

Headline: Global rallies urge action on climate

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Published Date: 12:00 AM November 30, 2015

Section: globalnation

Word Count: 7876

Content:

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THOUSANDS of Filipinos marched across Manila on Sunday, joining tens of thousands of people in other parts of the world marching to demand results from this week's climate change summit in Paris.

Catholic clergy, indigenous people, environmental activists belonging to the Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment and members of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) converged on Plaza Rajah Sulayman in Manila for a Climate Solidarity Prayer.

Carrying placards and streamers that called for a ban on coal plants and coal mining by foreign companies in the Philippines, the marchers prayed, sang and held a performance depicting victims of Supertyphoon "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan), which swept across the Visayas on Nov. 8, 2013, leaving more than 3,500 people dead or missing and more than 4 million others homeless.

On the eve of the opening of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the French capital, more than 2,000 climate events were planned in cities, including Sydney, Jakarta, Berlin, London, Sao Paulo and New York, making Sunday one of the biggest days of action on climate change, organizers said.

President Aquino is attending COP21, representing the Philippines as one of the poor countries that have suffered destruction caused by climate change.

Mr. Aquino's mining program, however, has drawn flak from climate activists, who blame it for the degradation of the environment and the displacement of indigenous peoples.

Renato M. Reyes, secretary general of Bayan, said the Aquino administration, through coal operating contracts, had encouraged coal mining in the country, most recently in Surigao del Sur province where lumad, or indigenous peoples, were displaced.

People's movements

Although the marchers expected results from COP21, some said they had no illusions of drastic, more meaningful actions.

They said it was ultimately up to the people to push for meaningful actions to combat climate change.

"People's movements, through direct action, must hold accountable their own governments and corporate polluters. These movements must push for climate justice to bring about a system where people, not profits, are the priority," Reyes said.

Some 150 leaders, including US President Barack Obama, China's Xi Jinping, India's Narendra Modi and Russia's Vladimir Putin, will attend COP21, which is tasked with reaching the first truly universal climate accord.

The goal is to limit average global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, perhaps less, over pre-Industrial Revolution levels by curbing fossil fuel emissions blamed for climate change.

Rallies demanding curbs to carbon pollution had been growing since Friday, with marches across Australia Sunday kickstarting a final day of people power protest.

Activists in France scaled back their plans when the government imposed a state of emergency after the Paris attacks that killed 120 people and wounded more than 350 others two weeks ago.

Human chain

In Paris, activists planned to form a static human chain, formed by about 3,400 people joining arms along what had been the original 3-kilometer route through the center of the city from Place de Republique to Place de la Nation.

"This is a moment for the whole world to join hands," said Iain Keith, campaign director for Avaaz, one of the organizers.

Separately, more than 10,000 demonstrators who had planned to come to Paris had instead sent shoes to form a big pile in a sign of solidarity.

Organizers said the Vatican sent a pair to represent Pope Francis.

Alix Mazounie of French Climate Action Network said the activists reckoned a human chain would not violate the state of emergency.

"This is not civil disobedience," she said. The chain would break, for instance, wherever it crossed a road to avoid disrupting traffic, she said.

But underscoring security worries, France put 24 green activists under house arrest before the summit, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said on Saturday, adding they were suspected of planning violent protests at the talks.

Sill, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius welcomed the worldwide demonstrations, which organizers said would include concerts, rallies, bicycle rides and a march by 1,000 Maasai in Tanzania urging more renewable energy.

"It is very positive," Fabius said, for governments to feel public pressure to act. Many environmental activists want a phaseout of fossil fuels and a shift to 100-percent renewable energies by 2050.

Marches were held on Friday and Saturday, from Melbourne to Edinburgh. "Don't be a fossil fool," said one Australian banner.

On Saturday, faith groups delivered a series of petitions signed by 1.8 million people urging stronger action, collected on pilgrimages to Paris.

"The time for talking is long over," said Naderev Saño of the Philippines, who walked 1,500 kilometers from Rome.

Global impact

In Australia Sunday, a march of some 5,000 people in Adelaide focused on the global impact that climate change has on health, food security and development, particularly among the world's poorest.

"Those who did the least to cause the problem are feeling the impacts first and hardest, like our sisters and brothers in the Pacific," said Judee Adams, a community campaigner with Oxfam.

Many low-lying Pacific nations such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands fear they could disappear beneath the waves completely as sea levels rise.

In the past week, the UN weather body said the average global temperature for the year 2015 is set to rise 1 degree Celsius above pre-Industrial Revolution levels, halfway toward the Paris conference's attempted limit.

And analysts say voluntary carbon-curbing pledges submitted by nations to bolster the Paris pact, even if fully adhered to, put Earth on track for warming of 3 degrees Celsius.

On the eve of Saturday's protests, French President Francois Hollande, host of the Nov. 30-Dec. 11 talks, warned of obstacles ahead of the 195 nations seeking new limits on heat-trapping gas emissions from 2020.

"Man is the worst enemy of man. We can see it with terrorism," said Hollande, who spoke after leading ceremonies in Paris to mourn the victims of the Nov. 13 attacks.

"But we can say the same when it comes to climate. Human beings are destroying nature, damaging the environment," he said.

Hollande called for a "binding agreement, a universal agreement, one that is ambitious."

Stumbling blocks

But he also spoke of fears that a handful of countries, which he did not name, may stymie consensus if they felt the deal lacked guarantees.

Potential stumbling blocks in Paris abound, ranging from financing for climate-vulnerable countries to scrutiny of commitments to curb greenhouse gases and even the legal status of the accord.

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