

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 28, 2013 at 10:05am

Earth is dangerously warming - and we are causing it

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

I usually write a column on global warming during the height of summer heat. It's harder for people to deny global warming when they're sweating.

But the highly authoritative United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent report, "Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis," has important warnings for us to seriously consider now.

The report, authored by 259 scientists and editors from 39 countries, declares: "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased."

According to the report, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in over the last 800,000 years. Concentrations of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide has increased by 40 percent since pre-industrial times primarily because of fossil fuel emissions.

As a result, the earth is warming, causing major ice melts. During the last two decades, Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets have continued to lose mass, and glaciers throughout the world are shrinking. Furthermore, Arctic sea ice in the Northern Hemisphere continues to decrease.

These verifiable scientific facts are already starting to pose dangerous conditions for some coastal areas.

British newspaper *The Guardian* features an eye-opening series on the serious reality of climate change already underway. Headlined "America's first climate refugees," the series features the plight of Newtok,

a native Alaskan coastal village.

"With climate change occurring rapidly in the far north, where temperatures are warming faster than the global average," many villages like Newtok could soon be washed away, *The Guardian* reports.

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' report predicts that the village's highest point could be underwater by 2017, and that there is no possible way to protect the village, *The Guardian* reports.

And as spring snow cover continues to decrease, water shortages are beginning to seriously affect the many people who depend on a much more gradual snow melt to supply water throughout the year.

As global temperatures increase, extreme precipitation events over most of the mid-latitude land masses and over wet tropical areas will likely become more intense and frequent by the end of the century, the IPCC report states.

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The report is crystal clear that human activity, especially the use of fossil fuels, is the main engine driving potentially catastrophic global-warming-induced climate change.

"Human influence has been detected in warming of the atmosphere and the ocean, in changes in the global water cycle, in reductions in snow and ice, in global mean sea level rise, and in changes in some climate extremes. ... It is *extremely likely* that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century" the IPCC report states (emphasis in original).

In his 2010 World Day of Peace message, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI boldly wrote, "Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?"

We remain indifferent at our own risk -- and that of future generations.

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net.]

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