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Headline: Philippines joins global wave of climate protests

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MANILA, Philippines — Their house is on fire. And they won't just stand and watch it burn.

Hundreds of students and environmental activists led the nationwide climate protests at the University of the Philippines Diliman, as the Philippines and several countries in the East Pacific on Friday kickstarted the weeklong global wave of protests to demand urgent, transformative action on climate change.

The protests, led by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg in New York, is part of the global "Fridays for Future" movement where students go on strike to demand accountability on the world's growing carbon emissions.

Most vulnerable

While the Philippines consistently ranks as among the lowest carbon emitters of the world, it's the most vulnerable to extreme weather and slow-onset disasters brought on by the compounding effects of global warming.

"The world is on fire and we refuse to inherit its ashes," said Mitzi Jonelle Tan, lead convener of the Youth Advocates for Climate Action in the Philippines (Yacap) that led the strikes in UP. "The youth needs to be at the forefront of the battle for the future of our planet in the face of massive environmental degradation," Tan said.

Around 500 students clad in blue joined the protests at the UP College of Science amphitheater. The sound of tribal drums and chants to save Mother Nature pierced the open air: "Tawag ng taumbayan / Sagipin ang kalikasan!"

Apart from the protest, the students also tried to break the world record for the largest earth formation. Amid grey clouds and light drizzle, they held blue placards facing the sky that formed the image of Planet Earth. On their feet was a large red banner that read: "There is no Planet B."

This was meant to underscore the urgency by which they needed to act, Tan said.

"This is such a crucial generation," Tan said. "Our actions would literally determine the future of the planet."

Global warming

The global protests were driven in large part by the bombshell report released by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change this year.

The UN report concluded that they have 11 years to curb the rise of global warming to a 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold, beyond which would worsen the risks for extreme weather phenomena and widespread poverty for hundreds of millions.

Urgent changes needed

The same report said “urgent and unprecedented changes” are needed to hit and stay within target.

But at present, most countries like the Philippines are bound to fail in meeting the Paris Agreement to keep temperatures between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius, says Greenpeace country director Lea Guerrero.

It's why even young students like Alex Demaisip, 15, joined the strikes even though she had no experience in rallies before.

A Grade 9 student from private Raya School in Fairview, Quezon City, Demaisip said she started to worry about her future after learning of the UN report.

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“For me, it's really sad that it's happening while we're just barely discovering our potential, and during an age where people my age have access to unlimited information,” she said. “But since we're all here now, maybe now the grownups will listen.”