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By: TA | AP Brief

Guterres warns of 'moment of truth' about climate change



As United Nations climate talks kick off in Turkey on Monday, Secretary-General António Guterres has an urgent message for world leaders: “This is a moment of truth.”

He's delivered variations of this ominous warning about climate change, caused by the burning of fossil fuels like oil and gas, in the past decade, often with increasingly hyperbolic language.

Three years ago, he even said, “the era of global boiling has arrived, " referring to rising temperatures and increasing extreme weather, both results of climate change.

But this time, it will be his last global warming sermon as head of the United Nations as his second and last term expires at the end of the year.

And the sense of urgency is palpable in a world with worsening killer heat waves, storms, floods and droughts amid ever higher temperatures and, on top of all of it, El Niño, a naturally occurring climate pattern that scrambles weather systems around the globe.

“This is a moment of truths. We can no longer wait, we can no longer have endless discussions in which everybody tries to push the responsibility to someone else. Everybody must do more, everybody must do more now,” Guterres said he will tell leaders of the U.N. climate conference, known as COP31, scheduled Nov. 9-20.

The “moment of truth” message weighs so heavily that the Secretary-General used the phrase three times in 20 minutes during a recent exclusive interview with The Associated Press from his 38th floor conference room at U.N. headquarters.

He discussed his one last push in the fight against climate change and a ten-year tenure where he became one of the most visible advocates urging often recalcitrant countries to do more to reduce their emissions of heat-trapping gases.

One of the most difficult days

The gravity of global warming reality also weighs heavily as he recalled his personal climate moment of truth. It was, he said, “one of the most difficult days of my life.”

It came last year when he consulted with scientists before a major speech on climate.

As he had for nine years, Guterres was going to insist that the 2015 Paris Agreement's main goal — limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times — was still alive.

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He was going to say the world needs to do far more to keep below that threshold, and that it was doable.

“Scientists told me you cannot say that because that's no longer true,” said Guterres, an engineer before his political career. Too much carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, the result of burning fossil fuels, had been released into the atmosphere.

“That was an enormous shock for me,” he said. Now the U.N. is trying to limit how much past that threshold the world heads.

It felt like a failure, Guterres said.

“But it's not the world that's failed, it's the political leadership that's failed,” Guterres said. Protecting the planet, he said, requires a long-term strategic view. Yet in many political systems “there is no strategic view. And policies change frequently, not allowing the kind of constant determined investment that is necessary," Guterres said.