UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: Arctic Fires - WMO

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Shotlist

1. Exterior shot, Palais des Nations flag alley, nations’ flags flying, a beautiful day.
3. SOUNDbite (English) — Clare Nullis, spokesperson, WMO: “Some parts of Siberia this week have again topped 30 degrees Celsius – so it’s been warmer in Siberia than, you know, many parts of Florida.”
4. Medium shot, journalists sitting apart from each other in line with COVID-19 distancing measures, Press Room III, Palais des Nations.
5. SOUNDbite (English) — Clare Nullis, spokesperson, WMO: “We’ve had exceptional and prolonged heat for months now and this has fuelled devastating Arctic fires; and at the same time we’re seeing rapidly decreasing sea coverage along the Arctic coast.”
7. SOUNDbite (English) — Clare Nullis, spokesperson, WMO: “We’re seeing, you know, dramatic satellite images, which show the extent of the burns surface; the fire front of the northern-most currently active Arctic wildfire is less than eight kilometres from the Arctic ocean – this should not be happening.”
8. Close-up, profile, journalist’s head in front of shot, blurred, laptops and hands typing to rear, Press Room III, Palais des Nations.
9. SOUNDbite (English) — Clare Nullis, spokesperson, WMO: “There was a study published earlier this week in Nature Climate Change; it’s not the WMO study, but it is indicative of the
wider picture; it says that polar bears - which as we all know is a symbol of climate change -
could be nearly extinct by the end of the century because of shrinking sea ice.”


11. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Clare Nullis, spokesperson, WMO:** “In general, the Arctic is heating
more than twice the global average; it’s having a big impact on local populations and
ecosystems, but we always say that what happens in the Arctic doesn’t stay in the Arctic, it does
affect our weather in different parts of the world where hundreds of millions of people live.”

12. Wide shot, journalist and podium speakers sitting apart from each other in line with COVID-19
distancing measures, line of chairs propped up against table to prevent use, Press Room III, Palais des
Nations.


“Exceptional and prolonged” temperatures in Siberia have left parts of the Arctic warmer than Florida and fuelled “devastating” wildfires for a second consecutive year, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said on Friday, while warning also of rapidly decreasing sea ice along the Russian polar coast.

According to the UN agency, temperatures in Siberia have been more than 5C above average from January to June, and in June up to 10C above average.

“They’ve had exceptional and prolonged heat for months now and this has fuelled devastating Arctic fires; and at the same time we’re seeing rapidly decreasing sea coverage along the Arctic coast,” she continued.

The development follows a reading of 38°C in the Russian town of Verkhoyansk on 20 June.

This has been confirmed by the Russian Federal Service for Hydrometeorological and Environmental Monitoring (Roshydromet); WMO is in the process of establishing a committee to do the same.

The cause of the prolonged furnace-like conditions is the “blocking” action of a vast weather front over the Arctic, along with a “persistent northward swing of the jet stream” which has been sending warm air into the region, journalists heard.

“‘The Arctic is heating more than twice as fast as the global average, impacting local populations and ecosystems and with global repercussions,’” Ms. Nullis said, adding that such extreme heat would have been almost impossible without the influence of human-induced climate change.

Worrying footage of the forest fires close to the ocean have underscored the need for urgent climate action by nations and greater commitment to achieving the pledges made in the Paris Climate Agreement, the WMO spokesperson insisted, including efforts to limit global warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

On 22 July, there were 188 points of probable fire in Siberia, according to Roshydromet.

“‘We’re seeing, you know, dramatic satellite images, which show the extent of the burns surface; the fire front of the northern-most currently active Arctic wildfire is less than eight kilometres from the Arctic ocean – this should not be happening,’” Ms. Nullis said.

Highlighting new climate research published in the journal Nature Climate Change pointing to irreversible threats to the Arctic ecosystem, the WMO spokesperson said that “polar bears - which as we all know is a symbol of climate change - could be nearly extinct by the end of the century”, if sea ice continues to shrink at current rates.

Changes to weather at the poles will likely affect other more distant and populated places too, Ms. Nullis warned, thanks to a phenomenon known as “teleconnections”.

These are observed in weather events including El Nino, where cold and dry air reaches places that are more used to seeing warmer, wetter conditions.

“In general, the Arctic is heating more than twice the global average,” Ms. Nullis said. “It’s having a big impact on local populations and ecosystems, but we always say that what happens in the Arctic doesn’t stay in the Arctic, it does affect our weather in different parts of the world where hundreds of millions of people
live."