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EarthBeat



Students march as part of the global climate strike Sept. 20 in Quezon City, Philippines. (Rojinie Ramsay-Cortés)



by Brian Roewe

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After roughly 6,000 actions in 180-plus countries bookended by two main days of demonstrations, the third global climate strike has come to a close.

For Solenne Ramsay-Cortés, the climate strike Sept. 20 in Quezon City in the Philippines was her first.

A high school student at Assumption College San Lorenzo, the 15-year-old saw the demonstrations as a stand "for my future, your future and the Earth's future."

She was also fueled by frustration.

"I find it sad that years ago, young teens were giving talks about the importance of climate justice, and yet here we are today still doing the same thing: bringing awareness to this issue," Ramsay-Cortés told NCR.

Other climate strikers in the Philippines and elsewhere identified a need for still greater attention to climate change, whether in overcoming denial, distraction or simply lack of information. The strikes, they hope, can help tear down those barriers and build up support for finding solutions and taking action.

Ramsay-Cortés was joined by her mom and hundreds more at the protest that began outside the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University, and kicked off a week of strikes across the Southeast Asian country. The strike came amid the "Year of the Youth" declared by the country's Catholic bishops, with the theme of "Filipino Youth in Mission."

To her, there seems to be a persistent cycle of "the past generations making mistakes and expecting the future generations [the youth] to correct them."

That's a cycle, Ramsay-Cortés said, that needs to change.

In 185 countries, the Sept. 20 and 27 global climate strikes drew an estimated 7.6 million people young and old to 6,100 actions, according to organizers who called it

the largest yet distributed mobilization calling for action on climate change. The two dates came on either end of the United Nations General Assembly in New York (Sept. 17-30), which opened this year with a climate action summit.

Related: Intergenerational solidarity: Elders join youth in climate strikes

A day after the Sept. 20 strikes, the U.N. presented the Fridays for Future movement, inspired by Swedish 16-year-old Greta Thunberg who joined strikers in New York City, with the 2019 Champions of the Earth award, its highest environmental honor.

Before and after the strikes, Thunberg pressed elected leaders and older generations to save any plaudits or praise for the youth strikers. Instead, she urged them to first listen to what climate scientists are saying — that global greenhouse gas emissions must be cut nearly in half by 2030, and reach net-zero by 2050, to hold average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), compared to pre-industrial levels — and then to take serious action.

"For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight," she said in a speech Sept. 23 at the U.N. Climate Action Summit.



Solenne Ramsay-Cortés shoots video during the climate strike Sept. 20 outside the offices of the Commission on Human Rights for Philippines, in Quezon City. (Rojinie Ramsay-Cortés)

As Thunberg offered blunt assessments, she continued to draw criticism.

The barbs lobbed by Fox News host Laura Ingraham — comparing the youth activists to Stephen King's *Children of the Corn*, while incorrectly stating that observed warming is consistent with past climate trends and chastising Pope Francis for lending his support — drew condemnation for "false reporting" from an order of women religious.

"In her attacks on the activists and on Pope Francis, at no time did she [Ingraham] present any reasoned rebuttals except to repeat the fossil fuel lobby's line that climate is always changing and there is no reason for alarm. While Ingraham mocks those who raise the alarm, we already are experiencing the effects of climate change," said the provincials of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in the USA in a joint statement.

Outside the U.S., the climate strikes also served as a way to bring more visibility to what they consider an emergency situation for the planet.

Ruby Sampson, 18, and Ayakha Melithafa, 17, both members of the African Climate Alliance, told reporters on a press call days before strike that their main motivation was education, with higher-level schooling out of reach for many in their country.

Sampson said that while people perceive there are more droughts and flooding, they are less likely to recognize climate change's role — that as global temperatures warm, it can extend dry seasons and bring about fewer, but heavier rainfalls.

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With the African Climate Alliance, the teens have spoken at schools with their peers, often beginning not by telling them what climate change is, but instead starting by asking how they think they've been affected. Melithafa recalled helping her mother, a farmer, understand how climate change related to the changes in river levels and rain she was witnessing.

"We here are just trying to raise awareness just to get people talking about it and connecting the dots," Sampson said.

Mitzi Tan, a 21-year-old recent college graduate who joined the strike in Quezon City, said there was a similar situation in the Philippines, "where people don't realize how bad the situation is here." For instance, that the archipelago nation is among

the most vulnerable in the world to impacts from climate change, like more powerful typhoons, rising seas and strains on crop and fisheries production.

Part of that, she said, is a lack of connecting observed changes to the impacts scientists have identified accompanying a warming climate. Another factor is people preoccupied with other pressing issues, such as hunger, homelessness and rising oil prices.

In meeting with local environmental defenders, often indigenous people, Tan said they typically already know the impacts of climate change, and their conversations focus on the reasons why. She added that since climate change is a problem that affects everyone, everybody — including the government — should acknowledge it and seek solutions.

"It is something that we need to be talking about," Tan said.



A young person stands inside a cardboard box decorated with a climate change slogan while participating in the Global Climate Strike in New York City Sept. 20. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Maria Lourdes Guinto, a parishioner at Our Lady of Hope Parish in Quezon City, told NCR she hoped the strike would "elevate" awareness among friends, family and others "that global warming is a serious matter," and push them to consider the small steps they can take to lower their impact on the planet. She also wanted to show how faith motivates her and others, Catholic or otherwise, to care for creation.

"This planet is co-shared with every single being, thus each has a responsibility to contribute to its maintenance," said Guinto, a collaborator with the Global Catholic Climate Movement and mother of three millennial sons.

As with many strikes, those in Quezon City had an intergenerational aspect to them.

Marilou Fernando-Canuzo, 60, was inspired by her youngest son to join the Fridays for Future movement. The strike Sept. 20 was their second, following the previous global climate strike in May.

"A mother would naturally do anything to ensure that her children will have a bright future ahead, or should I say, a better world to live in," Fernando-Canuzo told NCR.

She hoped the demonstration would inspire other parents and older people to get involved, to "understand that climate change is no joke." But more than anything, she hoped it would lead to the Philippines government "to take this seriously."

"I saw how hopeful our future generations are," Fernando-Canuzo said, reflecting on the climate strikes. "I saw their fighting spirit. These are the values I saw in them. They inspired me to also fight for what's right."

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