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Pope Francis. AP FILE PHOTO

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Climate activists expressed relief that Pope Francis has joined their fight against global warming.

Former Climate Change Commissioner Naderev Saño, who resigned in April to lead the People's Pilgrimage, said the Pope's encyclical was a "very important message and people should take it seriously."

"The climate change crisis is the defining issue of our generation, and we will be judged by future generations by how we respond to the climate crisis and leave them the legacy of a caring, just, safe and peaceful world," Saño said.

Kevin Yu of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice said Pope Francis' lending his voice to the climate change movement was a significant development.

"[F]or the first time, the Church is taking the lead in the climate change movement. For the past 21 years, nothing has happened in climate negotiations," Yu said.

Lourdes Arsenio of the Archdiocese of Manila's Ministry on Ecology said the encyclical should especially resonate to Filipinos.

Many people are affected by the ruthless destruction of land for mining, the consumption of fossil fuel for power generation, among other things. This is the Pope standing up for them, while also calling on all people, Catholic or not, to do their little share, such as waste segregation, to help the environment," Arsenio said.

Anna Abad, a campaigner for Greenpeace Philippines, said the Pope's letter should have a "significant impact" on the 1.2 billion Catholics of the world.

"The inclusion of moral imperative has been lacking in climate discussions," Abad said.

But the encyclical "would instill moral compunction on world and industry leaders... for clean, sustainable and renewable energy," she said.

"It is the poor who are most affected by catastrophic climate change, yet they have contributed least to causing the problem," Kumi Naidoo, Greenpeace international executive director, said in a statement.

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"It's quite apt. It will be our bible for the environment," said Fr. Dakila Ramos, head of the Archdiocesan Ministry on the Environment of the Archdiocese of Lipa in Batangas. Rima Granali, Nathan R. Melican and Jaymee T. Gamil; Maricar Cinco, Inquirer Southern Luzon; and AP