

DECLARE A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

A few generations from now, our descendants may not see the animals and plants we now regard as commonplace. Nearly 500 species have become extinct in just the last century. We are depleting 25% more natural resources than the planet can sustain right now. Mankind is teetering dangerously close to the precipice of extinction.

Al Gore's 2006 film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, awakened the world to the dire causes and consequences of global warming. It made an impact on millions and initiated global debates on climate change. However, many of us were sceptical of the warnings. Some of us did not believe that our planet would ever run out of resources. We thought that discussions would take place among scientists and environmentalists, but that the impact of climate change would never really be felt by us. And that if it were to be felt, it would take a long time, perhaps a couple of centuries.

In just 13 years, Al Gore's predictions have become real and haunting. Now the effects of climate change are at our doorsteps. Cyclones such as Thane, Vardah, Ockhi and Gaja have affected Tamil Nadu in recent times; Chennai saw terrible floods in 2015. Floods wreaked havoc in Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar this year, and Mumbai received record monsoon rains. Kerala witnessed floods for the second consecutive year. Cyclone Fani devastated Odisha, Cyclone Vayu ravaged Gujarat this year. All these are because of climate change. Meanwhile, Europe saw the highest temperatures ever in recorded history. This July, Paris recorded its highest temperature of 42.6°C.

Humanity is paying the price for the indiscriminate use of fossil fuels. The increase in global temperatures started with the industrial revolution. Experts say that if our current lifestyle continues, the global temperature will increase further in the next 30-40 years and that will have catastrophic consequences.

Industries, vehicles, burning of fossil fuels, thermal power plants and large-scale rearing of cattle are emitting heat-trapping greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. The increase in these gases is trapping the sun's heat and increasing the earth's temperature.

Global warming will drastically affect agriculture — the production of rice, wheat, maize and soya will decrease significantly. Apart from malnutrition, climate change will give birth to newer infections and illness. This imbalance will in turn affect the economy which will lead to conflict, war and global unrest. Global warming is already melting the polar ice caps. If this continues, sea levels will rise and submerge coastal cities. These natural disasters will make millions of people climate refugees.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report states that averting a climate crisis will require reinvention of the global economy. By 2040, there could be global food shortages, inundation of coastal cities and a huge refugee crisis, it says.

UN and climate experts have called for the declaration of a global climate emergency. Countries like the U.K., Canada, France and Ireland have already declared climate emergencies. So have local bodies and NGOs worldwide. Unfortunately India and U.S. are still slow to act. Which countries are responsible for historical emissions is now past the stage of debate. Global warming will affect every individual in every country. It is the duty of every human and government to take steps to stop the climate crisis. The Indian government should declare a

climate emergency immediately. Immediate policy changes should include reducing the usage of fossil fuels by half by 2030, encouraging the use of public transport, increasing forest area, promoting non-conventional energy, devising good water management policies, implementing the plastic ban stringently, banning the burning of waste, promoting innovative urban planning policies and reducing mass rearing of cattle for human consumption. Let us all join together to save the only planet we have.

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