

UN report warns of irreversible climate impacts



A United Nations climate report sounds an ominous warning about the "irreversible" impacts of human activity on the climate. (Photo by Reuters)

United Nations, August 9 (RHC)-- A shocking United Nations climate report has sounded an ominous warning about global warming, saying that humans are "unequivocally" to blame for "irreversible" climate change.

Describing the report as a "code red for humanity," UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged an end to the use of coal and fossil fuels. "This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels before they destroy our planet," Guterres declared in a statement on Monday, reacting to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that concluded the 1.5C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement would likely be breached by 2030, a decade sooner than it projected just three years ago.

"Countries should also end all new fossil fuel exploration and production, and shift fossil fuel subsidies into renewable energy," Guterres further emphasized, insisting, "The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk."

"If we combine forces now, we can avert climate catastrophe," the UN chief added. "But, as today's report makes clear, there is no time for delay and no room for excuses." The IPCC report came just three months before a major UN climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, where nations will be under pressure to pledge vigorous climate action and significant financing.

Drawing on more than 14,000 scientific studies, the report offers the most comprehensive and detailed portrait yet of how climate change is altering the natural world -- and what could still lie ahead.

Emissions "unequivocally caused by human activities" have pushed today's average global temperature 1.1C higher than the preindustrial average -- and would have pushed it 0.5C further if not for the tempering effect of pollution in the atmosphere, the report states.

That means that, as societies transition away from fossil fuels, much of the aerosols in the air would vanish -- and temperatures could spike. Scientists further warn that warming of more than 1.5C above the preindustrial average could trigger runaway climate change with catastrophic impacts -- such as heat so intense that crops fail or people die just from being outdoors.

"Every bit of warming matters," said IPCC co-author Ed Hawkins, a climate scientist at the University of Reading in Britain. "The consequences get worse and worse as we get warmer."

"We are now committed to some aspects of climate change, some of which are irreversible for hundreds to thousands of years," said another IPCC co-author Tamsin Edwards, a climate scientist at King's College London. "But the more we limit warming, the more we can avoid or slow down those changes."

Already, greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere are high enough to guarantee climate disruption for decades if not centuries, scientists also warned in the report.

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