“Native Americans have this mindset of if what you’re doing is going to negatively affect the next seven generations you should not be doing that. But sea level rise is gradually destroying [my] community. The rising waters could wipe out my entire home, my entire culture and that sense of community we have.”--Valholly Frank, a student and member of the Seminole tribe active in suing the governor of Florida for lack of climate change action living in Weston, Florida. ([Tampa Bay Times](#))

“The bad news is concentrated in Asia. China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand are home to the greatest number of people who today live on land that could be threatened by permanent inundation by 2100—151 million in total, and 43 million in China alone. Even with low carbon emissions and stable Antarctic ice sheets, leading to optimistically low future sea levels, we find that the global impacts of sea-level rise and coastal flooding this century will likely be far greater than indicated. If our findings stand, coastal communities worldwide must prepare themselves for much more difficult futures than may be currently anticipated.”—**Scott Kulp and Benjamin Strauss, authors of Climate Central** ([Sustainability Times](#))

“It has just moved me into tears. Like, oh my God, this is very serious. [The sea] is [6 to 9 ft] from the babai pit [where taro plants are grown]. I feel hopeless in one way that our people are suffering, but I also have the hope within our people that they will try to find a way to adapt.”—**Claire Antea, resident, on rising sea level near Kiribati** ([The Guardian](#))

Climate Change and Migration Testimonies



Artist Hermann Josef Hack created a "Climate Refugee Camp" made up of three hundred miniature tents to call attention on the plight of thousands of climate refugees whose lives are threatened by climate change.

Photo by John MacDougall

"I moved away from this village because they don't have any more life on this piece of land. I talk about life because before this land was full of banana, babai, coconut trees, so many coconut trees, so many trees we get food from, but now how can those trees continue to live when you don't have fresh water to give them? This is community land and so everybody has a right to live on it but now it seems like the sea has taken that away."—**Toroua Beree, resident, on the rising sea levels in Kiribati** ([The Guardian](#))

"Our common understanding of what it means to be a refugee needs to change, but also that countries...should ensure their asylum standards and procedures are adapted to protect all who face existential threats if returned to home countries that have become unlivable due to climate change."—**Bill Frelick, Director of Human Rights Watch's Refugee and Migrant Rights Division** ([HRW](#))

"Ronny planted potatoes during the dry season and corn during the rainy season but it was getting more and more difficult to tell which season was which. After months of toil, [he] wouldn't make enough money to eat. Faced with a burgeoning debt from their unsuccessful growing seasons, Ronny and his wife, Lleny, decided that their only real option was to try their luck in the USA. The land that had sustained the family no longer seemed capable of supporting their hopes of a stable life for their daughters. Leaving wasn't just a matter of departing from a place; it meant saying goodbye to everyone who made up the social fabric of their days. Ronny and Lleny made the same decision that more and more families across Central America are making. In 2019 the US Border Patrol arrested more people than at any time in the past decade. In 2011, 86% of people arrested trying to cross were from Mexico; in 2019, 81% were from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Once, the migrants were mainly single adults; now they frequently come with the entire family."—**Jessica Camile Aguirre, Guatemala** ([Sierra Club](#))