

The ozone hole's size has presently stabilized, but the low values in the interior of the hole continue to decline. The lowest values in the ozone hole are typically observed late September or early October of each year. In comparison, the Earth's largest island, Greenland, covers only 2.2 million square kilometers (840,000 square miles).

"These observations reinforce concerns about the frailty of Earth's ozone layer. Although production of ozone destroying gases have been curtailed under international agreements, their concentrations in the stratosphere are only now reaching their peak. Due to their long persistence in the atmosphere, it will be many decades before the ozone hole is no longer an annual occurrence," said Dr. Michael J. Kurylo, manager of the Upper Atmosphere Research Program, NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC.

Scientists continue to investigate this very large hole and are somewhat surprised by its size. The reasons behind the large size involve both low early spring conditions, and an extremely large Antarctic vortex. The Antarctic vortex is an upper altitude stratospheric current of air that sweeps around the Antarctic continent and acts to confine the Antarctic ozone hole.

"Variations in the size of the ozone hole and of ozone depletion accompanying it from one year to the next are not unexpected," said Dr. Jack Kaye, Office of Earth Sciences Research Director, NASA Headquarters. "At this point we can only wait to see how the ozone hole will evolve in the coming few months and see how the year's hole compares in all respects to those of previous years."

"Discoveries like these demonstrate the value of our long-term commitment to providing key observations to the scientific community," said Dr. Ghassem Asrar, Associate Administrator for NASA's Office of Earth Sciences, Headquarters, Washington, DC. "We will soon launch QuickTOMS and Aura, two spacecraft that will continue to gather these important data."

Ozone molecules, made up of three atoms of oxygen, comprise a thin layer of the atmosphere that absorbs harmful ultraviolet radiation from the Sun. Most atmospheric ozone is found between approximately 9.5 km (6 miles) and 29 km (18 miles) above the Earth's surface.

These measurements were obtained using the Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer (TOMS) instrument aboard NASA's Earth Probe (TOMS-EP) satellite. NASA instruments have been measuring Antarctic ozone levels since the early 1970s. Since the discovery of the ozone "hole" in 1985, TOMS has been a key instrument for monitoring ozone levels over the Earth.

TOMS **ozone data and pictures** are available on the Internet: <http://jwocky.gsfc.nasa.gov/TOMSmain.html>

TOMS-EP and other ozone-measurement programs are important parts of a global environmental effort of NASA's Earth Science enterprise, a long-term research program designed to study Earth's land, oceans, atmosphere, ice and life as a total integrated system.

3. Seventy Million Nigerians Are Poor

Benin, August 14, 2000 - The population of Nigerians living below the poverty line hit 70 million mark in 1990 and may have approached the 80 million mark as at January, this year.

P.M. News learnt that the increase in the population of the poor has been geometric. This was confirmed by the Edo State governor, Chief Lucky Igbinedion.

Apart from this alarming increase, there has been a drastic fall in life expectancy, from 52 to 49 years even as unemployment and illiteracy level are on the upward trend. As if that is not enough, Nigerian factories are all functioning below 25 per cent of their installed capacities with several infrastructures are dilapidated and rotting away.

Governor Igbinedion who was relying on figures from the federal office of statistics spoke at the Edo State launch of the National Re- afforestation Programme, at the devastated Ogba Forest Reserve. The reserve has been a victim of decades of exploitation to the extent that it is devoid of new trees.

The story is the same at several tree reserves across the state. At Udo, Okomu, loggers have destroyed the forests in search of hardwoods.

The result has been more carbon gases released into the atmosphere from trees, contributing over two per cent of the human-induced emission destroying the ozone layer.

