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Climate change seen hurting poor regions

By Michael Astor, Associated Press Writer

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil — Latin America and other poor regions of the world will bear the brunt of climate change, a top official from the organization that shared this year's Nobel Peace Prize said Thursday.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N. network of scientists, was awarded the prize along with former U.S. Vice President Al Gore for their work alerting the public of the perils of global warming.

"The results of the IPCC show very clearly the impacts of climate change will be ... much more severe for the poorest groups and Latin America is included in that," said IPCC vice chairman Mohan Munasinghe of Sri Lanka. Munasinghe headed a two-day meeting in Rio of the organization, its first since winning the Nobel prize.

He said water management issues were likely to be the most pressing problem caused by global warming in Latin America. Dry areas will become much drier and other areas will face increased floods and associated waterborne diseases like malaria and dengue fever.

Results from the Rio meeting, the group's fourth since 1990, will be presented at the U.N. climate conference in Bali, Indonesia, in December.

Munasinghe said he felt the Noble prize gave greater recognition and credibility to the scientific panel, which has explained the details of global warming in thousands of pages of footnoted reports issued every six years or so.

He said despite the problems facing Latin America, the region is very proactive in addressing the issue.

"My sense is that (Latin American) countries ... have been much more responsive to the issue of climate change because they feel much more vulnerable," Munasinghe said. "For North America, particularly the United States, the reaction is more defensive."

Brazilian Environment Minister Marina Silva said global warming was a burden shared by both developing and developed nations.

"If we were to reduce our gas emission by 100 percent, without richer nations reducing theirs by at least 80 percent, we would still be affected," Silva said, warning that global warming could turn the Amazon rain forest into dry savanna land in the decades to come.

Many scientists believe that the extensive Amazon rainforest absorbs carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. About 70 percent of the basin lies in Brazilian territory.

But agricultural burning in the Amazon is also responsible for about 75 percent of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions, making it the world's fourth largest emitter nation.

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