United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has warned that the world has entered a new era of extreme weather as human-induced climate change combines with a powerful El Niño, urging governments to take stronger action to reduce emissions and protect vulnerable communities.

“A supersized El Niño is colliding with a planet already superheated by manmade climate change,” Guterres said on Monday as world leaders gathered in Antalya, Türkiye, for the COP31 climate conference.

“We have entered a new age of climate extremes,” he said, calling for faster emissions reductions, a transition away from fossil fuels and increased financial support for countries facing the greatest climate risks.



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres

His warning coincided with the release of a report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), which said 2026 is expected to rank among the four warmest years on record. Global average surface temperatures between January and September were approximately 1.47 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average.

WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said the developing El Niño could intensify global heating and increase the risk of extreme weather into 2027.

“El Niño and indeed the state of the global climate in 2026 gives new meaning to the phrase ‘off the charts’,” she said.

El Niño is a natural climate phenomenon involving unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the tropical Pacific. It can influence rainfall and temperature patterns worldwide, adding to the effects of human-driven global warming.

Africa faces growing climate risks

The impact is particularly concerning for Africa, which is warming faster than the global average, according to the WMO’s State of the Climate in Africa 2025 report, released in June 2026.

The report found that extreme weather events affected at least 13 million people

and caused more than 3,000 reported deaths across the continent in 2025. Floods accounted for more than half of reported extreme-weather events, while drought affected more than 8.5 million people in East Africa.

Rwanda prepares for El Niño-related risks

Rwanda is also preparing for the effects of El Niño. The Rwanda Meteorology Agency's August 2026 forecast projected above-normal rainfall across the country during the September-to-December rainy season, raising the possibility of floods, landslides and damage to crops and infrastructure.

The risks are significant for a country that lost 131 people in the floods and landslides of May 2023. The disaster caused estimated damage and economic losses of Rwf518.58 billion, according to the government's assessment.

In September, Rwanda held a five-day multi-hazard simulation exercise in Karongi District to test its preparedness for floods and drought.

"This simulation exercise is timely and necessary to ensure that forecasts are not only produced, but translated into actionable triggers that enable anticipatory measures to be taken before hazards escalate," said ACP Egide Mugwiza, Director General of Response and Recovery Operations at the Ministry in charge of Emergency Management.

The exercise brought together government institutions, district authorities, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations to test how early warnings could be turned into action before disasters occur.