

UN's new weather chief seeks to improve disaster alerts

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The United Nations' new weather chief said Friday his priority was to improve early warning systems to predict increasing natural disasters sparked by climate change.

Finn Petteri Taalas, the new head of the 191-nation Geneva-based World

Meteorological Organization (WMO), also said these alert systems were not up to the mark in many countries.

"It's evident that we have already seen... that weather-related disasters are growing," he told AFP.

"We have seen more storms, we have seen more hit waves, in some parts of the world we have seen more flooding, and also droughts and related forest fires and difficulties in agriculture."

"The growth is expected to continue and even intensify during the coming decades."

Taalas, who was elected on Thursday, will replace the agency's veteran head, Frenchman Michel Jarraud, who is stepping down next year after three four-year terms.

His election comes ahead of a key conference in Paris at the end of the year, marking the first attempt to clinch a world-wide deal on [global warming](#) since the near-disastrous 2009 UN summit in Copenhagen.

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"One of the key issues for WMO and also its members is to provide very good early warnings of these disasters," he said.

"The national meteorological and hydrological services are key players in disaster preparedness and also in adapting to [climate change](#) and variability," he said.

But there were "very large country to country differences in the

resources devoted to these services," he said.

"We have to find more resources for improving global early warning and climate adaptation capacity," Taalas said.

"We have to invest in the national meteorological and hydrological services, we have to enhance their service capabilities and how they deliver this information to the people and actors in the country."

Taalas said an efficient [early warning](#) system was also vital for food security in a world with a skyrocketing population.

He underscored the need for "very good seasonal forecasting" saying it would help "local farmers to optimise their activity when it comes to agriculture."

"We are going to see less rainfall in many important parts of the world," he said, adding that "higher temperatures leads to higher evaporation" causing drier and more arid soil.

Cutting greenhouse emissions is a key factor in countering all these impacts.

"There are some positive indicators already that some countries like (the) EU will go for 40 percent reduction by 2030," he said.

"There are also some positive signals from (the) USA and China showing readiness to tackle the problem," Taalas added.

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