UN report warns of catastrophic consequences of climate change within 20 years

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The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a special report Monday calling for "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" in order to limit human-induced global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

"If the current warming rate continues," the report states, "the world would reach human–induced global warming of 1.5°C around 2040." Avoiding the disastrous consequences of climate change, the report stated, requires transforming the world economy in a way that has "no documented historic precedent."

The report, prepared by 91 scientists from 44 countries, is the latest UN paper reviewing the scientific evidence of climate change and its current and projected impact on every ecosystem on Earth. It contrasts the changes to the environment that would occur in a scenario where warming is limited to 1.5 degrees versus of 2 degrees Celsius.

Human activity has already caused approximately 1 degree Celsius of warming. The last three years—2015, 2016 and 2017—were the three warmest years on records going back to 1880, and 17 of the 18 warmest years have occurred since 2000.

Global warming has contributed to a series of ecological disasters, including larger forest fires, longer heat waves, stronger hurricanes and more torrential typhoons. The most recent of these is Hurricane Michael, which is currently bearing down on the Florida coastline and is expected to be one of the most powerful storms to strike the region.

Even a limited further warming will have far reaching consequences. The report states that if warming reaches 1.5 degrees, food shortages will multiply poverty in every country. The Arctic Ocean will be totally free of sea ice at least once a decade, potentially causing the extinction of the myriad of animals that rely on that ice to flee from predators and raise young.

Coral reefs will decline by 70–90 percent, wiping out the habitat that about a quarter of the ocean's creatures rely on to survive. Weather across the globe will become more damaging and deadly. The report estimates that if warming reaches the projected levels, it will cause damages of between $54 and $69 trillion dollars worldwide.

To achieve the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees would require the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions to 45 percent of their 2010 levels by 2030 and their elimination completely by 2050, or in just over three decades. This would require a complete transformation in global energy production and transportation infrastructure.

"Limiting warming to 1.5°C is possible within the laws of chemistry and physics but doing so would require unprecedented changes," said Jim Skea, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group III in the report's press release.

The increasingly dire warnings from the scientists stand in stark contrast with the response of world governments. In the US, the Trump administration has been openly skeptical of the reality of human-caused climate change. He responded to questions about the UN report on Tuesday by dismissing its significance. "I want to look at who drew it. You know, which group drew it. I can give you reports that are fabulous and I can give you reports that aren't so good."

Representatives of the other major capitalist governments responded complacently. In Germany, the

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only official who spoke on the report was Deputy Environment Minister Jochen Flasbarth, who deflected questions about Germany's rising carbon emissions with answers promoting the German green technologies industry.

Media outlets including the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* have taken this latest report as an opportunity to attack Trump and other political figures who deny climate change or have openly opposed "carbon taxes," such as Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Brazilian presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro. The *Times* wrote of the "despair since last year when Mr. Trump declared he would pull the United States out of the Paris climate accord."

The Paris Agreement, which was ratified by 195 countries in 2015, is a non-binding treaty that calls for world governments to voluntarily reduce their carbon emissions to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius by 2100. While it is presented as a "landmark" treaty, in reality it acts as a way for countries and companies such as ExxonMobil to participate in carbon trading and carbon tax schemes to maximize their profits while only implementing token reductions in carbon emissions.

Moreover, the latest UN report makes clear, the limit set by the Paris Agreement would still result in massive damage across the world. An increase of 2 degrees would cause the complete destruction of coral reefs and possibly the loss of plankton, the foundation of the world's food chain. Even at its best, the world envisioned by the Paris Agreement would be catastrophic for humanity and life on Earth.

The urgent measures needed to address climate change come into conflict with the two basic contradictions of the world capitalist system: the contradiction between a global economy and the division of the world into rival nation-states, and the contradiction between socialized production and the subordination of economic life to the accumulation of private profit.

That is, the global coordination and scientific planning required to organize the necessary transformations in energy and infrastructure is prevented by the fact that each capitalist state represents competing ruling elites, and the economy as a whole is controlled by the corporate and financial elite.

The development of mankind's productive forces is not only impacting the environment, it has also made it possible to address this impact in a rational way. However, the development of these resources to tackle climate change—along with war, poverty and inequality—requires a complete socialist reorganization of economic life. The economy must be placed in the democratic control of the working class, the only social force capable of establishing a society based on human need, including a healthy global environment.

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