

UN experts say world faces climate catastrophe



The UN's World Meteorological Organization says the world is 'way off track' in capping rising temperatures [File: AFP]

United Nations, October 27 (RHC)-- Current commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions put the planet on track for a “catastrophic” average 2.7-degree Celsius temperature rise this century, the United Nations said on Tuesday, another stark warning ahead of crunch climate talks.

Just days before the crucial Scotland climate summit, the UN's Environment Programme (UNEP) said national plans to reduce carbon pollution amounted to “weak promises, not yet delivered.”

“The G20 countries are responsible for 78 percent of all emissions so the ‘to do item’ lies with them,” Inger Andersen, executive director of the UNEP, told Al Jazeera. “The developed countries have a special responsibility to really step up, but actually everyone does – all 193 member states.”

Andersen said much of the pledged action by countries is delayed until 2030, which scientists warn will be far too late to halt the worst ravages of climate change on the planet. “Action is needed now,” she warned.

Governments will be in the spotlight at the COP26 conference next week to meet a deadline of this year to commit to more ambitious greenhouse gas cut promises, in what could be the last chance to put the world on track to limit warming to 1.5C (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

This would help prevent the worst-imagined catastrophic changes threatening the planet, scientists say. As extreme weather events such as superstorms, wildfires and floods increasingly hit countries around the world, even the slightest increase in global temperatures will worsen the situation.

The UN World Meteorological Organization said ahead of the two-week event, which begins in Glasgow on Sunday, that greenhouse gas concentrations hit a record last year and the world is “way off track” in capping rising temperatures.

If all pledges by 192 countries under the Paris Agreement are taken together, an increase of about 16 percent in global emissions is expected by 2030 compared with 2010, which would lead to warming of 2.7C by the end of the century – a figure where life on Earth would be devastating for millions of people.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said Tuesday’s report showed the world was “still on track for climate catastrophe.” “This report is another thundering wake-up call. How many do we need? The emissions gap is the result of a leadership gap,” Guterres told a press briefing. “The era of half measures and hollow promises must end. The time for closing the leadership gap must begin in Glasgow.”

UNEP said most recent commitments would shave 7.5 percent off previously predicted 2030 emissions levels. To keep on a 1.5C trajectory, a 55-percent reduction is needed. The report said plans of many of the 49 countries that have made “net-zero” pledges remained “vague” and were not reflected in their formal commitments.

“We have eight years to make the plans, put in place the policies, implement them and ultimately deliver the cuts,” Andersen said. “The clock is ticking loudly.”

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in August said Earth could hit the 1.5C threshold as soon as 2030 and be consistently above it by mid-century. The report said even if all net-zero pledges were delivered in full, there was a 60-percent chance that temperature rises would hit 2.7C by 2100.

“There is no appetite for reducing fossil fuel consumption globally at the rate required to meet our climate goals,” said Myles Allen, professor of Geosystem Science at the University of Oxford.

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