



UN Secretary General António Guterres says that he will commit the United Nations to an effort to “make our leaders listen” and tackle climate change, which he called a “direct existential threat”, before it is too late.

“If we do not change course by 2020, we risk missing the point where we can avoid runaway climate change, with disastrous consequences for people and all the natural systems that sustain us,” the Secretary-General said in a major speech on climate change in New York.

“We are experiencing record-breaking temperatures around the world,” Mr. Guterres said , pointing out that this year was shaping up to be the fourth hottest year on record and the past two decades included 18 of the warmest years since 1850, when records began.

“Extreme heatwaves, wildfires, storms and floods are leaving a trail of death and devastation.

Arctic sea ice is disappearing faster than we imagined possible. This year, for the first time, thick permanent sea ice north of Greenland began to break up. This dramatic warming in the Arctic is affecting weather patterns across the northern hemisphere. Wildfires are lasting longer and spreading further.”

Mr. Guterres called on all world leaders to come to next year’s Climate Summit to signal major actions for a 2020 UN Climate Conference. “Scientists have been telling us for decades. Over and over again. Far too many leaders have refused to listen. Far too few have acted with the vision the science demands. What we still lack – even after the Paris Agreement – is the leadership and the ambition to do what is needed. We see the results.”

The UN Secretary-General called on civil society, and young people in particular, to campaign for climate action.

He said that there were important economic arguments for climate action, not least because “we are experiencing huge economic losses due to climate change.”

“Over the past decade, extreme weather and the health impact of burning fossil fuels have cost the American economy at least 240 billion dollars a year.

This cost will explode by 50% in the coming decade alone,”Mr. Guterres said.

He also named several important positive climate actions by governments and businesses, including several in Europe,

- By 2030, wind and solar energy could power more than a third of Europe.
- Sweden is set to hit its 2030 target for renewable energy this year – 12 years early.
- Norway’s 1 trillion-dollar sovereign wealth fund – the largest in the world – has moved away from investments in coal and has dropped a number of palm and pulp-paper companies because of the forests they destroy.”

- Scotland has opened the world’s first floating wind farm.

- One of the world’s biggest insurers – Allianz – will stop insuring coal-fired power plants.
- Last year, China invested 126 billion dollars in renewable energy, an increase of 30% on the previous year

In his speech the Secretary-General pointed out that the targets set in the Paris Agreement three years ago, to stop temperatures rising by 2 degrees Celsius, were “the bare minimum” to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. “But scientists say we are far off track. According to a UN study, the commitments made so far by Parties to the Paris agreement represent just one-third of what is needed.”

“Let us raise our sights, build coalitions and make our leaders listen. I commit myself, and the entire United Nations, to this effort. We will support all leaders who rise to the challenge I have outlined today. ... Our fate is in our own hands. The world is counting on all of us to rise to the challenge before it’s too late,” Mr.Guterres said.