

# Island Nations Fear a Rise in the Sea: Higher CO<sub>2</sub> could leave some nations awash.

By PAUL LEWIS special to The New York Times

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## Philippine Volcano Subsides but Evacuations Continue

Steam and rumbling from a restive Philippine volcano subsided yesterday but residents of nearby villages continued to flee their homes on an island south of Manila. About a third of the population of

the island around Taal volcano has left since Thursday, when the volcano showed signs that it might erupt, officials said. These farmers struggled to get farm animals into boats to get them off the island.

# Island Nations Fear a Rise in the Sea

By PAUL LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 15 — Representatives of 37 island nations that fear they may disappear beneath the waves if the world grows any warmer are voicing their concern at the slow pace toward an agreement on stabilizing the global climate.

These nations, including Cyprus and Malta in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean islands and archipelagos around the Pacific, say their existence is threatened by the rise of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that contribute to the melting of the polar ice caps, which raises the ocean's level.

Warmer climates can also intensify hurricanes and tropical storms and kill coral reefs that protect island coastlines and harbor rich shoals of shrimp and fish.

These nations, which make up the Alliance of Small Island States, came together on Friday to prepare for a session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change on Tuesday. The group wants to draft an agreement before the "Earth Summit" in June in Rio de Janeiro.

But square brackets indicating objections still surround almost every sentence in the draft agreement on

stabilizing the quantity of carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere, mainly through the burning of fossil fuels.

"The Alliance of Small Island States members are doomed to ecological, social and economic catastrophe within the foreseeable future," Danielle de St. Jorre, the Seychelles Minister of Planning and External Relations, told the meeting Friday. "Some will even disappear. And if that happens they will take with them cultures, identities and values which are irreplaceable."

Robert F. Van Lierop, United Nations representative of Vanuatu, in the southern Pacific, said, "It's a question of survival, it's that simple. At the very least, sea level rises of a foot or so could wipe out island ecosystems. At worst, whole islands could disappear under water."

Noel J. Brown of the United Nations Environment Program, said, "We are facing a whole new category of ecological refugees."

### 4-Inch Rise in a Century

Evidence suggests that sea levels have risen by 4 to 6 inches in the last century, and the median forecast is for a further rise of 8 inches by 2030 and 26 inches by 2100, said John C. Topping, president of the Climate Institute in Washington, D.C.

Already many of these islands are feeling the effects.

## Higher CO<sub>2</sub> could leave some nations awash.

Mrs. de St. Jorre said tourist beaches are shrinking and noted that the Seychelles had to build special dikes to protect reclaimed land and sea-level industrial developments. Four tiny islands in the Maldives are being evacuated because of flooding.

The sense that they are already becoming the first victims of global warming gives the island states an urgency that they feel puts them at odds with the political priorities of the northern industrial countries and the larger developing nations.

All Western industrialized countries except the United States are ready to commit to stabilizing carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by 2000, but many will only do so if the United States changes its position. Saudi Arabia and several other oil-producing states, for example, are lined up with the United States against setting any binding new targets for emission levels because they fear that this will reduce demand for oil.

Japan wants to stabilize emissions at about 9 per cent higher than in 1990 to allow for population growth.

And for the bigger developing countries, like India and Brazil, the top priority is to insure that any agreement does not restrict their economic development and that the industrial north, which is responsible for over 80 per cent of the carbon dioxide already in the air, curbs its own emissions.

Nevertheless, larger countries may have as much incentive to stabilize sea levels as small island states, according to Stephen P. Leatherman, director of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at the University of Maryland.

A three-foot rise in ocean levels would render 72 million people homeless in China, 11 million in Bangladesh and 8 million in Egypt, or four times the island states' entire population of 23 million, he said.