

## **Professor David Hall Memorial Lecture 2009**

### **The Climate Change Challenge: Will Civil Society Cope?**

On 9<sup>th</sup> June, ELF hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary David Hall Memorial Lecture at the Royal Society, London. Three distinguished speakers spoke on the threats posed to society by the climate change crisis and answered questions from the audience.

**Professor Bob Watson**, Chief Scientific Adviser to Defra, gave an overview of the key national and global challenges of climate change which include environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation and food, water and energy security. Climate change affects loss of biodiversity, local and regional air pollution and land and water degradation. There are global conventions for each but they do not work together adequately. These issues need to be understood as one system, scientifically.

We need to both mitigate and adapt to climate change as it is already happening. The IPCC has concluded that temperature changes in the last 50 years have been predominantly due to human activity. If we do not try to mitigate, projected figures show the earth's mean surface temperature will rise by 2-7 degrees Celsius by 2100. Food demand will double within 25-50 years.

**Dr Mary Archer**, Chair of the Cambridge Hospitals NHS Trust, spoke about the impact of climate change on the NHS and health in general.

The WHO is now moving from a 'watching' strategy towards 'action' to cope with the health threat posed by climate change.

Direct threats include changing patterns of disease (it is estimated that the number of people affected by malaria will more than double by 2080). Indirect threats from extreme climatic events put stress on sanitation and food production. 3.5m children die each year from chronic malnutrition.

Governments must take action through developing public health policies and supporting international agreements.

**Patrick Holden**, Director of the Soil Association believes that we have moved beyond mitigation and adaptation into survival mode. He refers to Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* about societal collapses, in which Diamond states that the next collapse will be a global collapse because of globalisation. A pre-condition to a functioning society is a sustainable supply of food and we will have a global food crisis unless we act now. We have been living beyond our means for the last century.

Both communities and governments need to take action. At government level, a template for a national action plan is needed, which can be applied by any country. High emission agriculture should be a thing of the past. Governments need to move to systems reliant on current inputs of earth capital. The WTO system needs to be reframed to encourage sustainable food policy and a Sustainable Food Commission needs to be created.