

Youth activists protest against climate inaction at COP26

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Thousands take part in two days of youth-led demonstrations in Glasgow calling for greater action from world leaders on the climate crisis

Glasgow, November 5 (RHC)-- Youth activists are taking over the United Nations COP26 summit in Scotland to protest against what they say is a dangerous lack of action by leaders over climate change.

Two days of demonstrations, including a student march on Friday led by Greta Thunberg, are planned to highlight the disconnect between the glacial pace of emissions reductions and the climate emergency already swamping countries across the world, with thousands of people taking part. More demonstrations are planned for tomorrow, Saturday.

“We’re expecting lots of people to come and join us in the streets, and not only youth but also adults supporting youth, and adults that want climate action,” activist Isabelle Axelsson, 20, with the youth movement Fridays for Future, which organized the march, told Reuters news agency.

Friday’s rally comes at the end of the first week of the COP26 talks in Glasgow. The summit aims to secure enough promises from governments to cut greenhouse gas emissions – mainly from fossil fuels – to keep the rise in the average global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), which scientists say is a tipping point towards far more extreme weather events.

So far, the summit has yielded deals to try to phase out coal over the next three decades, reduce deforestation and curb methane – a far more potent, if short-lived, greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. It has also showcased a jumble of financial pledges, buoying hopes that national commitments to bring down emissions could actually be implemented.

The head of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, said on Thursday that emissions cut pledges made so far – if all implemented – could potentially restrict warming to 1.8C (3.2F). But some UN negotiators and non-profit organisations said that assessment was too rosy, and much more work had to be done.

Campaigners also say the world’s biggest carbon emitters need to do much more. The Earth has already warmed by 1.1C (2F) above preindustrial levels. Current projections based on planned emissions cuts over the next decade are for it to hit 2.7C (4.9F) by the year 2100.

Thunberg, who was expected to address Friday’s rally later in the afternoon, has been highly critical of the COP26 summit, calling it a “two-week celebration of business as usual and blah blah blah”.

Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a climate justice activist from the Philippines, echoed Thunberg’s criticisms. “This UN climate summit, we’re once again seeing world leaders saying big words and big promises,” Tan told the AFP news agency on Friday.

“We need drastic carbon dioxide emission cuts, reparations from the Global North to the Global South to use for adaptation and to manage loss and damages, and we need to put an end to the fossil fuel industry.”

Al Jazeera’s Nick Clark, reporting from Glasgow, said the rally was where all the “passion and anger” over climate change was in the city. “Thousands of protesters are beginning to gather ... and amongst their demands is a change to the system of these big UN climate conferences where thousands of delegates and politicians come from around the world, descend on a city for a bit, and then decide not very much,” Clark said.

“They demand that their voices are heard, that the voice of young people is heard, because it is their future after all,” he added.

The rally came as the British president of the COP26 conference, Alok Sharma, urged national negotiators to push harder through Friday, with a week left to secure more ambitious commitments to stop the world’s slide into climate catastrophe. “It is not possible for a large number of unresolved issues to continue into week two,” Sharma said in a note published by the UN.

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