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[Back](#) [Sci Tech](#)

2000-2009: warmest decade on record

JOHN VIDAL

The past 10 years have been the warmest in recorded history, according to the UK Meteorological (Met) Office.

Figures released at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen show despite 1998 being the warmest year on record, the noughties has been the warmest decade recorded in 160 years.

In a separate announcement, the World Meteorological Organisation in Geneva said today that 2009 will be one of the 10 warmest individual years recorded. The provisional figure for warming during the year is 0.44C above the long-term average of 14C.

According to the Vicky Pope, head of climate change advice at the Met Office, the figures "highlight that the world continues to see global temperatures rise, most of which is due to increasing emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and clearly shows that the argument that global warming has stopped is flawed."

A third paper released today, from the German research group Germanwatch, showed that Bangladesh, Burma and Honduras were the three countries most affected in the past 20 years by extremes of climate.

Also in the top ten were Vietnam, Nicaragua, Haiti, India, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and China.

Frequency rises

"We cannot attribute all extremes of weather to climate change but we are already recording an increase in frequency and intensity.

It shows we are living in a globally warmed world," said Saleemul Huq, head of climate change at the International Institute for Environment and Development in London.

With the Copenhagen talks intent on holding temperature rises to 2C, Huq warned that further extreme weather events and disasters were inevitable.

"A 2C rise in temperatures is safe for some, but not for the poorest. A 1.5C rise gives a safer world for everyone, but there is a vast difference between the two."

"The question is do we give up on the poor and most vulnerable? If we declare war on climate change, then yes we can do it. It can be done," he said.

Only four developed countries were in the top 20 of countries most prone to weather disaster: Italy at 12, Spain at 14, Portugal at 14 and the U.S. at 18.

The 2003 drought in southern Europe, which led to tens of thousands of deaths and huge insurance losses, as well as a series of category 5 hurricanes in the U.S. are responsible for these rich countries being placed so highly in the league table.

The figures from German watch do not include African countries in the top 20 because they are based on death tolls and recorded financial losses, neither of which figure strongly in the prolonged droughts and desertification which are mainly seen in Africa. — © *Guardian Newspapers Limited, 2009*

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