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OP/ED

Voodoo Economics? How About Voodoo Climate Science?

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When will our greener friends at the UN learn that it's just not a good idea to make definite predictions about certain disasters?



Image by AFP/Getty Images via @daylife

This time they have been called out on their 2005 prediction that by now there would be 50 million "climate refugees"—people choosing to emigrate because of bad weather. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) even came up with a global map showing precisely where people would migrate from.

Pretty much every forecast about climate change or its effects should be viewed as a hypothesis rather than a fact. After all, as Firesign Theater once noted, "the future's not here yet". But the UN named a specific year (2010) which allows for an actual test of their prediction.

Census takers around the world have inadvertently adjudicated the UN's forecast. It was dead wrong. Pretty much every recent census reveals that populations are growing rapidly precisely where everyone was

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supposed to be migrating from. (And where is the story that global warming causes babies?).

Folks were supposed to be streaming away from low-lying tropical islands because of worse and more frequent hurricanes. The population of the Bahamas, which catches about as many tropical cyclones as any place on earth, is up 14% since 2000. The Solomons, up 20%. Seychelles: 9%.

Did I mention that global hurricane activity has recently sunk to its all time measured *low*, despite the UN's strident statements about more frequent and terrible storms? (Note that the hurricane data is only reliable for the last fifty years or so, hence the word "measured".)

Is this exaggeration of an affect of climate change by the UN an isolated incident? Hardly. Recent history reveals the UN to be a systematic engine of climate disinformation.

In 2007, the UN famously stated that, if warming continued at present rates (whatever that means—there hasn't been any since the mid-late 1990s), the massive Himalayan glaciers would disappear 23 years from now. While the source, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) proclaims itself the consensus of climate science, there's no credentialed climatologist on earth who believes that this ice cap, which is hundreds of feet thick, could possibly disappear so soon.

When the government of India, which knows something about the Himalayan glaciers that feed the great Ganges River, challenged the UN's forecast, the head of the IPCC, Rajenda Pachauri, labeled it "voodoo science".

It turns out that the UN was the voodoo practitioner. Dr. Murari Lal, who authored the statement, eventually admitted that it was in the UN climate report to spur the governments of India and China into reducing their carbon dioxide emissions, and that it was not based on anything in the peer-reviewed scientific literature.

In the same report, the IPCC claimed that even a slight variation in tropical rainfall would cause a disastrous loss of the verdant rainforest—despite incoming satellite data that showed a remarkable resilience to an ongoing sharp drought.

Then it made the absurd claims that 55% of the Netherlands was below sea level, and that there has been no change in ice coverage in the southern hemisphere, where polar ice is indeed growing significantly.

The IPCC also stated that a mere nine years from now, tropical crop yields would be cut in half by a massive decline in annual rainfall. Even computer models that assume large scale drought reduce yields by about half of this.

Is all of this due to chance?

Scientists, as humans, make judgemental errors. But what is odd about the UN is that its gaffes are all in one direction. All are exaggeration of the effects of climate change. In each case, the IPCC was relying upon scientific literature that was not peer-reviewed in the traditional sense. No one has found analogous errors in the other direction (which would be an underestimation of climate change based upon the "grey" literature), and you can bet that people have been looking very hard in an effort to exonerate the UN.

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In an unbiased world there should be an equal chance of either underestimating or overestimating the climate change and its effects, which allows us to test whether this string of errors is simply scientists behaving normally or being naughty.

What's the chance of throwing a coin six times and getting all heads (or tails)? It's .015. Most scientists consider the .050 level sufficient to warrant retention of a hypothesis, which in this case, is that the UN's climate science is biased.

Patrick Michaels is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

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