

3rd International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Davos, Switzerland - News of BP's botched „top kill“ effort to stem gushing oil from its well in the Gulf of Mexico has cast a gloomy mood among roughly 800 world disaster experts meeting in this scenic alpine resort.

But delegates at the biannual International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos 2010 say it's also a chance to map strategies for coping with such catastrophes anywhere on this planet.

As Dr. Walter J. Ammann, the IDRC Davos 2010 presiding officer, told his guests here, “We want to move from threats to opportunities in all kinds of disaster and risk areas including climate change.”

The experts' scope includes both manmade calamities like the devastating oil spill off the Louisiana coast and natural ones such as the outpouring of volcanic ash from Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull eruption that grounded air traffic over all Europe in April. Further eruptions, GDF economists say, suggest new environmental crises and a grave economic future for the world airline industry.

Thus the sombre outlook prevails – and understandably in light of the latest crises in Iceland and the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Bron Taylor, a professor of environmental ethics at the University of Florida, summed up the sombre outlook in his own region. “It's such a terrible disaster,” Taylor says, alluding to both the threat to marine ecosystems and the grim economic loss facing the Gulf fishing industry. He doubts that the public is aware of the full impact of the crisis. A University of Florida study just released finds that an annual \$1.24 billion could be lost if the Gulf Coast's worst case scenario now emerging plays out.

On the opening day of their week-long conference the guest experts had not yet digested the news from the Gulf Coast. A panel of scholars focused more on long-term concerns like global warming. Their views too reflect both alarm and pessimism.



“From Thoughts to Action”

For more information
please contact:

Astrid Heinrich
Tel: +41 81 414 16 20
astrid.heinrich@grforum.org
www.grfoum.org

The World Bank’s lead economist Delfin Sia Go says his agency has reviewed the plight of sub-Saharan Africa over a 30-year period. It finds “remarkable achievements considering the starting point – at least until the financial downturn in 2008.”

The official pointed to a *New York Times* study that found “more progress in the region than generally thought.” Yet he warned: “It will take years of constant growth for this region to move out of poverty. Better policy is not enough. The area will need a lot of outside help. It’s not a time to be complacent.”

The global warming topic was on every delegate’s lips – even on a day when light snow fell over Davos.

A German physicist, Prof. Stephan Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, pointed out that the global mean temperature for the month of April set a record unequalled over the past 130 years. Lower temperatures in Europe and North America mislead people living there, he insists; a more reliable impression emerges in Africa, Asia, and South America.

“It a completely different planet,” Rahmstorf says, referring to his institute’s studies showing a 4-7°C temperature rise by 2100 unless efforts to reverse present trends prove successful.

The German researcher says the global goal – a so-called 2°C “guardrail” established at the United Nations’ 2009 Copenhagen conference – calls for the world staying below this target.

“If we don’t stop global warming soon,” he warned, “we will have the ‘worst scenario’ case, and it will have a major impact on sea-level rise. It’s a race against time, and we’re running out of time.”

Lyn Shepard, Conference Journalist

Davos, 1 June 2010

