

Yet another last chance to save the planet

Rodney Hide, NZ Herald, 8 November 2015

President Obama scares children: "This year, in Paris, has to be the year that the world finally reaches an agreement to protect the one planet that we've got while we still can." This was his heavy message, delivered last month.

The Earth has been around a long time. And its future hangs on this month's meeting of world leaders.

The stakes could not be higher, the challenge more daunting: 192 countries to agree to hobble their economies by cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Leaders must agree to hammer their own people in a way that is equitable, politically acceptable, and each and every leader has to sign up. If some don't, many won't. And that means the world fries. Or drowns. Or something like that.

The planet's future resting on a meeting of politicians

It's a depressing anticlimax to have the planet's future resting on a meeting of politicians. I had expected there to be fighting with enemy aliens or the need to blow up a death star.

Instead of cool lasers at warp speed, we have a UN bore-fest.

But there is no need to be despondent. I have learned the world has been here before. The World Wildlife Fund declared last year's Lima world leaders' meeting the "last chance" to save the planet.

The "last-chance summit"

A 2013 Warsaw meeting was called the "last-chance summit".

In 2012, Doha was the "last-chance summit".

The World Council of Churches called Durban 2011 the "last opportunity".

Indian environment minister Jairem Ramesh called Cancun 2010 our "last chance".

Lord Stern declared Copenhagen 2009 "the last chance to save the planet".

Australian environmental scientist Professor Tim Flannery said of Poland 2008, it was "likely to be our last chance as a species to deal with the problem".

In 2007 Friends of the Earth said: "Bali could be the last chance to avoid the worst effect of global warming." Campaigner Mark Lynas called the Montreal meeting in 2005 the "last chance for action".

Time magazine declared Bonn 2001 "A Global Warming Treaty's Last Chance". So it has been 15 years of summits, talkfests and hot air.

And still we live

The world is not measurably warmer. The only apparent warming is in computer models and UN meetings when the air conditioning breaks down.

We are weary of it all. The headlines no longer spur us into action.

Obama's words wash over us. He promised to end two wars. He's leaving three. That's the clear and present threat.

There are children suffering and dying.

A UN meeting? To save the planet? Last chance for Earth?

Yawn.