

Climate change could devastate Philippines: NASA scientist

Climate change could have a devastating impact on the Philippines, leading to widespread destruction of the country's flora and fauna and flooding the capital Manila, a NASA scientist warned here Friday.

The continued melting of Arctic ice caps, brought on by climate change, could cause sea levels to rise by seven metres (23 feet), said National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) physicist Josefino Comiso. He said the country's fish stocks would be depleted and many species of plant and animal life would die because of the change in ocean temperatures caused by climate change.

Comiso said the slow melting of the ice caps should be more than "just an item of curiosity" for Filipinos.

"The Philippines is a country that is among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change," Comiso said.

"Slight changes in ocean temperature will lead to coral bleaching which will impact on the coral reefs on which the country's fishes feed."

Fish species are already starting to disappear from Philippine waters as delicate coral reefs, some of the biggest in the world, are destroyed in the archipelago, according to the international marine watchdog group Reef Check.

In a report last year the group said coral reefs were already suffering from severe bleaching.

Only five percent of the world's reefs -- which shelter and provide food for a vast number of marine species -- are still in pristine condition, according to Reef Check.

Comiso said the melting of the polar ice caps meant the sun's rays were no longer being reflected, but instead going into the Arctic waters and warming them up.

"Currents from the Arctic waters travel around the world to all the other oceans, including the waters surrounding the Philippines.

"Such warming would encourage the growth of algae in the world's oceans, which would gravely affect the world's food chain," he said.

He also noted that rising temperatures could reach a point where "various living creatures" would start to die in large numbers.

"Such temperatures would vary from species to species," he said.

"But the deaths of these creatures would gravely affect the food supply chain."

Comiso, a senior research scientist at a NASA centre that monitors the effects of global warming, made the warning after attending a conference of the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astronomical Services Administration.

He said he was working on a project, to be funded by the Manila government weather station, to monitor the effects of global warming in the Philippines.

The project, which will be based in a state university outside Manila, will coordinate its research with NASA.

Comiso was part of the United States Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change which shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with former US vice president Al Gore.

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