

Many testimonies in Viterbo: from Nepal to Kenya, passing through the Alps. The change in temperature causes disease, drought, and risks for the populations.

## “Climate alarm, our lives in the balance”

*And Marco Onida raises the bar: “Our glaciers are at risk before 2050”*

**Viterbo, 27 November 2009 – High altitude testimonies at Greencord’s Forum in Viterbo.** The accounts given about the climate by WWF are passionate and alarming, and speak of the world of snow-capped mountains whose appearance has irreparably changed in recent years. The protagonists of this morning were the Alps and the Himalayas, not only because of their common orogenesis (The Alp-Himalayan mountain chain was the first mountain formation to develop because of tectonic shifting), but also because of the testimony of a person who every day witnesses the melting of these ancient glaciers, to the point where they will never re-form. **Marco Onida** is the secretary general of the Convention of the Alps, whom the countries of this mountain chain have assigned as guardian of this natural patrimony: “Three million years ago, up there, there was ox-raising, now there are glaciers. But the speed of the climate change has doubled in the past century; in 1985 the contracting of the glaciers had already begun: if this phenomenon continues, these glaciers will disappear in 2050. And if the over-heating of the planet has effects that are more or less visible in the various ecosystems – continues Onida – the consequences could be worse in areas that are particularly sensible and ecologically fragile, like in the Alps, where the melting of the glaciers and the consequent erosion of the ground could accentuate the occurrence of natural disasters.”

Things don’t seem to be going any better on the roof of the world. Just ask **Apa Sherpa**, a 49 year old Nepalese, who has climbed Mt. Everest nineteen times, and who was accompanied to Viterbo by another younger Nepalese, Dawa Sherpa. Their life is amongst the rocks: “With the passing of time I saw the increase in the number of hot days, with the incredible effect of finding insects at over 5000 meters of altitude. And if the number of deaths due to malaria has increased, the cause seems to be actually this proliferation of insects due to the climate change. Also, it continues to snow even less, and the withdrawal of the perennial glaciers became even more evident this spring, with the reappearance of bodies of missing mountain climbers from 1975. Also, if the ice melts then the lakes grow, and their instable equilibrium puts all the populations who live at altitude at risk. I dedicated my last two climbs on Everest – concluded an emotional Apa – to the problem of climate change. We hope that someone will quickly think of a solution to stem this problem because our children, the adults of the future, will have to deal with all this.”

From the Asian mountains to the landscape of Kenya, the changes in climate have hurt people like **Nelly Damaris Chepkoskei**, who lived primary due to agriculture and animal breeding. “The first sign that something had changed was the rain, that continued to be less intense and more infrequent. I remember the Christmas holidays when I was a baby; we passed them almost under the water. Now, in December, the climate is dry. With the

increase of the temperature, insects have also arrived in our zones of high-ground, with a twofold damage: for health, with the increase of the diffusion of malaria, and for cultivation where pesticides are now necessary, which, in addition to threatening the environment, has a cost which places us all in difficulty. I lost my four-year-old daughters to malaria. A mosquito that had landed on her forehead took her from me in three days. Fortunately, in the confrontation of sickness – especially AIDS – and growing poverty there are very well-organized Catholic organizations that help us. But the situation remains dramatic: for ten millionaires here we have ten million beggars.”

**Jalaluddin Saha**, an Indian farmer, also says: “I was born on Sagar Island, that is the biggest and furthest west in the Sundarbans. I had to rebuild my house two times due to the elevation of the sea level and I lost a good part of the land that was meant for farming. I’m afraid that my children will continue to see our home destroyed. I bought two hectares of land – adds Saha – but very little lasted more than an hour. We are also gradually losing farming land due to salination of the soil, a phenomenon that has been moving forward since 1969. Another change regards the period of rice sowing that now is delayed by two months as opposed to before. This makes a third cycle of sowing impossible. For now my house seems to be secure but I don’t exclude the fact that my children or grandchildren will have to move themselves again in the future, closer to the interior.

The International Forum on the Protection of Nature will continue tomorrow with an intervention of the Ferrovie dello Stato, on the obligation of rail transport sectors in the protection of the environment; Riccardo Valentini, teacher at the University of Tuscia, will confront the theme of evidence of climate change in the agro-alimentary sector; William Rees of British Columbia, creator along with Mathis Wackernagel of the concept of ‘impression ecology,’ will give a presentation on “The carbon imprint of humanity: knowledge, conflict, and negotiation.”