

Headline: Record-breaking heat

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The heat is on and, frighteningly, has been all year. Quoting American scientists, The Associated Press reported: "Thanks to a combination of global warming and an El Niño, the planet shattered monthly heat records for an unprecedented 12th straight month, as April smashed the old record by half a degree."

The report went on to say that the monthly climate calculation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) showed that the average global temperature in April was 14.8 degrees Celsius, or 1.1 degrees warmer than the average in the 20th century. This after NOAA declared 2015 the hottest year ever—a distinction that 2016 looks certain to grab.

This year, the Philippines' weather bureau Pagasa recorded the highest temperature ever recorded in the country—52.3 degrees C in Cabanatuan City. As Filipinos baked in the summer heat, it's hardly comforting to know that we are not alone. Earth actually experienced the hottest April on record, with peak temperatures recorded in Africa, South America and Asia. In fact, almost every month saw a new record for warmest ever. "...[S]o many [records] in a row that break the previous records by so much indicates that we're entering uncharted climatic territory [for modern human society]," Texas A&M; University climate scientist Andrew Dessler told AP.

There can be no denying the reality of climate change now. "Today you are signing a new covenant with the future," United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon told the 170 world leaders who signed in April the landmark Paris Agreement. He warned: "We are in a race against time."

The Paris Agreement originally intended to keep the rise in global temperature under 2 degrees C through a reduction of greenhouse gases. It requires ratification by 55 countries responsible for 55 percent of the total greenhouse gases, with a target implementation date of 2020. The temperature threshold has since been moved from 2 degrees to 1.5 degrees C.

Climate studies have shown that a rise in global temperature by 2 degrees C would lead to the submersion of land where today 280 million people live, including parts of Mumbai, New York and Shanghai, and overwhelm island-nations such as Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

Climate activist and former US vice president Al Gore discussed the all-important figures when he visited the Philippines in March. He said: "I am so happy that the 2-degree goal was modified with the reference to 1.5 [degrees]. One way to think about this is this: We have already seen an increase in just about 1 degree, and the north polar ice caps are melting rapidly, the land-based size of Greenland and Antarctica is beginning to melt much more rapidly, sea level is rising. We are getting closer to the danger zone with the melting of the arctic permafrost that could release a lot of methane emissions that are even more dangerous than carbon dioxide."

Gore also warned about the effects of climate change on vulnerable countries such as the Philippines, as seen in the devastation wrought by Typhoon "Yolanda" in 2013. He said these superstorms were "likely to come stronger with the continued warming of the oceans."

The warnings become more urgent as the weather gets worse. That everyone needs to do their part to curb the spike in global temperatures is spelled out in a Project Syndicate commentary by Sen.

Loren Legarda and Rep. Marcela Guerrero of the Philippines and Costa Rica, two of the 43 countries that make up the Climate Vulnerable Forum.

“The goal is an ambitious one. But vulnerable developing countries are committed to helping achieve it,” Legarda and Guerrero wrote of the Paris Agreement. “Such initiatives are more commonly associated with advanced economies than with developing countries. And the rich world does have a moral obligation to move first and faster—with policies, technologies, and finance—to reduce the emissions that cause global warming. But we also recognize that developing countries have a responsibility to act and that doing so can generate immense economic, social, and public health advantages for their citizens.”

The two lawmakers emphasized how, for vulnerable countries, the battle against climate change is a battle for survival. “We cannot succeed on our own; this much is certain. The Climate Vulnerable Forum represents a tiny share of global emissions. We need the industrialized countries and the giants of the developing world to redouble their efforts to reduce their emissions, so that global warming can be limited to 1.5 degrees. Only then can disaster be averted.”

Indeed, everyone must pull together. It’s later than we think.

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