

Tens of thousands rally in New York demanding end to fossil fuels

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New York, September 18 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of people have rallied in the U.S. city of New York, calling for urgent action against climate change ahead of the opening of the United Nations General Assembly.

Protesters from some 700 organisations and activist groups took part in Sunday's rally, shouting that humanity's future depended on ending fossil fuels and carrying signs reading, "Fossil fuels are killing us" and "I didn't vote for fires and floods."

Many aimed their wrath directly at United States President Joe Biden who is seeking re-election next year, urging him to stop approving new oil and gas projects, phase out current ones and declare a climate emergency with larger executive powers.

"We hold the power of the people, the power you need to win this election," said 17-year-old Emma Buretta of Brooklyn of the youth protest group Fridays for Future. "If you want to win in 2024, if you do not want the blood of my generation to be on your hands, end fossil fuels."

The rally, dubbed the March to End Fossil Fuels, was the opening salvo to New York's Climate Week, where world leaders in business, politics and the arts gather to try to save the planet. Organisers estimated that some 75,000 people joined Sunday's event.

The march featured politicians such as U.S. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and actors Susan Sarandon, Ethan Hawke, Edward Norton, Kyra Sedgwick and Kevin Bacon. "We have people all across the world in the streets, showing up, demanding a cessation of what is killing us," Ocasio-Cortez told a cheering crowd. "We have to send a message that some of us are going to be living on on this planet 30, 40, 50 years from now. And we will not take no for an answer."

A UN climate report released this month named 2025 as the deadline for global greenhouse gas emissions to peak – followed by a sharp drop thereafter – if humanity is to keep global warming in line with targets set in the 2015 Paris Treaty. The Paris agreement has successfully driven climate action, but "much more is needed now on all fronts", said the report, which will underpin a crucial climate summit in Dubai at the end of the year.

Achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 – another Paris goal – will also require phasing out the burning of all fossil fuels whose emissions cannot be captured or compensated. Analilia Mejia, director of the activist group Center for Popular Democracy, said the world needs to wake up and "take immediate action". She pointed to recent extreme weather events – from fires in Canada, Hawaii and Greece to flooding in Libya – as demonstrating the seriousness of the "existential crisis" posed by climate change. "We are here to demand that the administration declare a climate emergency," she said.

While Biden has made a historic push for green manufacturing, offering billions of dollars for clean energy projects, some young activists say he has not acted forcefully enough to lead the U.S. off dependence on fossil fuels.

Nearly one-third of the world's planned drilling for oil and gas between now and 2050 is by US interests, environmental activists calculate. Over the past 100 years, the US has put more heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than any other country, although China now emits more carbon pollution on an annual basis.

Top world scientists warn that the world is likely to experience new record heat in the next five years and that global temperatures are more likely than not to breach a crucial threshold of an average 1.5C rise.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has organised a Climate Ambition summit for Wednesday, during the General Assembly, at which he hopes to accelerate the ongoing work to counter climate change by governments as well as private sector organisations and financial institutions.

"History will remember their action, or inaction," said Mejia. "And if we're lucky, human beings will be around to remember what [world leaders] did in this summit."

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