

Global Climate <http://www.vpr.net/episode/49634/>

By [Alan Betts](#)

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(HOST) *In a year when new climate extremes have been reached around the world, commentator Alan Betts says it's not too late to join the global movement for change.*

(BETTS) From a climate perspective, this year has toppled many records. The global temperatures from January to August set a new record high, and ten states in the eastern U.S. reported the hottest summer on record. It was far worse elsewhere on Earth. In Pakistan, extreme temperatures of 129 degrees were followed by the worst monsoon floods in living memory. Moscow experienced 99-degree temperatures for the first time, with toxic smog from devastating forest fires.

On the long timescale of the Earth, the trend to a warming planet is unmistakable. And it's almost certain that none of these extremes would have happened if atmospheric CO₂ had remained at its pre-industrial level of 280 parts per million, rather than the 390 it has now reached.

A few years ago, a group of students started meeting at Middlebury College on Sunday evenings to talk and dream about action on climate change. They assumed that government action would come too late to help the Earth - and they knew that they would inherit a transformed world. One offshoot of this group, inspired by Bill McKibben, was a series of campaigns, starting in Vermont, and culminating in 350.org, which mobilized the first International Day of Climate Action one year ago this month in 181 countries.

Last December this group took their campaign to the U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen. They were stunned but delighted when over a hundred countries signed their petition, recognizing that stabilizing the Earth's climate requires reducing atmospheric CO₂ from its present 390 parts per million back down to 350. But their elation was brief. These hundred countries were mostly the poorer countries, whose people will suffer the most from rising temperatures and spreading droughts - not the rich and powerful nations that are polluting the atmosphere.

No agreement was reached in Copenhagen, because the wealthy nations put their short-term self interest above the needs of the Earth and its ecosystems. Transforming their consumer economies and standing up to the powerful fossil fuel industry was simply too much of a political risk. In private, our noble leaders told the 350 team just this: until you can convince the American people that it's in their interest to change direction, we can do nothing!

After Copenhagen the U.S. 350 group felt defeated, but their colleagues from around the world offered encouragement with this reminder: "Governments everywhere are corrupt; we, the people, must take action." As the American empire declines, our lost ideals are reflected back to us by a global democratic community. So this Sunday, 10/10/10, is again a day of climate action around the world.

At 350.org you can see the kaleidoscope of people from almost every country on Earth planning for our collective future. They know it will not be easy - but we are one planet and one people, and together we create the future of the Earth. Will you join them? It's not too late.

<http://alanbetts.com/talks>