

Greta Thunberg joins climate rally in Berlin ahead of German election

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Young people around the world took to the streets on Friday to demand urgent action to avert disastrous climate change [Christian Mang/Reuters]

Berlin, September 25 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of environmental activists -- including Greta Thunberg, the face of a global youth climate movement -- have staged a rally outside Germany's parliament ahead of a general election this weekend to demand that politicians take stronger action to curb climate change.

Friday's protest in the capital, Berlin, was part of a string of rallies around the world amid dire warnings the planet faces dangerous temperature rises unless greenhouse gas emissions are cut sharply in the coming years.

The idea for a global "climate strike" was inspired by teenage Swedish activist Thunberg's solo protest in Stockholm three years ago. It snowballed into a mass movement until the coronavirus pandemic put a stop to large gatherings. Activists have only recently started staging smaller gatherings.

Thunberg, who is 18 years old, addressed the rally outside the Reichstag from a stage, telling the crowd that voting is important but must be coupled with protests that put politicians under constant pressure. "We can still turn this around," she said to cheers. "We demand change, and we are the change."

Thunberg and prominent German climate activist Luisa Neubauer accused Germany's politicians of falling short on combatting climate change, with the country ranking as one of the world's top emitters of greenhouse gases.

They said the programs set out by Germany's main political parties were not far-reaching enough to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) – the more ambitious limit set out in the 2015 Paris climate accord.

German activists have referred to Sunday's election, which will see longtime Chancellor Angela Merkel leave her office, as the "vote of the century." They argue that the decisions taken by the next government will influence the country's efforts to tackle climate change for decades to come.

The issue has been a major topic during the election campaign and most voters cite climate protection among their top priorities.

Overall, demonstrations on Friday were planned in more than 1,500 locations worldwide by the youth movement, Fridays for Future. The rallies kicked off in Asia with small-scale demonstrations in the Philippines and Bangladesh before gradually spreading throughout the day.

Scores of other marches and protests were expected in cities and towns across Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Hundreds of students and environment activists demonstrated in the Czech Republic's capital, while in the United Kingdom, climate activists temporarily blocked the country's busiest ferry port in Dover.

The events took place five weeks before the United Nations' COP26 summit, which aims to secure more ambitious climate action from world leaders to drastically cut the greenhouse gas emissions heating the planet.

A landmark UN climate science report in August warned that human activity has already locked in climate disruptions for decades – but that rapid, large-scale action to reduce emissions could still stave off some of the most destructive effects. So far, governments do not plan to cut emissions anywhere near fast enough to do that.

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