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Support for Hungary's Gypsies

Hillary Rodham Clinton was presented with flowers yesterday at a Gypsy service center in Budapest, where the First Lady urged Gypsies, Hungary's most ostracized minority, not to lose hope in face of bias.

Report Says Global Warming Poses Threat to Public Health

By JOHN H. CUSHMAN Jr.

WASHINGTON, July 7 — As international negotiations on global warming resume, United Nations health and environmental agencies are warning of serious threats to public health if actions to reduce climate change come too slowly.

In a report to be issued during the talks that resume in Geneva on Monday, scientists from United Nations agencies warn that warming due to air pollution "could have a wide range of impacts on human health, most of which would be adverse."

Major cities could see thousands of additional deaths each year during heat waves, and tens of millions of people could face the risk of malaria in parts of the world where the disease does not now occur, to cite but two examples from the report.

Concerns about the possible health consequences of global warming have become increasingly widespread among those scientists who believe that the earth's climate will change rapidly in the coming century as pollution in the atmosphere traps solar radiation — the so-called greenhouse effect.

The 262-page report is one of the most thorough examinations of the issue to date, but it concedes that the predictions are fraught with uncertainty and that much more research needs to be done. At the same time, it warns negotiators against taking a "wait-and-see" approach, since the possible consequences of inaction are so dire.

How fast to act on global warming is the focus of the latest round of negotiations over what to do about global climate change.

Industrial nations are already falling short of their initial goals, which they established in a 1992 treaty, for controlling pollution from carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Major industries in some countries, including the United States, are urging their governments to take a go-slow approach to the problem, arguing against steps they say could cost jobs and growth before the problem is better understood.

Eileen Claussen, the Assistant Secretary of State for Environmental Affairs and a top American negotiator at the latest round of talks on carrying out the climate treaty, called the United Nations' report on health problems "another indication that this is an issue that has to be taken seriously — and we intend to do just that."

In the treaty, which has been ratified by 159 nations, the industrialized countries agreed to reduce and stabilize their emissions of greenhouse gases by the year 2000 at the levels that prevailed in 1990. But almost none of them will meet that target, which, according to the current scientific consensus, would not be enough anyway to head off global warming.

In the United States, for example, where the Clinton Administration adopted a largely voluntary program of measures to reduce the pollution, greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise every year since the treaty was written in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

The Clinton Administration is expected to call for tougher steps to control pollution, but it is not expected to propose specific new measures to reverse the trend until after the November election. Other nations are calling for steps ranging from increased taxes on energy to global standards for fuel efficiency.

In a report issued in London last Thursday, the World Energy Council, an independent research group, said that carbon dioxide emissions, largely from burning of fossil fuels, rose 12 percent between 1990 and 1995, and said that immediate action was required to reverse the trend.

But representatives of major energy-producing and consuming indus-

tries, like John Schlaes of the Global Climate Coalition, say there is no rush and that steps to control emissions before further research is conducted would cause grave economic harm. "The time for decision is not yet now," he said at a news conference in Washington on Wednesday.

The new report on the health risks posed by global warming, being issued by the World Health Organization, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program, comes down squarely on the side of those who are calling for early action, despite the uncertainties that permeate the scientific studies it cites. A copy of the report was provided an American government official who deals with environmental issues.

"If adverse population health impacts are likely to result from climate change, we do not have the usual option of seeking definitive empirical evidence before acting," the study says. "A wait-and-see approach would be imprudent at best and nonsensical at worst."

The report concedes that rapid worldwide reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases "may not be politically achievable." It says that paying more attention to health risks might help galvanize public opinion for taking quicker action.

Some of the research cited in the report, including a study on the dangers of heat waves, was conducted

Studies see danger from heat waves and infectious disease.

by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

It has long been recognized that heat waves kill people, both by the direct effects of heat and by intensifying chemical reactions that form hazardous smog.

E.P.A. researchers studied data from China, Egypt, Canada and the United States.

Many cities could have thousands of extra deaths annually, the researchers said.

Last July, a heat wave killed 465 people in Chicago alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

In New York, where heat-related deaths now average 320 per year, the study predicted that three to six times that many might die annually by 2050, depending on which climate-change scenario was examined. Even if people naturally became acclimatized to hotter weather, the figures could increase two- or threefold, the study suggested.

The spread of infectious diseases could occur even sooner — indeed, there is some research to suggest that it has already begun as a result of recent warming, the report said.

Within five years, the warming of the climate could increase substantially the proportion of the world's population living in potential malaria zones, according to the report, and several other diseases spread by insects or other pests might also become more widespread.

The report concedes that measures to adapt to a warmer climate — developing a vaccine against malaria, for example, or teaching the elderly to drink fluids and mineral supplements during heat waves — could help save lives. But it says these ideas are of limited value, especially in poorer countries, and that in light of these shortcomings governments should focus on the preventive option: reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases in the first place.