

An Active Imagination ? The effect of global climate change upon humanity.

I have often been told that I have an over active imagination. As a child I would see someone on the edge of a cliff and immediately visualise them falling; I imagine a painting completed whilst the canvas is still untouched, I see projects fulfilled before they're begun... and I have the ability to emphasise simultaneously with every character in a film!

It was therefore with a certain degree of apprehension that Brian agreed to watching with me the re-run of the Titanic on television the other night!

I was deeply engrossed, absorbed in the build up to the pending disaster, when the film broke for the ten o'clock news. Before our eyes came the devastating images of the emergency in Niger. A world of people waiting hopelessly on the brink of a disaster that seemed inevitable.

The newflash finished, and the film of the Titanic resumed its nerve racking, nail biting way to its inevitable conclusion. I watched the story of the first class passengers sitting in the relative comfort of their life boats as hundreds of people sank into the sea before their eyes.

"Drought has always been a feature of life in Africa "we hear people say. Drought combined with a swarm of locusts... a devastating effect, there was little anyone could have done.... They said the same about the Titanic, but we know that was not the case. The naval architect down to each individual upon that boat must have questioned their collective responsibility as the devastating outcome of that disaster came to light. Similarly I feel that we in the comfort of our safety boats of the western world must question our own collective responsibility for each and every drought, flood or typhoon that is increasingly causing damage and devastation around the world.

As yet more emergency appeals are launched I hear people say wearily, "there's always something..." as if this is another cunning and contrived scheme to get us to pay up ! They are right, there does always seem to be something. Another catastrophe. *And it will only get worse as global climate change continues.* This time this is not my over active imagination. This is scientific fact. It is also a fact that global climate change is due to the increase of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere over the past two hundred years, and particularly over the last fifty years. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) says " there is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities" it concludes that the combustion of fossil fuels is to blame.

This might be my imagination... but I personally can't see that the people of Niger are the ones who have consumed the fossil fuels that have changed the atmosphere that changes the world weather patterns.

Droughts like the devastating one witnessed on our TV screens in Niger and West Africa are forecasted to become more common, spreading to regions where such disasters are rare. Climate change, due to global warming, will result in large changes in water supplies in many areas. The result of decreased rainfall and increased temperature is a substantial loss in soil moisture which in turn increases the vulnerability to drought. People in the developing world will find increasingly that their land is no longer able to sustain them, either because it has been lost to sea level rise, or to extended drought. Agriculture is the main source of employment in the developing world and people need employment to buy food.

Dry lands cover about 40% of the total land area of the world and support one fifth of the world's population. Desertification in these dry lands is the degradation of land because of loss of vegetation , reduction of available water, reduction of crop yields and erosion of soil. The rate of desertification is approximately

60, 000sq. kilometres per year, or 0.1% per year of the total area of dry lands. It is a potential threat to 70 percent of these dry lands, over 25 percent of the worlds land area.

The United Nations recommends that Carbon Dioxide emissions must be reduced by one quarter if we are to limit the rise in global climate change to two percent in the next forty five years. That's not just a statistic thrown to the powers that be, to distant governments, but to each and every one of us.

It challenges us all to look at our own personal energy consumption, and to reduce our own carbon emissions. Small every day acts can make a difference, acts like changing to low energy light bulbs throughout our homes, turning down the central heating, not going on that cheap weekend flight for a short break, recognising that the fashion for large high energy consuming vehicles carries a cost that stretches out across the world.

Each individual act to reduce our own personal carbon emissions is like throwing a life belt to the person drowning from the Titanic... By looking at the way we live we are accepting some responsibility for the devastating weather that is increasingly hitting the poor and vulnerable in the developing world. We don't need an overactive imagination, the reports of extreme weather conditions around the world are increasing... there is "always something... ", but there is also always something we can do about it.

If you would like more information please on this or any other related subject please contact cheryl@owciom.org or come to the resource centre at St. Johns Mill open: Tuesday & Wednesday afternoons from 2 -5.30pm and Saturdays 10. -12.30 pm.