

Current emission reduction pledges by governments internationally will result in disastrous global warming

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The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released its 2024 Emissions Gap Report earlier this month, the 15th edition of its kind.

The title refers to the gap between the current pledges of world leaders to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and the measures needed to limit global warming to 1.5° compared to pre-industrial levels.

The report's findings show that with the current levels of grossly inadequate climate action, the world is potentially on track for over 3° of warming—double the 1.5° target.

More than a century of rampant capitalist-driven extraction and burning of fossil fuels, and the associated GHG emissions, have so far warmed the earth by at least 1.3° since pre-industrial times. This warming has exacerbated extreme weather events such as hurricanes and heatwaves that already have severely affected millions of people around the world.

Limiting global warming to 1.5° would not eliminate climate impacts, but it would greatly increase the probability that far more devastating impacts can be avoided.

Recent research also confirmed that it is crucial to avoid an “overshoot” of the 1.5° target—that is, temperatures exceeding 1.5° before being reduced to meet the target in the long run. Staving off the worst impacts of climate change associated with increased warming requires that global temperatures not be allowed to exceed the 1.5° mark in the first place.

To accomplish this goal, substantial and rapid reductions of GHG emissions are crucial.

CO2 is the primary GHG responsible for global warming, but there are others, including methane.

Because different gases have different effects on the

climate, the term “CO2 equivalent” is used in climate science literature to describe “for a given mixture and amount of GHGs, the amount of CO2 that would have the same global warming ability,” the new UNEP report explains.

But instead of reducing emissions of these gases to meet the 1.5° target, governments around the world are overseeing an increase. In 2023, global GHG emissions reached a record level of 57.1 gigatons of CO2 equivalent, according to the report.

A press release video by UN Secretary-General António Guterres indicated the consequences of such record-breaking emissions: “Record emissions mean record sea temperatures supercharging monster hurricanes; record heat is turning forests into tinder boxes and cities into saunas; [and] record rains are resulting in biblical floods.”

Additionally, the increase in emissions from 2022 was 1.3 percent, half a percentage point higher than the average annual growth rate throughout the 2010s of 0.8 percent. In other words, not only are GHG emissions increasing, but the rate of increase is accelerating.

This is the opposite of what is necessary for climate change mitigation. According to the new report, a reasonable (above 50 percent) chance for warming to be kept below 1.5°C requires that GHG emissions relative to 2019 levels be cut by at least 42 percent annually by 2030, and 57 percent by 2035.

Time is of the essence. If the necessary reductions are delayed from 2024 until 2030, it essentially doubles the annual GHG reductions necessary to reach 1.5°. Continued inaction also “further adds risks of temperature overshoot and compounds increasingly severe climate impacts, some of which are

irreversible.”

These findings reaffirm the warnings made by the scientific community for decades. For instance, the sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report from 2022—a synthesis of tens of thousands of research papers that represent the current state of climate science—said any reasonable chance of keeping warming below 1.5°C would “involve rapid and deep and, in most cases, immediate greenhouse gas emissions reductions in all sectors this decade.”

The governments of the world have repeatedly ignored such warnings. The countries that signed on to the 2015 Paris Agreement are required to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) every five years. The NDC of each country presents their self-determined national efforts to reach the long-term goal of limiting warming to well below 2°.

Based on both the current NDCs in place since 2020, as well as the actual political action taken to meet them, the report finds that the world is on track to reach temperature increases of between 2.6° and 3.1° this century.

The lower figure of 2.6° comes from the estimated levels of warming to be expected if every country fully implemented its own NDCs, which is not currently taking place. The upper figure of 3.1° is an estimation from the policies that actually have been implemented. It therefore represents the amount of warming that will likely take place if no further action is taken.

Both these scenarios would result in warming that continues to increase past the end of this century and well into the next.

The 0.5° gap between the two scenarios further indicates that world governments have not even committed to acting on their own inadequate climate pledges. The estimations contain confidence intervals spanning from 1.9° to 3.8°. But the report makes clear that in either case, the probability of keeping warming below 1.5° with the current levels of commitments is “virtually zero.”

The catastrophic climate results will fall disproportionately onto the working class and the poorest sections of the population that bear no responsibility for climate change.

The UNEP report was released shortly before the convening of the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference

(COP29), being held in Baku, Azerbaijan. The summit is being presided over by Mukhtar Babayev, a former oil executive. Last year, COP28 was presided over by Sultan al-Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. Also present at COP28 were at least 2,456 oil and gas lobbyists.

These developments further expose the fraudulent nature of such global meetings, supposedly aimed at accelerating efforts to combat global warming. The root source of environmental destruction is the capitalist profit system. The *World Socialist Web Site* recently explained:

That the UN climate conferences have taken the form of business mixers for the world’s fossil fuel magnates is not an aberration but the logical outcome of attempting to resolve the ecological crisis under capitalism. Coal, oil and natural gas have been and remain enormously profitable industries. During the first half of 2024, Shell reported a profit of \$14 billion, despite a drop in global energy prices. In the third quarter of 2024 alone, Saudi Aramco reported \$27 billion in profits. The International Energy Agency expects that investment in fossil fuels will exceed \$1 trillion this year.

It is scientifically and technically possible to meet the 1.5° target, even at this late hour. Monumental advancements in science and technology over several decades have made possible the rational planning of the world’s resources to both stave off climate disaster and provide every human being on earth with a decent standard of living. But these goals are impeded at every turn by capitalism, which prioritises the enrichment of the biggest polluting companies and their shareholders over the lives of billions of working-class people.



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