

Not just a few bugs and beasts. The effect of global climate change on humanity.

I have just returned from a wonderful holiday in Greece . Blue skies, warm sunshine, deserted beaches... all the things we dream of. But what of the uncharacteristic freak thunder storms, the flash flooding, the dry winter and the predictions of a long and excessive heat wave this summer?

Scientists are in agreement that global climate change is now a reality and that most countries around the world are *already* experiencing it in some form or another. Please note, I refer to “global climate change” and not the much used term global warming. I’m sure many of us on the Isle of Man feel we would happily do with a bit of global warming!

A close friend of mine surprised me the other day, she said “I really can’t get worked up about global climate change and all that environmental stuff!” Now I never had imagined her to be “green”, her 4x4, her designer clothes, and her high consumer life style never had led me to see her as an “eco- warrior,” but I had seen her as someone who was “world aware.” I knew that she worked tirelessly for a leading charity to raise money to alleviate poverty in the developing world.

It seems that so often in life we are for one thing but not another. We place our allegiance in one camp, create boundaries and do not stray beyond. But global climate change is not going to be so tidily restricted. We often fail to see the domino effect of life; knock one domino over and the whole lot goes tumbling down. We fail to see the chain reaction in existence, if one link of the chain is broken, the chain is useless. Just as we are linked in our humanity across the world, humanity is also linked to all that “environmental stuff”. Global climate change is not just about the extinction of a few bugs and beasts.

A report that has recently been published under the combined authorship of 18 leading Aid agencies recognises this link. The report is on the impact of global warming on *human development*. For those who can’t feel challenged by the prediction that over half the worlds land species will be extinct in just the next forty five years, as a result of our Western worlds high consumption of energy, this report looks at the humanitarian impact of our current life styles... and guess who are the ones who are already suffering most? The worlds’ most vulnerable, the world’s poorest people and countries.

“Global warming” is not just about the warming up of the temperature of the world, it results in more extreme weather patterns, more rain, flash floods, more violent storms, hurricanes, longer dry spells, droughts, more fires, and the spread of tropical diseases. None of these impacts respect national boundaries, and most present direct risk to human life. Flooding and landslides pushed by heavier rain fall will become increasingly common and in coastal areas sea levels will rise. Half of humanity inhabits the coastal areas around the world and within these areas the lowest lying are some of the most fertile and densely populated.

While the so called “developed” nations of the world produces the majority of green house gases that cause this global climate change, the burden of the impact will be more severe on developing countries. The governments of these countries are poor, they do not have the capital or infra structure to cope with the increased humanitarian aid and are less equipped to deal with extreme weather events. In the developing world the majority of people are still dependent upon agriculture for their livelihoods, agriculture is climate dependent.

In the words of the R K Pachauri Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) “global warming threatens to reverse all human progress making the Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction unachievable”.

Maybe it is time for us to break the imaginary ‘boundaries’ between humanitarian aid and green issues and accept that the two are inextricably linked. We are not all called to wear homespun or to be Greenpeace activists, but those concerned with world poverty, injustice and inequality must also be concerned with the issues of global climate change.

We can work tirelessly to alleviate world poverty, we can give generously to leading aid agencies, we can put pressure upon world governments to fulfil their millennium goals, but that is almost the easier option. Are we willing to accept that *our* consumption of energy, of fossil fuels, our life styles are at the root of what is creating world poverty on a scale that has never been witnessed before? And are we, each one of us, prepared to make those personal changes in our life styles that take on board all that “environmental stuff”?