

UN calls for energy sector overhaul to avoid climate catastrophe

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Unusually heavy monsoon rains caused havoc in South Asia this year, inundating swaths of Pakistan [File: Akhtar Soomro/Reuters]

United Nations, October 29 (RHC)-- The United Nations has found that only a swift system-wide transformation of the energy sector can stave off the most devastating effects of climate change, as

projections show current pledges offer “no credible pathway” to limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

A report released this week by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) estimated that greenhouse gas emissions will need to be slashed by 45 percent by 2030 to get on track to 1.5C and 30 percent for 2C (3.6F). “We had our chance to make incremental changes, but that time is over,” Inger Andersen, executive director of UNEP, said in a statement on Thursday. “Only a root-and-branch transformation of our economies and societies can save us from accelerating climate disaster.”

The UN’s climate experts have offered a roadmap for delivering this objective, which requires multiple major transformations to be initiated in this decade, simultaneously across all systems, including in the electricity supply, industry, transport and building sectors, and the food and financial systems.

Among the most urgent actions, UNEP highlighted the fast expansion of renewable energy systems despite cost barriers, “as costs are no longer the issue in many geographies”.

Unusually heavy monsoon rains caused havoc in South Asia this year, inundating swaths of Bangladesh and Pakistan, while an unprecedented fourth failed rainy season led to catastrophic hunger and displacement in Somalia.

While low-income countries bear the brunt of climate change, oil companies this year made record-breaking profits from high oil and natural gas prices partly stoked by the war in Ukraine amid reports that windfall profits were not taxed.

According to UNEP, avoiding building new fossil fuel infrastructure that locks in fossil fuel dependency and greenhouse gas emissions for decades is necessary, “in particular for coal and gas.” “All governments need to plan for fossil fuel phase-out well ahead and in a socially just manner,” the report said, which includes removing fossil fuel subsidies as well as bureaucratic hurdles to grid access for renewable energy.

Subnational governments, businesses and citizens should also buy 100 percent renewable power from high-quality providers, UNEP found. Rapid and lasting emissions cuts were also needed in food production industries, which account for about a third of greenhouse gases.

The UN environment agency noted that action in four areas – protection of natural ecosystems, dietary changes, improvements in farm food production and decarbonisation of food supply chains – would reduce food system emissions by 2050 to about a third of current levels.

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