

Headline: The living and the dead

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There's a horror story to scare us out of our wits today. No, it's not any movie that's currently showing in our movie houses. And no, it's not the ongoing bloodletting in the South if you want a horror story from real life, even if the faces of the Muslim women that appeared here last weekend, all haggard with anxiety, adding deeper furrows into faces already furrowed by age, are horrific enough in themselves.

It's global warming.

That term almost makes it sound anticlimactic. It's such a benign way to refer to a planet in peril, to a threatened apocalypse, to the making of a day devoted to visiting the dead redundant.

A news item came out Monday that drove home the point.

Richard Muller, a prominent skeptic of global warming, spent two years studying the data to prove the doomsayers wrong only to discover that they were right. The earth is heating up, its land mass in particular now being 1.6 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than it was in the 1950s. Muller is set to deliver his findings this week.

The community that has been warning about climate change is unimpressed though it welcomes his corroboration. "After lots of work he found exactly what was already known and accepted in the climate community," says Jerry North, the atmospheric sciences professor who headed a National Academy of Sciences climate science review in 2006. "I am hoping his study will have a positive impact. But some folks will never change."

There's no longer any reason to be skeptical about rising temperatures, Muller wrote in the Wall Street Journal, a bastion of skeptical thinking about global warming. Which is the reason his study is making waves, if not exactly whipping up a tsunami. His study however does not address the causes of global warming or suggest ways of counteracting it.

Still, he said, the world would do well to reduce carbon emissions caused by fossil fuels. "Greenhouse gases could have a disastrous impact on the world."

Just how disastrous it could be, a group of scientists and environmental activists pointed out a month and a half ago. Led by Al Gore, the best president the United States never had who gained fame with "An Inconvenient Truth," they held a day-long marathon show called "24 Hours of Reality," which was streamed worldwide via Internet. The event drew in representatives from 24 locations across the globe whose job was to "connect the dots between the changing climate and extreme weather." It featured our very own Rodne Galicha, a 32-year-old environmental activist from Sibuyan Island, Romblon. He held his own in the distinguished company.

He began by drawing attention to the humongous catastrophes that have beset the world of late: massive floods in Pakistan, Australia, even Mississippi and North Dakota; mudslides in Korea; droughts in Brazil, Mexico and Syria; unrelenting rains in China, Fiji, Colombia and the Philippines; rising temperatures, increasing water vapor over the oceans, and growing intensity of rainstorms and snow storms.

He ended by saying: "If we are unable to act, with this phenomenon, we are committing suicide; for the next generation, we are committing homicide. Homo sapiens has now become the most critically endangered species of all time."

All this merely confirms what our senses have been telling us for some time now. There's no denying global warming, there's no denying climate change, there's no denying a dying planet. Monumental catastrophes have happened in the past, some more catastrophic than the ones we see today. But not as plentifully, not as frequently, not as universally harshly. Quakes and tsunamis violently rocking various parts of the world, laying low even a powerful country like Japan; hurricanes and tornadoes howling in the American heartland and elsewhere; super storms and floods devastating countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines at the frontline of them: You don't have to believe in the Mayan prediction of an apocalyptic event ravaging the earth next Christmas to be very, very afraid.

As it is, we're already thanking heaven a storm did not waylay our visit to the cemeteries today. A thing we may not count on in years to come. Galicha himself contends that it's the poor countries like ours that are taking the brunt of the effects of global warming.

Can we stop the complacency, the indifference, the cynicism that are pushing humankind to the brink?

Yes.

But unfortunately that is not just something we can do on our own, even if we had the will to do it. It takes global effort of the kind Gore and company are spearheading. It is no small irony that the rich countries continue to preach the infinite wonders of globalism while being the very obstacle to real globalism, the kind where the peoples of the world unite to take global action to save the planet. They're the ones who insist that even if the planet is warming, they have nothing to do with it, it's a natural cycle of life, the earth has immense powers of recuperation, left to itself it will right things in the end. An argument unfortunately that nobody can win: You prove them wrong, you still lose.

Galicha is right, it's time we added our voices to those protesting the complacency, the indifference, the cynicism of the greedy—yes, the greedy, as Occupy Wall Street so rightly puts it—before we end up being merely the voices of the damned. Like Galicha, it's time we told countries like the United States that have remained stumbling blocks to global accords to fight off global warming: "From the Pacific islands, from the global South, we don't need your money. What we need is climate justice. Decrease your emissions."

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Homo sapiens is the one species now most threatened with extinction. We don't act to reverse this, we blur the line between the living and the dead.