

Nations urged to heed climate activists' demands for bold action

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People take part in the 'Global march for climate justice' while environment ministers meet weeks before Glasgow's COP26 meeting in Milan [Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters]

Milan, October 3 (RHC)-- The world's major economies must do more at the upcoming United Nations COP26 climate summit in Scotland to show they are serious about wanting to tackle global warming and heed the warnings of young activists, policymakers said over the weekend.

COP26 President Alok Sharma said there was renewed urgency in the climate debate following preparatory talks in Milan where thousands of youth activists, including Greta Thunberg, urged

governments to match words with action and stump up billions of dollars to wean the world off fossil fuels.

“We had a very constructive set of discussions and there was a real sense of urgency in the room,” Britain’s Sharma told reporters after the meeting in Italy’s financial capital.

The COP26 conference in Glasgow aims to secure bolder climate action from the nearly 200 countries that signed the 2015 Paris agreement and agreed to try to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

Sharma said delegates in Milan agreed to do more to keep the 1.5C target within reach and deliver on a \$100 billion per year pledge to help the most vulnerable nations confront climate change. “The energy that came forward from the [youth] did galvanise the ministers,” Sharma said. “As we go forward in the next few weeks and into the COP, we must always keep [their] voices ... in our minds.”

New energy and funding pledges from the United States and China have raised negotiators’ hopes, but many G20 countries – including leading polluters such as China and India – have yet to announce updates of their short-term climate plans.

Sharma said national action plans needed to include more ambitious targets for emissions reduction. U.S. climate envoy John Kerry also urged big economies to commit to more radical policies. “We now have about 55 percent of global GDP [gross domestic product] committed to undertake tracks that will hold the temperature to 1.5 degrees,” he said.

Wealthy nations pledged about 10 ago to mobilise \$100bn a year to help vulnerable countries adapt and transition to cleaner energy, but they are still short of their 2020 goal.

“The bottom line is, folks, as we stand here today, we believe we can make enormous progress in Glasgow, moving rapidly towards the new goals that the science is telling us we must achieve,” Kerry said. That means achieving a 45 percent reduction in carbon emissions in the next 10 years. “This is the decisive decade,” Kerry said.

However, he noted, the sum of all 191 submissions as they are currently written would increase emissions between now and 2030 by 16 percent. Financing climate action will be vital to the success of COP26, said Oscar Soria, campaign director at the US-based activist network Avaaz who was in Milan for the talks.

“Developing and developed nations should urgently sit together to design a plan. Without real money at the table it will be difficult to build trust in the negotiations in Glasgow,” Soria said.

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