



Climate change threatens African civil war



Climate change could increase the likelihood of civil war in sub-Saharan Africa by over 50 per cent, researchers have warned.

A study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) claims over the next two decades the changes in temperature could have a devastating affect on the southern parts of the continent.

The authors of the study, from a series of leading US universities, claim their results provide the first quantitative evidence linking climate change and the risk of civil conflict.

The study concludes by urging accelerated support by African governments and foreign aid donors for new and expanded policies to assist with African adaptation to climate change.

Commenting on the findings, the study's lead author Marshall Burke, from the UC Berkeley, said: "Despite recent high-level statements suggesting that climate change could worsen the risk of civil conflict, until now we had little quantitative evidence linking the two.

"Unfortunately, our study finds that climate change could increase the risk of African civil war by over 50 per cent in 2030 relative to 1990, with huge potential costs to human livelihoods."

Edward Miguel, professor of economics at UC Berkeley said the results "made sense".

He said because the majority of the poorest people in most African countries depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, when temperatures rise the livelihoods of many in Africa suffer greatly and the disadvantaged become "more likely to take up arms".

In the study, the researchers first combined historical data on civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa with rainfall and temperature records across the continent.

They found that between 1980 and 2002, civil wars were significantly more likely in warmer-than-average years, with a one degree C increase in temperature in a given year raising the incidence of conflict across the continent by nearly 50 per cent.

Using projections of future temperature and precipitation change to quantify, the researchers found that the incidence of African civil war could increase 55 per cent by 2030, which they claim could result in an additional 390,000 people being killed.

The authors said their findings should be used at the upcoming Copenhagen negotiations in December in determining both the speed and magnitude of response to climate change.

"If the sub-Saharan climate continues to warm and little is done to help its countries better adapt to high temperatures, the human costs are likely to be staggering," Mr Burke concluded.