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# MEDIA RELEASE

## CHOGM LEADERS URGED TO ACT

Millions of Commonwealth citizens across Africa, Asia and the Pacific face declining food production and the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, a conference in Brisbane was told yesterday.

But the issue of climate change is not on the agenda for Commonwealth leaders to discuss when they meet at Coolumbia this weekend.

Addressing a forum called to highlight the exclusion of climate change from the CHOGM agenda Dr Habiba Gitay, a lead author of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said the IPCC predicts that crop yields across the Indian sub-continent will decline by up to 30 per cent due to global warming and changing weather patterns.

Crop yields in Africa are expected to decline by up to 20 per cent. Dr Gitay said that a sea-level rise of one metre would see the already impoverished Bangladesh lose 17 per cent of its productive land mass.

Dr Jon Barnett, lecturer in development studies at Melbourne University, told the forum that the Commonwealth's atoll nations were particularly vulnerable to climate change. Releasing a new index of vulnerability to sea level rise he said four Commonwealth islands – the Maldives, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Tokelau – were the most vulnerable in the world.

He said the IPCC found that low-lying small island states face "the possible loss of whole cultures" through the impacts of climate change.

Senior environmentalists from four Commonwealth countries who addressed the forum today signed an open letter to Commonwealth leaders

The letter called on Commonwealth leaders to ratify the Kyoto Protocol as a matter of urgency, as a first step to beginning the task of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

"Climate change poses a severe threat to the future prosperity of Commonwealth nations and especially citizens of developing country members," the letter says.

"The world's foremost climate scientists ... have forecast global warming, sea level rise, declining crop yields and the spread of vector borne diseases. These will adversely affect millions of Commonwealth citizens across Africa, Asia and the Pacific."

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