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Headline: Filipino climate pilgrims set 60-day walk from Rome to Paris

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Twenty-six Filipino and foreign “climate pilgrims” are gearing up for a 60-day walk from Rome to Paris, in a bid to convince leaders to act on climate change and come up with a legally-binding agreement in December.

One of them is Yeb Saño, a former climate change commissioner, who first caught the attention of the international community when he gave an emotional appeal during a United Nations (UN) conference in Warsaw a month after typhoon “Yolanda” devastated the Philippines in 2013.

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Saño, who was among those who led the filing of a human rights petition against 50 “big polluters” or top companies responsible for carbon emissions, said their group was heading for Rome on Sunday where their Europe leg will start.

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The group has already been to Tacloban, the Pacific Islands, Australia and South Asia. They were supposed to hold another leg in Africa but had problems with the visa requirements.

After resigning from the Climate Change Commission (CCC) in April, Saño reintroduced himself as the leader of The People’s Pilgrimage of Our Voices, a multi-faith campaign focused on climate issues.

READ: Yeb Sano resigns from climate change commission

Saño said that they had a large group of supporters who would accompany them along the way but the group of “core pilgrims” was composed of 21 Filipinos and five foreign nationals.

“Some of them are survivors of typhoon Yolanda,” he told INQUIRER.net.

The former climate commissioner said hundreds to thousands were expected to join them as they negotiate 1,500 kilometers worth of roads and rough terrain, some along the Italian and Swiss alps.

“[It’s] equivalent to the distance of Manila to Davao.” he added, explaining that they would be following an ancient pilgrimage route.

The official start of the last leg of their Climate Walk will be on September 30 at the Vatican. They hope to reach Paris, where the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) will be held. Since being assigned host of the COP21 where a legally binding agreement will be discussed, France has been drumming up support for the climate negotiations in Paris.

The group will have stop overs in villages in Italy, Switzerland and France to discuss climate change issues with the residents. While they would have to camp out, most of their nights will be spent in churches.

Saño said parishes in Europe “graciously offered them shelter and food during their pilgrimage.”

A large gathering will be held on November 28 in Paris to welcome them and other pilgrims coming from Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and other countries.

Meanwhile, a “big” People’s Climate March is being organized for November 29. They are targeting a million people to gather with them to call on heads of states to act on climate change.

Saño said he was hoping that the Philippines, which has yet to submit its commitments in reducing carbon emissions and promoting adaptation measures, would take on a leadership role, as it did in the last five years when he was actively involved in the negotiations.

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“Importante nga sana yun, yung tinitignan tayo, rinerespeto ang Pilipinas having the moral high ground pag pinag-uusapan ang climate change dahil tayo ang naapektuhan ng husto,” he said.

(That’s important, that we’re being seen, that the Philippines is respected, having the moral high ground when it comes to climate change because we are one of those who are most affected by it.)