

Headline: 13 of last 15 years warmest on record—UN agency

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DURBAN—Thirteen of the warmest years recorded have occurred within the last decade and a half, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said on Tuesday.

The year 2011 caps a decade that ties the record as the hottest ever measured, the WMO said in its annual report on climate trends and extreme weather events, unveiled at UN climate talks in Durban, South Africa.

"Our science is solid and it proves unequivocally that the world is warming and that this warming is due to human activities," WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud said in a statement, adding that policy makers should take note of the findings.

"Concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have reached new highs and are very rapidly approaching levels consistent with a 2 to 2.4 Celsius rise in average global temperatures."

Scientists believe that any rise above the 2.0 threshold could trigger far-reaching and irreversible changes on Earth over land and in the seas.

The 2002-2011 period equals 2001-2010 as the warmest decade since 1850, the report said.

2011 ranks as the 10th warmest year since 1850, when accurate measurements began.

This was true despite a La Niña event – one of the strongest in 60 years – that developed in the tropical Pacific in the second half of 2010 and continued until May 2011.

The report noted that the cyclical climate phenomenon, which strikes every three to seven years, helped drive extreme weather events including drought in east Africa, islands in the central equatorial Pacific and the southern United States.

It also aggravated flooding in southern Africa, eastern Australia and southern Asia.

While La Niña, and its meteorological cousin El Nino, are not caused by climate change, rising ocean temperatures caused by global warming may affect their intensity and frequency, scientists say.

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