

Earth in 'hottest decade on record'



World leaders are hoping to forge a global agreement on tackling climate change [Reuters]

The earth is suffering its hottest decade on record, according to the UN's weather agency on the second day of climate talks in Copenhagen.

Warning that 2009 was also the fifth warmest year since records began, the World Meteorological Organisation report may add to mounting pressure on political leaders to accept the changes needed to reduce emissions and slow global warming.

Michel Jarraud, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organisation, said the decade to 2009 is "very likely to be the warmest on record, warmer than the 1990s, which were in turn warmer than the 1980s".

Speaking in the Danish capital on Tuesday, Jarraud added that the year 2009 would probably rank as the fifth warmest since accurate records were started in 1850.

According to Nasa, the US space agency, the other warmest years since 1850, when records began, have been 2005, 1998, 2007 and 2006.

The data was released as negotiators at the two-week summit worked to craft a global deal to tackle climate change.

US emissions move

The Copenhagen talks, under the banner of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), are aimed at outlining an agreement that sets down pledges by major emitters of greenhouse gases to curb pollution.

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On Monday the US government boosted talks by saying it would start to regulate carbon dioxide as a dangerous pollutant.

The move means Barack Obama, the US president, can sidestep congress to order cuts in emissions.

The announcement by the US Environmental Protection Agency (Epa) was clearly timed to build momentum towards an agreement at the international conference on climate change.

Environmentalists hailed Monday's announcement and welcomed the timing, saying it will help the US president convince delegates at the Copenhagen conference that the US is serious about addressing the problem.

The conference is also hoping to set down the principles of long-term financing to help wean poor countries off high-carbon technology and bolster their defences against climate change.

Once ratified, the accord would take effect from 2013.

Delegates said the next few days would see countries lay out their positions before some 110 world leaders, including Obama, China's Wen Jiabao and India's Manmohan Singh, arrive for the climax.