# **The Decade of the Century**

By Benita Vital

Welcome to the hour-long takeover segment on BBC News, with me, Riley Kennedy. Tonight, we recap on the decade of the century, and the changes that have taken the world by storm. I sit here this evening, and I ask myself: How did we get here? How did the world get to this point; the point which could have been avoided?  “Scientists warn that the world may be at a tipping point”- This was the headline that graced the news almost 14 years ago, at the height of several climate change-influenced disasters all occurring simultaneously, around that year. Now, the year is 2035, and the world has reached the tipping point, near the peak of no return. The world being at a tipping point has been the cry for a couple of years. Like a broken record, scientist after scientist has warned us, that if something was not done, the damage would be irreversible.

I always questioned why there wasn’t any specific public pressure on the true villains in the climate crisis. We all had a part to play in reducing our carbon footprint and doing everything we can to protect the environment. But let’s face it – the little guy’s efforts were minuscule in repairing the earth. These multimillion businesses, whose combined greenhouse gas emissions made up for most of the world’s emissions, are to blame. The scientists’ warnings weren’t even necessary because visual evidence was clear as day. Every day, there was a new headline about a climate exacerbated disaster event somewhere in the world. Whether it was the European Fires of 2021 or the Great Drought of the West (United States), there was always a disaster. The blame is also on us, the little guy. We should have applied more pressure on these multimillion businesses, for there is strength and power in unity and numbers. The IPCC gave 15 years to reduce GHG emissions, to slow the climate crisis. We have received as a human race, countless amounts of warnings. We did not heed to reason. We all could see what the world was coming to; we decided to ignore it.

There would be no going back to the world we once knew, I once knew. The world that I envisioned and hoped for the generations that will come after me. Adaptation is our capability to survive the climatic conditions of the ecosystem. It’s a trait that human beings have possessed for centuries, that allowed us to conquer the globe. It’s now the survival of the fittest and the fittest of us have adapted to our new changed world, and those that couldn’t – alas. We had to adapt, for it was our only choice. Many are unable to fully grasp the shocking changes that have happened over the decade. A lot of us have adjusted to our new world, as many aspects of life have become the new norm. But to really grasp the shift, to understand where we are and how we move forward, here is a recap of the decades.

Many of us were uprooted. There are thousands of climate refugees from the island regions, as they were amongst the first to bear the wrath of the climate crisis. As it got hotter, and temperatures rose, the seas got warmer, and the hurricanes became frequent guests. Hurricanes like no other, the likes that have never been seen before. Mary and Anna particularly graced us with their unwelcomed presence. They took us completely by surprise too, much like Maria of 2017. One day, they’re off the coast of Cape Verde, a measly tropical wave, and the next day, as they’re about to knock on the door, and take off their shoes - they became beastly category 5 hurricanes, barging and breaking down our doors. Many more unwelcomed guests, although their arrival was more polite, overstayed their welcome, ate all the food, broke a timeless vase, and insulted everyone.

Entire cities have and are currently being abandoned, as they are deemed uninhabitable. The temperature in some places has become so unbearably hot that it is impossible to live. The environment becomes so hot that the body is beyond its capacity to cool itself down – hyperthermia. Pakistan is one of them. Years before, they were already experiencing record-breaking temperatures of 50 degrees Celsius – so can you imagine what they would be feeling right now? The people could take it no longer. Nothing could be done - not work, nor play – and so they had to leave the place they once called home. The ocean has risen significantly, and coastal cities are being deserted as the sea reclaims its land. In the Caribbean, they’ve borne witness to the thief. So many of their small, low-lying islands are now even smaller, as the beaches are being stolen. Flooding is so frequent in some places in the world that stilt houses became the building standard amongst those who could afford. And those who couldn’t, had no choice but to leave. All in all, the abnormal weather patterns that we live in now, have made it impossible to live in certain areas of the world. It is beyond the point of being adaptable.

The globe looks different now, as some countries have completely disappeared from the map. The ocean reclaimed its land as the sea levels rose, plunging entire countries into water. Before the onset of the climate crisis, Fiji and other Oceanic countries had been disappearing into the ocean. Somewhat fortunate, is that the majority of these island nations have small populations. The governments of New Zealand and Australia opened their borders to their displaced brothers and sisters. And now, more than a quarter of these islands are gone. They’ve become faint memories of the past, vanishing from the Earth as if they never existed. Our very real-life version of the Lost City of Atlantis.

Our societal norms have shifted too. Workdays are now worknights. I didn’t completely debate this shift; I’ve always been a night owl. The countries that weren’t burning like Pakistan still endured unbearable heat, and so, society attempted to escape the scorching heat of the day. Gone are the simple days when 4-day workdays and 3-day weekends were the controversial topics of debate. The need to change was understandable, as the sun is too scorching hot, and almost burns off your skin that you must ask yourself, “Is this hell?”. Besides being physically painful and exhausting, it’s not the most conducive, efficient work condition. Especially for the jobs that require you to be outside of an office setting. So as a global community, we decided to switch our working hours to working nights and as of now, regular working hours are from 6 pm - 2 am. We sleep throughout the day, work at night. Almost every household has invested in heavy-duty, light-blocking curtains/blinds, to get a good day’s sleep.

Halfway across the globe, desalination is becoming increasingly popular as river and lake levels are decreasing. This was somewhat controversial, as it had been discovered that desalination requires high levels of energy and may not be the most sustainable solution. However, our brilliant minds found ways to make desalination environmentally sound. Egypt had already adopted this method more than 13 years ago when conflict over the River Nile between them, Sudan and Ethiopia escalated. Many other nations followed suit, as they had no other solution.

In some parts of the globe, agriculture is suffering, and food supply is scarce. As the world heats up, the temperature increases have created hostile environments for anything to grow. Precipitation patterns became unpredictable, and weather events became so extreme that they would destroy whatever crops farmers managed to sow. So, controlled environment agriculture is becoming the norm. Think of the cannabis farms – the illegal ones that used to be caught by the police, not the open field ones. They are usually found in large, enclosed areas, with controlled temperatures and LED lighting to mimic the sun. There are areas where open field agriculture just isn’t possible, and so large, controlled environment agriculture is the best solution, where farmers are able to imitate conditions that would occur naturally. This has been the only way to provide food for some regions, but unfortunately not everyone is lucky. Climate change just added to the already existing world problems and exacerbated them. The silver lining, however, is that as temperatures increased, and snow melted, new fertile agricultural lands formed. The Arctic Circle is an example of this, as it is as lush and green as the thickest forest.

The health system is under extreme stress as temperature-related illnesses are increasing. And there are two categories of these. The sheer temperature of the environment is too much for any human to handle. Heat strokes, cramps, rashes as well as muscle spasms are incredibly common now. Some experience extreme fatigue and dizziness that has caused fainting. Skin cancer is now the most commonly occurring cancer. In that same light, specific industries specializing in solar goods are booming. The next generation Jeff Bezos has revolutionized the company (Amazon), capitalizing on goods that provide some form of protection against the harmful UV rays: items like, sunscreen, protective clothing, air-conditioned umbrellas, and even ground-breaking technology like temperature-regulated clothing. The other category of temperature-related illnesses is due to melted permafrost and glaciers. Ancient viruses and bacteria that were preserved in the ice for thousands of years are now exposed and unleashed, creating a new wave of epidemics worldwide.

Gas and oil have nearly been entirely replaced by renewable energy, but with a cost. Businesses and governments were warned for years that fossil fuel energy production was one of the leading causes of GHG emissions, which further contributed to climate change. They should have been easing the transition to renewable energy, years before. That’s why the structural integrity of global governments is holding on by a thread as citizens are enraged at the lackadaisical approach to climate crisis preparation. If only they had prepared and began a transitioning process, maybe we would not have been where we are today. The cost was The Global (Economic) Crash of 2027. It was three times more severe than the Great Depression and we are only now slowly exiting and recovering from this economic calamity.

As I near the end of this eye-opening recap, I look back over the decades and how drastically our world has changed. How lives have been disrupted and altered for the worse. How our environment and those dependent on it are suffering. We should have taken advantage of the time we had to avoid this disaster being our reality. The true question is what we do moving forward. Is it too late to repair what we’ve damaged? Are there any solutions to this ongoing climate crisis? What, do, we, do? This is Riley Kennedy, thank you for listening.