



Collaborating for Climate Change, Global Economics, and Disease Burden  
By

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delivered at

**The International Conference on Green Summit on Climate Change - Issues & Concerns**

St Ann's College for Women, an Affiliate of Osmania University, Hyderabad, India.

November 12, 2010

Dr. Smita Asthana, Head, Dept. of Chemistry & Convenor of the Conference, Dr. Elizabeth Margaret, Head, Dept. of Botany and Secretary General of the Conference, Dr. Sr. K. Anthonamma, Principal, Ms. Katherine Dhanani, Consul General, US Consulate General, Hyderabad, Prof. T. Tirupati Rao, Vice Chancellor, Osmania University, Faculty, Students, Fellow Presenters, Sponsors, Organizing Committee; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

My sincere thanks to you all — the faculty, staff, and students of St Ann's College for Women — for inviting me to this conference. It's an honor to be asked to come and speak to a gathering of so many distinguished academics to discuss the thought-provoking theme of **"Green Summit on Climate Change - Issues & Concerns"** for this year's conference. The time has come for every college & university, world organization, and individual to seek a convention to discuss how we, as citizens of the world, can find a lasting solution to climate change - issues & concerns.

Indeed, I believe that while we have all resolved to create climate change awareness, it is only through our collective efforts—our commitment, cooperation, and collaboration—that we can actually prevent a negative trend. St Ann's College cannot do it alone; and neither can India, the US, or Africa. In fact, no single super power or developing nations can do it alone. We need collaborative efforts around the globe for inventive global reordering and effective climate change risk communication to spread across the world. If we truly want positive results from our efforts, we must work as one. The moral fortitude of our time lies in how we, as a human race, treat this issue of climate change. According to Christianity, unlike all the earthy and earthly creation, the triune God bestowed specific superiority on mankind based on the manner he was made. He was only creature who was formed and created by the handiwork of God. All other creatures came forth from the divine word of God. We were to operate with the utmost respect for God and to act responsibly. In a word, we are all caretakers of the earth.

The theme, **"Green Summit on Climate Change - Issues & Concerns,"** clearly brings to the fore your awareness of the grave state of our planet, the very earth that we live on. You believe, as I do, that our planet faces many challenges, such as increased temperature, biodiversity loss, air pollution, deforestation, poor global leadership, and above all, lack of collective response from the grassroots - the common man. The earth, as you are aware, is suffering due to geopolitical quibbling - the battle among nations as to who should take the lead to reverse man-made climate change. Do you know why the lifeline of our earth, our planet, is suffocating? I think you do - the reason is the lack of will power as individual people, grassroots, and world citizens to compel global leaders to listen to us in one common language, to understand the gravity of the situation and act positively. So, let me thank you personally —conference organizers and official sponsors—for making this historic gathering possible in your beloved state and the city of Hyderabad, India.

I have immense appreciation and respect for women—the bearers of kings, queens, prime ministers, presidents, and other leaders on different platforms. Ladies & gentlemen, there is no area of human undertaking upon which the patent of woman has not been made, and made well. You and the earth's image stem from the same roots. The Book of Genesis in the Christian Bible tells us how the earth is the

mother, created with great care before human creation. Likewise, religious practices across the world had female priests playing a dominant role. All this was prior to the inception of patriarchal traditions. Look into the practices of the times—African, Algonquin, Assyrian, Babylonian, Incan, Slavonic, Roman, Greek, Indian, and Iroquoian - they speak volumes of the responsibilities of female leaders. Throughout the span of human existence leading up to this day, there are treasure troves of examples depicting mother goddesses, such as in ancient Bassa Gelephoh, ancient Greek Gaia, ancient Irish Danu, and even right here in India (the Hindu Mata appears in nine different forms). Incidentally, the word "Ma" means woman (Maa) in Bassa. The Rig Veda calls the Female power "Mahimata," a term that literally means Mother Earth.

In Christianity there is evidence that before the "Word" or "Spirit" was created in flesh in the form of the great Jesus Christ, for thousands of years - from the Old Stone Age to the closing of the last goddess temples around AD 500 - women were at the forefront of all great civilizations.

Ladies and gentlemen, history is a recurring event. The past repeats itself as the future unfolds. By this, I mean, the women of the world will take the reins to guide humanity through "baby steps" progressing towards "stronger footsteps." We must act now. We must take action now to abate climate change.

Hence, this opportunity to address you is for a worthy cause. I consider my appearance before you here today extremely important because what is at stake is not one nation, not just economics, not merely human survival, biodiversity, or animals species. It is the fate of the next generation. Escalating climate change is a genuine issue that we are facing in the history of our world. We are talking about an era not so far down the future when there will be a lack of oxygen, food, land, water and medicine. The time will come when old and new diseases will be incurable.

I know a good fight when I see one. **"Green Summit on Climate Change - Issues & Concerns,"** is a worthy fight! A world with stable climate and steady temperature reflects the triune of God in whom we seek an intimate purpose of life. We need the united forces of all the people in our global village to fight. We should strive to be keepers of this earth ourselves, take on the sacred responsibility and hallowed conviction to save our own fate. Although geography and distances separate us physically, even though our cultures and languages are different, we should stand as one to counter climate change. United we must be to sustain the pressure to stabilize climate change in our common world.

I seek your permission to speak to you in brief about my own fight against malaria, for which I received a 2010 Fulbright-Nehru fellowship for my "Culture-Driven Malaria Control" program - dedicated to developing malaria treatment and education programs tied to the values and practices of local communities. It derives its strength from using radio scripts in vernacular languages; connecting with sports teams; developing school lessons that include drama, music, and competitions; educating farm workers, and designing new housing to control malaria.

Like many Indian citizens, I was born in a malaria-infested region. Fifty young girls and boys, including me, soon realized that a killer disease, malaria, stalked us. A moment didn't go by without the sounds of a

grief-stricken mother beating her chest and wailing, sobbing for help as one of her children lay on the brink of death or had already succumbed to the deadly but preventable disease.

My sister was pregnant at that time and we were elated as we prepared for the arrival of our next family member. Sadly, fate had other cards to deal. My sister was afflicted with malaria and did not recover. The parasites pierced her placenta, stopped the blood flow to her fetus, and killed her unborn baby. Since there was no doctor to perform a cesarean delivery, my sister died and was buried the same day. I did not get a chance to say goodbye to her unconquered spirit on her journey to our ancestors. By the time I finished elementary school, malaria had taken more than 25 lives of my classmates and friends.

My story is no different from citizens born and raised in malaria-infested regions of India. So, you see, ladies and gentlemen, these personal experiences have given birth to a dream to do something about malaria using my education, both for Africa and for India.

### Global Economics and Disease Burden

Curable malaria has proven to be one of the deadliest diseases throughout the world. In fact, half of all human deaths up to the 1900s could be traced to mosquitoes, the malaria parasites. Currently, curable malaria kills up to 2.7 to 3 million and there are 300,000 cases of infected people annually. As I speak, an estimated 3,000 children around under the age of five lose their lives daily to preventable disease. These children are future citizens and leaders of the world. The economic loss is almost as bad as the loss of lives. The World Health Organization estimates annual losses up to \$12 billion. However, the amount can stretch to \$92 billion if you add burial expenses, loss wages, and loss of manpower. It is the number one contributor to poverty, violence, and underdevelopment in the developing world. The poorest parts of the world suffer the most form of economic loss.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and other international health services organizations estimate that the economic effect of malaria is just as tragic, as it costs India an estimated. Of the total malaria spending in Southeast Asia, India not only incur 77%, but loses an estimated \$400 million needed national development due to insidious disease. This economic loss is felt more in areas where development funds are needed most. For example, India 8% tribal and population accounts about 30% of total malaria cases and about 50% of the deaths due to Plasmodium falciparum-produced malaria.

The nine anopheline species transmits killer malaria contributing to more than 15 million malaria cases and 20,000 deaths. Malaria has been a worldwide health hazard for a long time. There are more than 136,000 compiled literature texts available on the Internet, public libraries, and other sources on any aspect of malaria.

Strangely enough, in the menacing face of malaria, the state of people's lives is pathetic. In some cases, one person lives on a daily income of less than US\$2 and many others struggle to survive on US\$ 1 a day

or less. This severity of hunger, poverty, and malnutrition are the primary factors interacting to create an enormous setback to socioeconomic development, especially in the rural areas of the world. Developing and developed nations expect malaria inflicted nations to progress in development without controlling the disease. The memory of insidious malaria affecting nations like the United States, Japan, Germany, and Italy decades ago is long forgotten. At that time, these nations struggled with development as their countries struggled to battle malaria. It was only thanks to aggressive interventions that development happened thereafter.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2004, my organization went all out, on full throttle by sending letters to the political leaders of the world, including the U.S. Congress, President George Bush, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI The Roman Catholic Church, Mr. Jan Elaiison, president of the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly, the Liberian Ministries of Health & Social Welfare, and many other influential institutions across different countries in the world, including Africa.

My organization, LIHEDE, hosted several malaria awareness symposiums, workshops, and seminars within African communities across the US and Liberia to raise awareness at the grassroots level. In 2006, LIHEDE hosted the first Liberian malaria control and prevention National Health Conference in Monrovia. Held in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Liberian universities and other groups, the conference sought to bring awareness to the Liberian people and the world about the magnitude of malaria's impact in Liberia. One of the highlights of the 2006 conference was an invitation extended to officials of LIHEDE by the US Embassy in Liberia. It was to witness the historic announcement by the then U.S. President George W. Bush via satellite, declaring that Liberia would be a focus country and benefit from the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) funds. As a focus nation, Liberia automatically became eligible to receive over \$70 million in aid for malaria control and prevention.

In my capacity as a Fulbright lecturer on biosciences at the Mangalore University, my research is centered on "Culture-Driven Malaria Control. As a person who grew up in a developing nation, we have one killer in common. Take for example the recent events at the Indian village of Bhuvanaahalli on Friday, October 22, 2010, where our brothers and sisters in India still swallow the bitter pill of death each day and abandon their villages.

The next point I would like to make is that I personally don't consider my Fulbright-Nehru fellowship to India a mere coincidence. My reasons are this: First, both the United States and India are the world's two largest democracies, capable of rallying the world towards a new hope for malaria. Second, your Prime Minister, Singh and President Obama have roots in areas where preventable malaria reigns freely. As I said before, my trip to India is not a coincidence. I was able to write to the respected Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with a copy to Madame Sonia Gandhi, President of Congress and Dr. Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Minister of Health and Family Welfare asking the Prime Minister to discuss malaria prevention issues with the US President, Barack Obama on his first visit to India. I believe if both leaders put their global weight behind malaria control, we can develop the necessary technologies to kill

mosquitoes and disrupt their life cycle, as well as gain knowledge to prevent and treat this terrible disease.

I have briefly catalogued my organization's relentless efforts since 2004 to keep this issue alive as a means to align the similarity of your conference's mission and goals on climate changes - issues & concerns, and to provide a background and context for my presentation before you this morning.

Ladies & gentlemen, history tells us that the earth is more than 4.5 billion years old and that biodiversity is the result of an estimated 3.5 billion years of evolution. What this means is that the earth was being formed long before the arrival of humanity. It was certainly not an overnight process. Before the advent of Christianity, the Bassa people, the ethnic group I was born in, told this story orally. It passed on from generation to generation about Gelephoh, the Creating Deity, depicted in both masculine and feminine versions of the Supreme Being.

The story goes: long, long ago, when our earth was but one country and humankind its citizens; a time when animals could speak and all creatures could speak one language, one mother tongue, Gelephoh said, "I am about to create a very amazing earth from working with the laws on nature for you to see!"

Gelephoh instructed, "Go down to the lowest point where the rapidly migrating or wandering water gushes and scoop up the mud until your eyes see the murkiness above the surface." Mud piled up from the river that gives life, until Gelephoh saw the murkiness above the waters. Then with an index finger, she slowly stirred in a circular motion the law of motion, starting from the center and working out to the sides until it thickened and hardened.

As the people rejoiced, Gelephoh warned them, "Watch out! Be on the lookout for Mother Nature. Treat "this thing" with respect as I am in it and it is in me." By that, Gelephoh meant that there are fixed laws of nature, but the complex interactions of day-to-day events, whether caused by accident or fate, could result in unpredictable outcomes.

The entire colony of creatures joyfully assembled for the exciting news. The meeting began with adoration. The great singers of praise were birds of all kinds, whose songs warmed the heart of Gelephoh. The greatest among the great singers of praise was the bird saabo. Todopka was ready for people to live in it. Gelephoh then commanded the planted trees to breathe through their stomata, to "sweat" out water for their own health, to make breathable, serene, clean air, to make Todopka a friendly, healthy place for the incoming residents. The trees, in gleeful adoration, agreed to adapt to particular regional climates, while vegetables for more general use agreed not to curb their growth to just one area. They began to grow and flourish in almost every climate and corner of Todopka. Gelephoh then proceeded to put all dreadful meteors, unwholesome vapors, and poisonous exhalations in check. There was extreme harmony with all the elements. There were no storms, only spectacular tropical sunny days, gentle breezes, and the sparkling blue waters blended harmoniously with the environment, as sweet scents of tropical flowers wafted in the breeze.

Step-by-step Gelephoh, the Almighty and all-wise Creator Deity, made sure that everything was perfectly honed from the building blocks of careful planning and execution that would continue to stir humanity towards wonderment at the colossal geological formations of Gelephoh's creation. Gelephoh identified hazards and made sure to check and reduce all flaws, defects, weaknesses, imperfections, and

imminent dangers to an acceptable level. After Gelephoh mustered all the forces of the universe (wind, water, fire, and a splendid mosaic of gases) to fashion Todopka the Beautiful, she pronounced to the trekkers, "All things are good."

I have a reason for combing through history. You should know that since time immemorial, there has been respect for Mother Earth and nature. Her peace and harmony are humanity's primary concern for survival. Even what we call Earth Day is a day to devote to the earth's harmony. It is not a new phenomenon. It is simply reposing or re-depositing faith in the belief of our parentage and ancient sages, who gave utmost respect to Mother Earth for bestowing living beings with joy, wealth and prosperity.

Going forward, a French physicist, Joseph Fourier, expressed in a paper in 1824 in France one major concern to the world regarding his vision of a "greenhouse effect," which is a natural process where the average surface temperature of the earth is about 15°C. This is the infrared absorption capacity of water vapor and carbon dioxide. This natural process, if tempered with, or if CO<sub>2</sub> is increased, will interfere with the earth's natural ability to self-regulate. Fourier was echoing a sacred cannon of belief.

Svante Arrhenius, a Swedish scientist, reminded the world a century ago that fossil fuels may eventually result in enhanced climate change. Even here, he was repeating the warning of ages. Like Fourier and Arrhenius, an American scientist Charles Keeling, from his remote area in Mauna Loa, Hawaii, spoke up in the early 1960s. He said that doubled CO<sub>2</sub> concentration would lead to a rise in the earth's temperature or climate change. He too was echoing the concerns of our ancient past. Sadly, these alarming declarations didn't draw the desired attention of the world until Keeling's curve began to increase steeply.

Keeling's curve began to rise sharply because somewhere in this process of human existence, Mother Earth had lost more than 8.6 billion acres of its original 14.8 billion acres of virgin productive rainforest to deforestation. In actuality, our earth loses 33.8 million acres of tropical forest annually. The remaining forests of the world will be lost in less than 40 years. An alarming thought, don't you think?

As I speak, an estimated 5,000,000 plus species of plants and animals go extinct annually and the rate of extinction is now 1,000 times more than ever experienced in the entire planet's existence. In my introduction, I spoke about a time long ago when the earth was very rich in oxygen as it prepared itself. The air contained such an abundance of the element that animals and insects grew to gargantuan sizes. At that time, almost one-third of the atmosphere was oxygen.

Things changed at the dawn of the Industrial Age when fossil fuel was introduced. CO<sub>2</sub> elevated from 280ppm to 380ppm. The result of having more CO<sub>2</sub> trapped in the atmosphere is global warming, or a rise in the temperature of the surface of the earth and reduction in oxygen.

So, where do we stand now? The last hundred years of the earth history has never seen the "warming fever" the way we saw it in 2005, the warmest year. The other warm years were 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2004. It is public record that 15,000 people in France and 2,000 Britain residents loss their lives in 2003 as the result of cartographic heat waves. Climate change is of mammoth proportions, and this poses a question

of our survival. The melting glaciers increase in numbers as heat waves, tropical storms, changing weather patterns and rising sea levels make worldwide headlines news.

The phenomenon of melting glaciers in places like Alaska, Alps, Himalayas, Greenland and the polar regions of the Arctic and the Antarctic are opening new fronts in climate change. It is quite scary to witness the melting "hiccup" as reported in the permafrost or permanently frozen soils of Alaska, Canada, and Siberia. Hurricanes, tropical storms, monsoons, cyclones, floods and landslides are growing concerns, increasing in frequency and intensity, disrupting global weather patterns and rising sea levels.

All these changes in climate have devastating and prevailing effects on crops and livestock production. A steady rise in global temperature between 1 and 3°C is sufficient to decimate biodiversity, with up to 30% of species at the risk of extinction. Millions of our fellow humans worldwide are in grave danger of diseases and reemerging disease as we run out of breathable air. Humanity will soon run short of water; millions threatened by floods and other weather related calamities. Of the estimated 54 million plus deaths that would occur worldwide, one-fourth is attributed to infectious disease, with developing nations suffering the most, as it will quadruple.

More worrisome is the death of medicinal plants, an event affecting biological sources directly or indirectly. Currently, 50% of pharmaceutical drugs come from plants, animals, and microorganisms. In the future, this will be extinct. What's more - this is not the end! 80% of the indigenous world depends on rainforest medicine from nature. There will be no plants, as the diversity of wild species not yet investigated for medical potential will disappear.

Global emergence, reemergence, and spread of new vector-borne diseases such as malaria-transmitting mosquitoes are migrating to areas once considered too cold to support their existence. Old diseases such as dengue, yellow fever, plague, trypanosomiasis and leishmaniasis, and related morbidity and mortality problems arising from insects, rodents, and other parasites are building resistance to drugs.

Ladies and gentlemen, coastal regions of the world are in trouble too as we saw thousands of Indians lose their homes. The coastlines are shrinking, leading to lack of food and drought, which in turn will lead to movement of climate refugees from one country to another, increasing political instability in many regions of the world.

Current research estimates India's unstable future within the next 35 years, as most of the glaciers in the Himalayas will melt if we do not take global action on climate change. A projected 500 million of India's 1.1 billion people will be affected directly and another 250 million people will bear the brunt downstream. All this is so evident without even calculating the economical loss of freshwater ecosystems, biodiversity, and wetlands. China's 1.6 billion people are at risk from melting glaciers; by 2050 or even earlier, they will shrink by 27.2%, causing unprecedented human migration and suffering. The displacement of 12 million Chinese citizens and 560,000 evacuated people in recent year is just an example of what is yet to come.

In places like Africa, rising sea levels due to climate change project up to 30% of Africa's 18950 miles coastline shrinking, and about 25 to 40% of Africa's natural habitats could be lost forever. The world's



major cities in the US, Indonesia, Haiti, India, Japan, Liberia, and others could be flattened due to climate change.

### Where Do We Stand Today?

Well, the world is caught up with the climate change theory. The response was the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) formation, assembling the eager minds of 2,500 scientific and technical experts through the efforts of the UN & Environmental Programme and the World Meteorological Organization. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was formed thereafter. Conferences such as the Kyoto one produced the "Kyoto Protocol that binds most developed nations in "Annex I" of the treaty to reduce their emissions. The 15<sup>th</sup> UNFCCC of the Parties held in 2009 Copenhagen would produce the "Copenhagen Accord. I can list many conferences that have led to nowhere. This is due to the argument between developing and developed countries over divergent views on who should bear the burden of costs for cutting emissions.

You would have thought that with 2,500 scientific and technical experts there would be hope to tackle climate change. Instead, the debates rage on about which nations should hold the baton to pave a path.

### The Way Forward

I think we can move forward on three points. As civilized people, we know what went wrong. Instead of using our education to build a better world, we launched on a path of war pitting ancient words of wisdom against ourselves. There were reasons why mountains, rivers, jungles, and animals were considered sacred. There were reasons behind sacred groves and oracles. There was day to hunt and day of rest. Even in Franciscan Doctrines, animals and human beings were relative. In lieu of using education to protect the earth, greed overcame our spirits at an unprecedented rate. The earth is dying and the human race will be wiped out if we sit back and do nothing.

Here are my three points on how we can move forward:

#### **Point One**

Climate change is the product of behavioral and economic greed. For technological and engineering initiatives to succeed, it is imperative to understand social, cultural and economic factors. These dynamics should be incorporated into the design of global warming control programs. A top-down approach alone or one nation's initiatives are not sufficient to counter this risk.

The choice, therefore, is to control our own behavior or appetite as individuals and nations. We can blame no one but ourselves for the earth's rising temperature. The problem of climate change cannot be solved by the President of the US alone managing the economic needs of the US citizens. The President of China cannot be satisfied with the economic needs of the Chinese sustaining their lifestyles. Likewise, the Prime Minister of India cannot concern himself with Indian sentiments only. No nation can claim that their carbon footprint is insignificant in relation to that of our planet. For decades, humanity has contributed to drastic emissions. The earth suffers because of our collective actions as emitters of

greenhouse gases. Therefore, it is crucial for all of us to rise to the occasion and deal with climate change, the very fact that threatens human existence. Systemic environment, air, water, and soil pollution have obliterated all man-made boundaries and unite all of us as one human family.

### **Point Two**

Quibbling among nations is dabbling with danger, not the answer. Our new perspective of looking at climate change should be from a "world citizens" approach. By this, I mean, we must now see the world as a family ready to work towards stopping climate change. The looming prospect should be the one thing that unites us and makes us aware that the wealth of the world must be equally distributed. Uneven trade and exploitation will kill us all, now is the time to act. When this happens, we can stand straight and say that the needs of the "world citizens' needs" must be balanced and controlled to save the earth. The words "world citizens" help us recognize the uniqueness of a world family.

World citizens do not create boundaries and you are on your own. It respects life on earth, without any prejudices. I hasten to reassure you that my use of the words "world citizens" does not mean loss of patriotism to your country. On the contrary, a true patriot is one who looks beyond geographic boundaries to elevate the consciousness of brotherhood, his country and that of the earth. A "world citizen" is devout to his country and to the entire earth's survival. The focus of a "world citizen" is elevation of global consciousness - in which his country, all countries, and the planet mutually benefit. A "world citizen" works towards establishing an ideal and highly evolved society on earth.

### **Point Three**

Effective global communication should use technical, cultural, and traditional tools available to humanity. Nothing will happen if over a third of the world's citizens had no clue about what is occurring (Gallup, 2007-2008). In other words, share everything that nature offers. Communicate this message to other nations. Develop a global shared plan for development to stop harming the earth. Communicate with all religions of the world, schools and organizations for behavior modification to save the earth. The "world citizens" put global leaders in power. Attract the attention of the world by refusing to kill ourselves. The earth is our earth. It belongs to all of us. Its harmony is in our best interests. This should be the message to the world.

In conclusion, drastic measures, including "technological savior" need to be set in place to stop climate change. Climate change prevention strategies and implementation goals lack direct and full participation from all nations, who are supposed to be the direct beneficiaries of such initiatives. Therefore, it is now imperative to control our greed effectively through a joint effort as world citizens. We need to get down to the grassroots and put pressure on nations' leaders to take action. Will we be able to unite, think, feel, and act as one global community and make headway with climate change?

We need to set aside greed for a better lifestyle and not ruin the common ground we live on. I believe, my global brethren, that it is time to awaken the sleeping giants (the sons and daughters or the grassroots of the world), to awaken and proclaim the new global environmental ethic. Time has arrived

for the church to build an ark in which biblically informed, morally responsible people will stand up against those determined to destroy creation for their own economic gain. Rise as one and fight against deforestation, environmental pollution, and global warming. Protect global forests and water resources, including mountains, rivers, streams, oceans and their inhabitants, trees, forests, minerals, fish, vegetation, and animals. So, I ask each of you, "Will you get on board?" This is my message to you! This is the message for St Ann's College for Women and related climate change control entities. Help protect our environment and natural habitat.

Thank you for your time and patience! I hope to have made an impact in you to contribute to climate change.

