

‘Rising sea levels will only happen around 2100, by then we’ll all be dead’: a surprising view from Hong Kong at Paris climate summit

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When Hong Kong’s secretary for the environment speaks about the challenges posed by a warming earth, he refers mainly to extreme weather.

At a side event at the Paris climate summit, Wong Kam-sing spoke on Monday about how the city had adapted to such events. Prone to typhoons, the city had built up its weather forecasting and alert systems that warned citizens to stay indoors and inbound flights to stay grounded, he said.

Meanwhile slope management projects in hilly areas had prevented the landslides the city experienced decades ago, Wong said.

But what about rising sea levels? Wong said Hong Kong was monitoring all climate change related risks and new developments would take account of the risks.



AFP

environmental affairs with CLP Holdings, surprised me by saying: “First thing, rising sea levels will only happen around 2100, by then we’ll all be dead.”

[1]Jeanne Ng, director of group

Such comments are seldom heard at climate summits nowadays, because scientists and civil society are pressing negotiators to prevent disasters in decades or centuries to come.

A sense of urgency has prevailed at the summit.

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Hong Kong has a much better emergency response system for extreme weather events than many mainland cities. And it is already working on reducing coal consumption, while its carbon intensity – emissions relative to GDP – was only about one ninth that of the mainland in 2012, according to Robert Gibson, professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

But the city is not immune from rising sea levels, even now. Hong Kong's Observatory found the mean sea level in Victoria Harbour rose 30mm per decade from 1954-2014.

Another speaker noted that Tai O villagers had to be relocated whenever there was a storm surge.

Long before they flood the city, rising sea levels are forecast to increase the frequency of storm surges.

Global climate talks have had many disappointing moments over the years. But at least they teach people that coping with climate change is not just about adapting to it, but preventing it.

UPDATE: Following this report, CLP issued a statement saying that sea level rise was a longer term issue and that it would take a concerted effort across the community, the government and the business sector to discuss and plan together how to manage and get ahead of the challenge. It said the company had been conducting adaptation studies to make it resilient to climate change. The studies take into account the potential severity of sea level rises as well as other potential impacts on Hong Kong such as temperature increases and storms within the next few decades.

Topics: Paris climate summit 2015

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