



WORDS: SARAH BLADEN. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK.



Wildfires, storms, droughts, hurricanes, typhoons, tsunamis are all a product of global warming.

A freak of nature?

Are natural disasters down to fluke or fossil fuels, asks Sarah Bladen, founder of On Cloud Zen

Over the last decade, the weather has been particularly unpredictable and lethal. Thousands of heatwave records were broken across the globe. Climate experts predict that temperatures in regions like Britain may rise by 8 degrees Celsius within the next decade. Having Mediterranean weather in the UK might not sound like a bad thing, however, climate change is certainly not something to smile about. Scientists say that global warming is a very real and dangerous threat.

You don't need to be a geologist to see that the world is heating up at an alarming rate and that extreme weather conditions are most likely linked to our mistreatment of our fragile earth. When it comes to scientific evidence, experts from Northern Arizona University say that temperatures in the Arctic are now higher than at any time in the past 2,000 years. Ice sheets are disappearing at a dramatic rate and this has a worrying impact on the planet's geology. Wildfires. Storms. Droughts. Hurricanes. Typhoons. Tsunamis. They are all real threats.

Last November, Typhoon Haiyan (aka Yolanda) ravaged the Philippines, killing more than 6,000 people, making it one of the deadliest storms in the country's history. Over a million houses were damaged. At a UN conference, the Filipino climate change representative Yeb Sano pleaded with the world to take immediate drastic action to reduce climate change-causing carbon dioxide emissions. "This destruction is unprecedented and staggering," he said tearfully. "I struggle to find words to describe how I feel about the losses."

In the last decade the world has seen some of the most ferocious natural disasters. In 2004, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami killed more than 230,000 people in 14 countries. The worst hit were Indonesia, India and Thailand. It was one of the deadliest natural disasters ever recorded and caused the entire planet to vibrate by one centimetre.

Meanwhile, the Haiti earthquake of 2010 caused 250,000 deaths. Then in 2011, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami went down in history as the most powerful earthquake »

The **climate crisis** offers us the chance to experience what few generations in history have had the privilege of experiencing: **a generational mission; a compelling moral purpose; a shared cause; and the thrill of being forced by circumstances to put aside the pettiness and conflict of politics and to embrace a genuine moral and spiritual challenge.**

—Al Gore

to hit Japan. It also triggered a wave of terror, taking the lives of an estimated 18,000 people.

While this subject may be debatable, scientists at University College of London (UCL) argue that global warming can actually trigger earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes. Furthermore, a recent leaked United Nations report by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) brings home this inconvenient truth: it's far worse than we thought.

Manmade global warming (caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels) does exacerbate weather conditions and will bring more turbulent disasters unless we take drastic action immediately.

Even President Obama realises the urgency of the matter when he says: "Heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods – all are now more frequent and more intense. We can choose to believe that Superstorm Sandy, and the most severe drought in decades, and the worst wildfires some states have ever seen, were all just a freak coincidence. Or we can choose to believe in the overwhelming judgment of science."

One of America's most senior scientists, Gerald Meehl, from the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, says: "By adding just a little bit more carbon dioxide to the climate, it makes things a little bit warmer and

shifts the odds toward these more extreme events. What was once a rare event will become less rare."

Meanwhile, when it comes to hurricanes, Professor Kerry Emanuel, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, warns: "There is widespread agreement among hurricane scientists that rainfall associated with

hurricanes will increase noticeably with global warming."

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. In some cities around the world, the smog is so thick you can't see the stars anymore. In Mexico City, when children draw the sky, they use the colour grey instead of blue. This isn't the kind of world we should be living in.

Unless we each start taking responsibility and changing our behaviour today, we may well have a bleak future ahead of us. According to Professor Bill McGuire, director of the Benfield Hazard Research Centre at UCL: "Global warming is not just a matter of warmer weather, more floods or stronger hurricanes. It is a wake-up call to Terra Firma." I couldn't agree more. ❖

Sarah Bladen, the founder of On Cloud Zen, is passionate about living a more eco-friendly lifestyle. To find out more go to www.oncloudzen.com



Rainfall associated with hurricanes will increase noticeably with global warming.