

French police attack protesters with tear gas at Total's meeting

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Paris, May 27 (RHC)-- French police officers have fired teargas to disperse climate demonstrators gathered in Paris to raise their voices against an annual general meeting of oil company TotalEnergies. Called by a coalition of non-governmental organizations, dozens of protesters gathered around the Salle Pleyel venue from dawn on Friday, and were heard chanting slogans "All we want is to knock down Total" and "One, two, and three degrees, we have Total to thank." "We won't let them go," said Marie Cohuet, spokeswoman for climate campaigners Alternatiba.

TotalEnergies “embodies the worst of what is done in terms of the exploitation of people and the planet,” Cohuet said. Energy giants posted record profits last year as the war in Ukraine sent oil and gas prices soaring.

Friday’s unrest comes on the heels of Tuesday’s protest outside Shell’s annual general meeting in London, where protesters were shouting “Go to hell, Shell!” On Tuesday, activists from pressure groups including Greenpeace, Fossil Free London, Neon, and Tipping Point interrupted the opening speech of chief executive Wael Sawan, while others attempted to occupy the stage.

In an interview with La Croix newspaper on Wednesday, TotalEnergies chief executive Patrick Pouyanne refused to accept the criticism against his group. Pouyanne said his company must meet growing demand from developing nations. “No, TotalEnergies cannot lower oil demand on its own”.

Climate protests have become a regular feature of annual meetings in recent years, with campaigns focused particularly on banks such as HSBC and Barclays that lend to fossil fuel projects as well as oil companies including Shell’s rival BP. Last year, three people were arrested after Shell was forced to pause its AGM and environmental protesters chanted: “We will stop you.”

Last week, parts of northern Italy’s Emilia-Romagna region received half their average annual rainfall in just 36 hours. Rivers burst their banks and thousands of acres of farmland lied submerged, forcing an estimated 20,000 people to leave homeless and 13 were confirmed dead.

It was just the latest weather disaster to hit Europe where as atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide increase, so too does extreme weather. Consecutive years of drought have afflicted farmers in Spain and southern France, while last year there were unprecedented heatwaves across the continent.

“Climate change is here and we are living the consequences. It isn’t some remote prospect, it is the new normal,” Paola Pino d’Astore, an expert at the Italian Society of Environmental Geology (SIGEA), told Reuters.

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