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Headline: Environmental advocates ask for justice on Global Day for Climate Action

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Around 200 environment advocates gather in front of the Baclaran Church in Parañaque City on December 9, 2023, for the commemoration of the Global Day for Climate Action. The activists also raised concerns over reclamation projects in Manila Bay. INQUIRER.net / Zeus Legaspi

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MANILA, Philippines — Environmental advocates commemorated the Global Day for Climate Action on Saturday by demanding climate justice in a rally held at Baclaran Church in Parañaque City.

Sister Maria Liza Ruedas of Daughters of Charity said the participation and unity of different religious denominations in the protest action that called for a common cause highlights the need for Filipinos, not just Catholics, to unite for the “noble cause” of protecting nature.

“It is very clear to us as a Church – we need to support our Mother Earth; to care for our Mother Earth,” she said.

The nun marched with the protesters and expressed support for their advocacy of stopping reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

While marching from Airport Road to Baclaran Church with the rest of the crowd, Sr. Ruedas carried with her a “parol” bearing the phrase “wishing for climate justice to prevail.”

“The grieving of Mother Earth is also the cry of the poor. Doon talaga nakikita ang malagim na epekto ng climate change: sa ating mga aba at dukhang kapatid,” she told INQUIRER.net on the sidelines of the parade.

(That’s where the grim effects of climate change are truly seen: in our impoverished brothers and sisters.)

“The ‘Laudato Si’ is very clear. Everything that the Church can do to help Mother Earth, it does,” she noted.

“Laudato Si” is Pope Francis’ second encyclical which focuses on the theme of caring for “our common home,” addressing environmental issues, climate change, and advocating for ecological stewardship and social justice.

“We always say that the church will always take a stand where the poor are and the poor are the most affected in the climate crisis. Sometimes they cry out, yet their voices are not heard. But we will not cease shouting for this cause because we believe there is a reason to do so,” she said in a mix of Filipino and English.

Multiple groups in the past have underscored how inequality is exacerbated by the effects of the climate crisis – including disasters, droughts, and rising sea levels, which disproportionately affect the poor.

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“The Church will not stop,” Sr. Ruedas continued, adding that despite the challenges faced by environmental defenders in the country, the Church will continue to “translate its love of neighbor into love of creation.”

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For Patricia Muncal, a Protestant member of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, God’s creation takes center stage in the topic of climate justice.

“Anything that creates a permanent imbalance in our ecology and destroys livelihoods disrupts God’s creation. With that, we, as Protestants, believe that it is one of our duties to protect the environment in any way we can,” Muncal said.

Muncal added that apart from Catholic and Protestant groups, Evangelical Churches also joined the commemoration of the Global Day for Climate Action.

In May, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines joined calls for “immediate action” against the climate crisis.

Data from the United Nations (UN) show that up to 3.6 billion people worldwide live in countries that are vulnerable to climate change.

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The UN likewise pointed out that individuals living in poverty may be less able to prepare for or respond to extreme events that make them more susceptible to the impacts of climate-related hazards.