

World facing 'hellish' 3C of climate heating, UN warns before Cop28

'We must start setting records on cutting emissions,' UN boss says after temperature records obliterated in 2023

Damian Carrington *Environment editor*

@dpcarrington

Mon 20 Nov 2023 14.59 GMT



- Today's carbon-cutting policies are thought to be so inadequate that 3C of heating is likely to be reached this century. Photograph: Olivier Morin/AFP/Getty Images
-

The world is on track for a “hellish” 3C of global heating, the UN has warned before the crucial [Cop28](#) climate summit that begins next week in the United Arab Emirates.

The report found that today's carbon-cutting policies are so inadequate that 3C of heating would be reached this century.

Temperature records have already been obliterated in 2023 and intensifying heatwaves, floods and droughts have taken lives and hit livelihoods across the globe, in response to a temperature rise of 1.4C to date. Scientists say far worse

is to come if temperatures continue to rise. The secretary general of the UN, António Guterres, has said repeatedly the world is heading for a “hellish” future.

The UN Environment Programme (Unep) report said that implementing future policies already promised by countries would shave 0.1C off the 3C limit. Putting in place emissions cuts pledged by developing countries on condition of receiving financial and technical support would cut the temperature rise to 2.5C, still a catastrophic scenario.

To get on track for the internationally agreed target of 1.5C, 22bn tonnes of CO₂ must be cut from the currently projected total in 2030, the report said. That is 42% of global emissions and equivalent to the output of the world’s five worst polluters: China, US, India, Russia and Japan.

Inger Andersen, the Unep executive director, said: “There is no person or economy left on the planet untouched by climate change, so we need to stop setting unwanted records on emissions, temperature and extreme weather. We must instead lift the needle out of the same old groove of insufficient action, and start setting other records: on cutting emissions and on climate finance.”

Guterres said: “Present trends are racing our planet down a dead-end 3C temperature rise. This is a failure of leadership, a betrayal of the vulnerable, and a massive missed opportunity. Renewables have never been cheaper or more accessible. We know it is still possible to make the 1.5 degree limit a reality. It requires tearing out the poisoned root of the climate crisis: fossil fuels.”

He added: “Leaders must drastically up their game, now, with record ambition, record action, and record emissions reductions. No more greenwashing. No more foot-dragging.”

Guterres said countries must commit at Cop28 to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 and to phasing out fossil fuels with a clear timeframe. He said the recent climate agreement between China and the US was a positive step, but that much more needed to be done to restore trust between developed and developing countries, after broken promises on delivering billions of dollars of climate aid.

The UN warned earlier in November that the world’s fossil fuel producers were planning expansions that would blow the planet’s carbon budget twice over, which experts called “insanity”. Another recent report found that the state oil company of the United Arab Emirates, whose CEO, Sultan Al Jaber, will preside

over Cop28, has the largest net zero-busting expansion plans of any company in the world.

The Unep report, pointedly titled Broken Record, said that if all the long-term pledges by countries to cut emissions to net zero by about 2050 were achieved, then the global temperature rise could be limited to 2C. However, it concluded that these net zero pledges “are not currently considered credible”. None of the G20 countries, which together produce 80% of CO₂, are reducing emissions at a pace consistent with their net zero targets, it said.

Another report, from UN Climate Change, published on 14 November, reached virtually the same conclusion as the Unep report. It found that existing national pledges to cut emissions would mean global emissions in 2030 were 2% below 2019 levels, rather than the 43% cut required to limit global heating to 1.5C.

“Governments are taking baby steps to avert the climate crisis – they [must] make bold strides forward at Cop28 in Dubai to get on track,” said Simon Stiell, the executive secretary of UN Climate Change.

Al Jaber said: “There is simply no time left for delays. Cop28 must be a historic turning point in this critical decade for [countries] to seize the moment to commit to raise their ambition and to unite, act and deliver outcomes that keep 1.5C within reach, while leaving no one behind.”

Tom Mitchell, the executive director of the International Institute for Environment and Development, said: “The world needs to take the brakes off when it comes to climate action. That means addressing deeply embedded aspects of the economic, legal and financial status quo.

“The international investment regime protecting the interests of big oil is one example,” he said, referring to the energy charter treaty, a system of secret courts that enables companies to sue governments over climate policies that would cut their future profits.

“Treaties and contracts that favour fossil fuel investors are holding back the green energy transition, even though we know most fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground if we are to prevent catastrophic heating,” Mitchell said. “The [treaties] must be reformed if we want to cut emissions and keep as much of Earth as possible habitable for our descendants.”