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Headline: Filipinos in NY raise PH concerns in Climate Strike

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Photo by Rey Anthony Ostria

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NEW YORK CITY — Filipinos in this city called for an end to the exploitation of natural resources by big business and to violence against Earth activists, as they marched on Friday from Foley Square to Battery Park as part of a concerted global protest action against abuse of the environment and climate change.

The march, dubbed Climate Strike, was inspired by 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who started the climate strike movement Fridays for Future protesting government inaction across the globe on the climate crisis.

Organizers said some four million people filled city streets around the world, in what was billed as the biggest ever protest against the threat posed to the planet by rising temperatures.

The march was held three days before the United Nation's Climate Action Summit, which will gather world leaders, civil society leaders and businessmen in this city.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres will host the emergency summit on Monday in which he will urge world leaders to raise their commitments in the 2015 Paris climate accord.

Urgent advocacies

A landmark UN report to be unveiled next week will warn that global warming and pollution are ravaging Earth's oceans and icy regions in ways that could unleash misery on a global scale.

There were other urgent advocacies related to the environment, as Filipino protesters in New York underscored.

Ruthie Arroyo, a member of Kabataan Alliance in the United States, told the Inquirer, "one of the things the 'lumad' (indigenous peoples) are fighting for is the selling away of their ancestral land, the 'yutang kabilin' (land of heritage). So, of course, they are the ones defending the environment from corporate plunder."

She said the lumad's ancestral lands were rich in mineral resources like gold.

Michael Garrovillas, also from Kabataan Alliance, said the protesters were also marching for Brandon Lee, a Chinese-American environmental activist and journalist who was shot in front of his home in Lagawe, Ifugao, on Aug. 5.

GLOBAL OUTCRY Filipinos join the Climate Strike march on Friday in New York City to call international attention to Philippine issues arising from the exploitation of natural resources, like the

plight of indigenous peoples losing their ancestral land and the threats faced by environmental activists. —Rey Anthony Ostria

Lee, a volunteer at Ifugao Peasant Movement, was shot four times and remains in paralysis.

“We are hoping to get him back to the United States to get that sustainable medical treatment back here, because the current Philippine government [and] the US government are not ... helping him [return] home,” Garrovillas said, adding that a \$200,000 fund-raising drive for Lee has so far raised \$30,000.

Friday’s rallies were the start of 5,800 protests across 163 countries over the next week, said strike organizer 350.org.

Events began in the deluge-threatened Pacific Islands of Vanuatu, the Solomons and Kiribati, where children chanted: “We are not sinking, we are fighting.”

‘We deserve better’

“We are the future and we deserve better,” 12-year-old Lilly Satidtanasarn, known as “Thailand’s Greta” for her campaign against plastic bags in malls, said in Bangkok.

Schoolchildren rallied in India while thousands protested in the Philippines, which experts say faces threats from rising sea levels and increasingly violent storms.

Organizers said more than 300,000 children, parents and supporters rallied in Australia alone, which has been struck in recent years by droughts, more intense bushfires, devastating floods and the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef.

In New York, Thunberg claimed there were 250,000 protesters. Tens of thousands of supporters in Battery Park chanted her name as she called on leaders to act now to curb gas emissions.

Empty promises

“Why should we study for a future that is being taken away from us?” Thunberg asked. “We demand a safe future. Is that really too much to ask?”

“People in power and their beautiful words are the same. The number of politicians and celebrities who want to take selfies with us are the same. The empty promises are the same. The lies are the same. And the inaction is the same,” she said further.

Strikers on their way to Battery Park chanted: “What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it? Now! If we don’t get it, strike it down!”

The strike “makes me feel that there really is hope in organizing and mobilizing people. There really is power in unity,” said Terrence Rienton, community defense organizer of Damayan Migrant Workers Association, who took part in the New York rally.

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“And right now, we’re trying to show these corporations, especially the ones in the Philippines, that money is money. We can’t eat money. One day, all of our resources will be depleted,” he said.
—With a report from AFP