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PEARLY BEACH BEWAREA – VAN DIE LESSENAAR VAN DIE VOORSITTER, ELRINA VERSFELD

Working Together Saving Tomorrow Today

This is the motto of the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This meeting is held annually to discuss issues of global warming and find possible ways of reducing the inevitable temperature increases faced by our planet. The venue of the conference rotates between the five United Nations regional groups. This year, the honour falls on the Africa Group, with South Africa hosting the conference in Durban from 28 November to 9 December 2011. Of the 195 countries or parties that have signed this global agreement, 193 have also signed the Koyoto Protocol, which not only encourages them, but commits them to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), which are widely held responsible for global warming. The main greenhouse gases include water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and ozone. In recent times, the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and natural gas, has greatly contributed to the increase in carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere and animal agriculture has increased the amount of methane. Even though Africa is not considered to be a large contributor of GHG emissions, the Southern part of Africa has been found to experience temperature increases of twice the global average over the past century. In other words, if the world's increase is two degrees, Southern Africa experiences four. As a result, the normal temperatures at all times of the year are expected to rise by four degrees, which may be nice for us in winter, but not in summer. And what will happen to our valuable water resources and the plants and animals in the long term? Hopefully, further measures to mitigate climate change will be formulated at this upcoming international conference. In the meantime, we as individuals can do our part in helping to save our planet for tomorrow's inhabitants by making an effort to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions caused by our lifestyles.

Written by Susanne Fuchs for the Pearly Beach Conservancy.

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