

Special Committee 2

Combating climate change denial



Forum	Special Conference 2
Issue:	Combating Climate Change Denial
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Introduction

The issue of climate change is one that has been the focus of many international discussions in recent years. Since the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800s, humans have been pumping out carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases at an unsustainable rate, which is leading to the degradation of our environment. This degradation includes rising sea levels, rising global temperatures, and the extinction of many species. It has been the general consensus amongst the scientific community, as well as society at large, that humans are to blame for these changes. However, there are still many people who believe that climate change is a natural occurrence that would've happened anyway, and that humans are not to blame for it. This notion is further compounded by support for it by many popular politicians and celebrities.

The issue of climate change is a very serious one, and is potentially the defining issue of our generation, just as nuclear warfare was to the generation before us. To solve the issue of climate change itself, we must begin by combating its denial, so that people are suitably alarmed by the very real prospect that humanity will reach a point of no return with the environment within the next century. As former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said, "We are the first generation that can end poverty. We are also the last generation that can slow global warming before it is too late."

Definition of Key Terms

Climate change

Climate change is the blanket term used to describe different changes occurring in the Earth's climate, such as rising sea levels and desertification.

Global warming



Global warming more specifically refers to the rising in the Earth's average temperature due to greenhouse gas emissions.

Greenhouse gases

Greenhouse gases are gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and water vapour. These gases are emitted through human activities (combustion mostly, from engines and factories), and through natural means (volcanic eruptions, cows flatulating). The gases rise into the atmosphere and form a sort of boundary that traps heat in the earth's atmosphere.

“Natural” climate change

This is the kind of climate change which deniers often refer to. Climate change has in fact occurred naturally throughout the course of history (ice ages). This is usually caused by large natural disasters such as enormous volcanic eruptions or meteor strikes. They often also point to phenomena such as solar flares, when the sun is hotter than usual and would thus warm the earth more for a brief period.

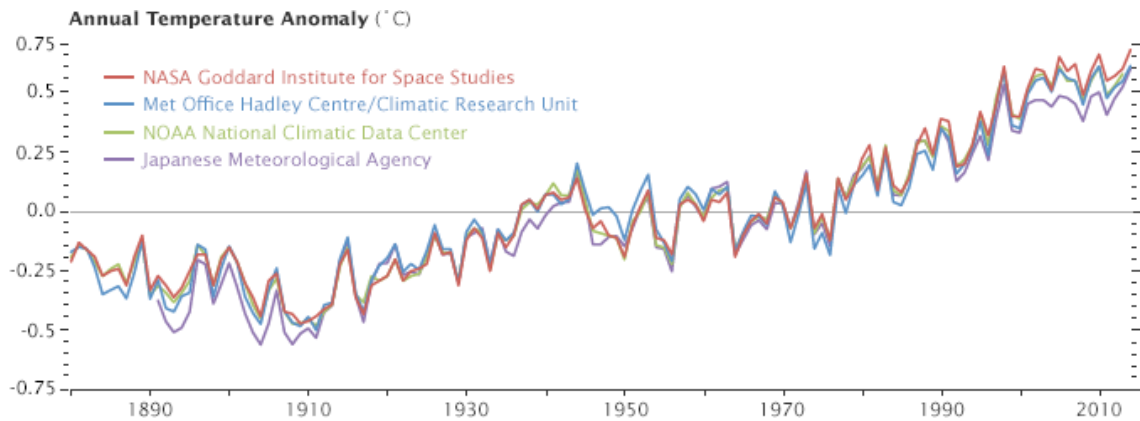
General Overview

Climate change

Greenhouse gases have always been a part of the natural atmosphere and are in fact beneficial to a certain degree. Without them, the Earth would be a cold and desolate planet that would possibly not be able to support life at all. Having those greenhouse gases which are present allows for the preservation of heat and therefore the development of life. However, at the moment, there is a clear imbalance with regards to the levels in the atmosphere. We are markedly above the natural levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which means that the planet will continue to get hotter in an unsustainable and unnatural way.

It is important to begin by looking at climate change as a whole. The graph below highlights how the Earth's temperature has risen since the 1880s, aggregated from most of the major weather observatories in the world.





“World of Change: Global Temperatures.” NASA, NASA, earthobservatory.nasa.gov/world-of-change/DecadalTemp.

The graph shows a few things. Firstly, there’s the evident overall trend that the Earth’s temperature is rising. The graph is specifically looking at the temperature anomalies, which are the differences from the historical mean that is expected. The important thing about the graph, however, is the direct correlation that can be made between human activities and the temperature rises. It begins to rise from the late 1800s, which is when the Industrial Revolution really took off in Europe, leading to a huge growth in manufacturing and coal-fired energy plants, both of which were and are huge emitters of carbon dioxide. There are also dips in the rises in the 1910s, which is due to the destruction of factories in World War 1, and in the 1940s, due to World War 2. The fact that the changes on the graph can be linked so closely with human activities just goes to show that humans are indeed responsible for climate change.

Arguments of deniers

There are a number of major arguments which climate change deniers present to refute the scientific consensus. Here are some of the most common ones:

“Why are there more unseasonal winter storms if the Earth is getting hotter?”

Firstly, the distinction must be made between *climate* and *weather*. Climate deals with long-term trends of temperature on a global scale, whereas weather is one-off anomalies in certain regions that break the overall pattern. So, it would be incorrect to say that because there was one very cold day in 2018 that global warming is untrue, because global warming deals with the climate, while that cold day is an issue of weather. On a general scale then, climate change will cause winters to be warmer and shorter, though may not eradicate them completely. On an interesting note, climate change may actually lead to heavier snowfalls in



the short-term, since warm air carries more moisture, however this would not continue in the long-term as it becomes too warm for snowfall to stay solid.

“If climate change has happened naturally before, why are humans to blame now?”

It is true that the climate has changed naturally many times over the course of natural history. However, the changes have all been in response to something: the Earth does not simply decide to warm up or cool down on a whim. The website *Skepticalscience.com* has a very good article on this misconception (and many others), but briefly summed up, scientists can tell that changes in the climate are being caused by humans because of many different identifying factors. These factors include looking at the chemical “fingerprints” that fossil fuels leave in the air as opposed to standard natural phenomena, as well as the fact that atmospheric oxygen is decreasing proportionally to the increase in carbon dioxide due to the fact that oxygen is required for combustion.

Why do some people deny climate change?

There are a number of reasons why climate change deniers exist in the first place. One of the main ones is simple - scientific confusion. The science behind climate change can often be confusing and daunting, and as such it can simply be easier to deny that it is happening at all. Conflicting studies also don't help, as there are some differing opinions amongst scientists over human impact on the climate, even though the general consensus is in favour of humans having a large impact on the climate. Another reason is convenience: it is simply an inconvenient truth to accept. Take, for example, the current Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison. In 2017 (at the time he was Treasurer), he entered the Australian Parliament with a lump of coal, proclaiming to his fellow politicians to “[not] be afraid (of it)”. Mr Morrison was aiming to disregard fears over coal's impact on climate change because it was politically convenient to do so (his voter base is made up largely of mining communities). The coal industry is extremely important to the Australian economy (it was their biggest export in 2018), and therefore pandering to coal executives would have helped him to get elected as prime minister a year later. The same can be said of Donald Trump, who strove to increase American manufacturing, even with his planned expansions contributing huge amounts of greenhouse emissions.

Major Parties Involved



Australia

Australia is an important country to the issue for a number of reasons. Firstly, as previously stated, it has a huge coal industry which is a polluter both within Australia, and in the countries where it's eventually combusted. The current Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has been criticised over being weak on climate change in the interests of the economy. However, Australia is also one of the countries that will be most affected by climate change. Since 1910, Australia's climate has already warmed by more than 1 degree celsius, and is projected to rise by up to 5 degrees by 2090 at current rates. This has resulted in more droughts, bushfires, and extinctions. Climate change is also affecting the ocean - the Great Barrier Reef has been suffering greatly from the effects of warmer and more acidic waters brought about by climate change; this is significant as the Reef brings in lots of revenue through tourism, but also because it is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world, harbouring thousands of different species that are found nowhere else.

China

China is the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, surpassing both the EU and the US combined. It therefore has a huge responsibility to combat climate change, and it must begin by acknowledging it. China has been a great example in how national and government opinion can change rapidly. As late as 2011, the general consensus and official party line were that climate change wasn't real, and that it was probably a conspiracy by the West to curb China's rapid economic growth. However, that changed suddenly in 2011 - publication of climate-skeptic books stopped, politicians no longer made skeptical statements, and online discussions ceased abruptly. A national opinion poll was taken to gauge what people thought, and 93% of Chinese thought that global warming was real and would affect them, yet bizarrely only 50% of them thought humans were to blame. Internally, the ruling Communist party had realised the grave consequences of climate change, which were being seen all too clearly in the health issues being caused to the population. Again, convenience came to the fore - but this time in a positive way. The government were concerned about China's slowing economic growth and thought that green technologies could help boost it. The 12th Five Year Plan was established in 2011, which



aimed to spend \$761 billion on transitioning away from carbon-based industries by 2020. Politicians also began to take a more serious tone, by acknowledging that it was a great struggle for all humanity. It has also become a geo-political tool - since the US has taken a backseat on climate change under President Trump, China has the opportunity to lead the world in the field.

Brazil

Brazil is a large emitter of various greenhouse gases such as methane and carbon dioxide (the 6th largest in the world), and as such has a responsibility to be concerned about climate change. Brazil has generally been decent with the environment, producing over 70% of its energy from renewable sources like hydropower. However, the main concerns come from deforestation of the Amazon for mining and farming purposes. Large swathes of the Amazon have been removed in recent years for soy production as well as iron, tin, and gold mines, all of which are hugely profitable. These also have impacts on local tribal populations, who are often forgotten in the interests of economic gain. Brazil, and Latin America as a whole, used to have one of the most positive looks on climate change (in that they saw it as a very big issue that was extremely dangerous), but in 2018 Jair Bolsonaro was elected president. He is a populist nationalist, and has been broadly skeptical about climate change, even going so far as to threaten to pull out of the Paris Climate Accords (although he later withdrew the threat after huge international backlash). The delegate of Brazil has a big opportunity to reverse the country's downward trend with regards to climate change.

India

As the third-largest emitter on the planet and home to 9 of the 10 most polluted cities, India is not an environmentally friendly country. The government's stance has been more apathetic than openly skeptical. The national outlook has definitely been more towards economic development than environmental sustainability. India has suffered from a number of droughts in recent years, and is set to fall victim to more as the climate warms. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that climate change will affect disadvantaged communities the most, thereby meaning that India stands to suffer given the huge inequality that is present. The



government's tepid climate targets also don't inspire much optimism. While the government has acknowledged the dangers of climate change, illiteracy and poverty means that most of the population still feel as though there are more pressing issues to worry about, such as putting food on the table, rather than the climate emergency.

United States

The US has a huge role to play in combating climate change denial. It is the 2nd largest emitter on the planet, and has a president who is greatly skeptical of climate change, dismissing it as a Chinese hoax. Polls indicate that only 40% of Americans believe that humans are at least partly responsible for climate change, with 13% stating that humans have no effect whatsoever, and another 13% claiming that the climate wasn't changing at all. For a country which has often paved the way in climate science, some find it alarming to see such beliefs amongst the population. The new administration has had a different approach than the former one - President Trump has appointed a former coal executive as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency and has rolled back hundreds of Obama-era climate regulations, as well as offering full support for increases in polluting manufacturing and allowing oil exploration in climate-sensitive regions.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1800	The Industrial Revolution in Europe



1824	French physicist Joseph Fourier becomes the first person to speak of a “greenhouse effect” at a science symposium
1896	Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius proposed the idea that man-made climate change may have contributed to a rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide since the early 1800s
1955	American researcher Gilbert Plass concludes that atmospheric carbon dioxide rises since 1800 have resulted in a rise in global temperature, and that it will continue to do so
1970	First Earth Day in the US
1979	First World Climate Conference is held in Geneva
1988	IPCC is set up
1992	UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio
1995	Hottest year on record, and 1990s confirmed to be hottest decade in a millennium
1997	Kyoto Protocol is signed by most industrialised countries (only to be renounced by the US in 2001)
2015	Paris Agreement is signed by 195 out of 196 countries (not Syria), creating the most comprehensive climate framework in history
2017	US President Donald Trump announces his intention to withdraw the United States from the Paris agreement by earliest 2020



UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Kyoto Protocol (1992)
- Paris Agreement (2015)
- United Nations Framework on Combating Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992)
- Resolution on the Situation in the Lake Chad Basin Region (S/RES/2349 (2017))
- Resolution on the Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (A/RES/52/1998)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been a number of different ways that governments and nations have attempted to solve the issue of climate change in the past, however there have been few pertaining to climate change denial as such. A notable example is the Australian Eureka Prize, which is awarded each year to an organisation or individual that has taken great steps in promoting climate knowledge. This is a good way to solve the issue as it incentivises teaching people about the climate. Governments have also included climate change as key parts of their national educational curriculums, and have organised events such as Earth Day or climate parades, which are often effective as large-scale climate projects are undertaken (take, for example, Indians planting 50 million trees in one day). Awareness is effectively the most useful tool a government has at its disposal to combat climate change skepticism.

Possible Solutions

- A possibly radical solution could be to make it illegal to spread misinformation about the climate, and to make it punishable with a fine or suspended sentence such as community service. This would be effective but raise questions about censorship and free speech.
- UN bodies and treaties could be created that are legally binding in order to ensure that countries are adhering to their climate obligations under the Paris Agreement and other national agreements.



- Climate change could be made an even more key part of the educational curriculum so that people are aware of it from a young age.
- Creating a UN or national center for climate awareness could be useful in educating people about climate change and ensuring they have the facts correct.
- Notifying community leaders such as preachers to speak about climate change could be useful since they have a wide outreach and people trust them.
- Large-scale social media campaigns could be used to raise awareness of climate change.

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