

# 'Irreversible' climate shifts

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Global warming is accelerating beyond the worst predictions and is threatening to trigger "irreversible" climate shifts on the planet, warn hundreds of leading scientists.

Copenhagen - Global warming is accelerating beyond the worst predictions and is threatening to trigger "irreversible" climate shifts on the planet, hundreds of leading scientists warned.

Saying there is no excuse for inaction, the nearly 2 000 climate researchers meeting in Copenhagen urged policy-makers to "vigorously" implement the economic and technological tools available to cut emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

They issued their stark message on Thursday, at the end of a three-day conference aimed at updating the findings of a 2007 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change before UN talks in December on a new global climate treaty.

"The worst-case IPCC scenario trajectories (or even worse) are being realised," the scientists said in a statement. "There is a significant risk that many of the trends will accelerate, leading to an increasing risk of abrupt or irreversible climatic shifts."

The climate change panel predicted a sea level rise of 7 to 23 inches (18cm to 59cm) by the end of the century, which could flood low-lying areas and force millions to flee. But more recent research presented at the conference suggested that melting glaciers and ice sheets could help push the sea level up at least 20 inches (50cm), and possibly as much as 39 inches (1m).

Poor nations and communities at risk

"Recent observations show that societies are highly vulnerable to even modest levels of climate change with poor nations and communities particularly at risk," the statement said.

It noted that policy-makers already have a range of tools to mitigate global warming. "But they must be vigorously and widely implemented to achieve the societal transformation required to de-carbonise economies," it said.

The conclusions of the congress will be presented to politicians when they meet in Copenhagen in December to discuss a new global agreement on greenhouse gas emissions to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

"We know from scientific evidence that climate change is a reality and that climate change will have damaging effects on the economy all over the world," said Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, one of the politicians attending the scientific conference. "Therefore we need an agreement, and we need an agreement this year."

Earlier on Thursday, British economist Nicholas Stern, the author of a major British government report detailing the cost of climate change, told the conference that the global recession presents an opportunity to build a more energy-efficient economy.

"Coming out of this we have got to lay the foundations for a low-carbon growth, which is going to be like the railways, like the electricity, like the motorcars, this is going to be over the next two, three decades the big driver in investment," Stern said.

Stern said green investments make sense because energy-efficient economies will be more sustainable in the future.

"We know from this crisis that if we postpone looking risk in the face, it will bite us much more deeply," he said.