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Participants of COP27 arrive at the convening in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, on Nov. 7. (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)



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Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt — November 8, 2022

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As COP27, the annual United Nations climate conference, gets underway in this Red Sea resort town, Catholic groups worry that world leaders might fail to implement the previous agreements meant to tackle climate change and support adaptation in African countries.

The groups said they were disappointed in the convening's opening days that few world leaders have demonstrated progress in implementing their climate commitments or financial support for countries bearing the brunt of climate change.

"The leaders have started giving speeches, but no one is talking about what we want to hear," said Roman Sieler, the European co-president of FIMCAP, an umbrella organization for Catholic youth organizations. "We want implementation and compensation for the damage and loss caused by severe climate change."

"We want action," he added. "There has been severe loss and damage that has affected many people, and that's why we are here to push this agenda as Catholic youths."

During the opening ceremony of COP27, more than 100 world leaders gathered in Sharm El-Sheikh to push for full implementation of the Paris Agreement. The convening of the global conference — which 196 countries, 45,000 people and 120 world leaders will attend — reflected on devastating floods, unprecedented heat waves, severe droughts and formidable storms, all unequivocal signs of the unfolding climate emergency.

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This year's convening is also taking place against the backdrop of inadequate ambition to curb greenhouse gas emissions. According to the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, carbon emissions need to be cut by 45% by 2030, compared to 2010 levels, to meet the central Paris Agreement goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century.

"We will be holding people to account, be they presidents, prime ministers or CEOs. Our policies, our businesses, our infrastructure, our actions must all align with the

Paris Agreement," U.N. climate change executive secretary Simon Stiell said during the inauguration of the conference. "The heart of the implementation of climate pledges lies with everybody everywhere in the world, doing everything they possibly can to address the climate crisis."

Catholic groups told EarthBeat that such pleas by the COP27 delegates indicate that world leaders are not ready to implement the Paris Agreement and work together to tackle the global challenge of climate change unless they are begged to do so.



McIvan Vamboi, the national president of the Catholic Youth Organization in Sierra Leone, at COP27 on Nov. 7 (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

"Climate change is a real disaster that is really weighing in on us. As youths, we are worried that we may lose our planet if we are not careful," warned McIvan Vamboi, the national president of the Catholic Youth Organization in Sierra Leone. "We have also to push the question of what else after COP27. I know that they will still hold another COP28 next year in Dubai. But the question is, are we achieving the goals?"

Many Catholic actors said they started to become worried on Sunday when delegates struggled to reach an agreement on the discussion of loss and damage, resulting in the delay of the start of the climate summit.

Delegates spent hours deliberating on how "loss and damage" — which refers to the devastating consequences of climate change suffered by the poorest and most vulnerable countries, and how to help or compensate them — should be put on the agenda.

"We are worried that we may not get what we want from this COP27 because our leaders still want to discuss issues affecting people instead of implementing them," said Fr. Angelito Andig Cortez from the Philippines, representing the Franciscan delegation at COP27. "However, we must support all civil society organizations and church actors as they advocate and act for climate justice and demand that our leaders build efforts to engage people directly working on and directly impacted by climate change."

Some Catholic charity groups attending the convening still believe that it's not too late to push the voices of vulnerable communities around the globe to the front line of the climate crisis.



Fr. Angelito Andig Cortez from the Philippines, representing the Franciscan delegation at COP27, on Nov. 7 (Courtesy of Angelito Andig Cortez)

"It will be an opportunity to advocate for climate justice and bring to the world's attention the conditions of vulnerable communities and their sufferings as a result of climate change, even though they are not directly responsible for it," Caritas Internationalis Secretary General Aloysius John said in a statement shared Nov. 6. "Climate change has had a major impact on the current food and migration crisis. The international community and especially the States responsible for the degradation of our Common Home must act immediately."

Caritas Internationalis, the humanitarian and development organization of the Catholic Church, said they were also going to push for the inclusion of loss and damage to ensure wealthy nations responsible for the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions compensate climate-vulnerable nations.

"Without a reliable and comprehensive financing facility to ensure funding to help countries cope with climate-induced loss and damage, the most vulnerable countries

will sink deeper into debt and poverty every time they are hit by climate disasters, for which they are not responsible," added John.

In the meantime, Vamboi is optimistic that the key issues being raised by churches, nongovernmental organizations, civil societies and some governments can still be achieved if they put their differences aside and work together to save the planet.

On Tuesday, Austria announced it will direct 50 million euro to fund loss and damage. Scotland, which last year at COP26 in Glasgow, became the first country to pledge financial assistance on loss and damage, also committed an additional 5 million euro to its initial pledge. Belgium, Denmark and Germany have also pledged support.

"Despite our worries, we are still hopeful that things will change," Vamboi said. "Our voices will be heard. We also believe that it's each of our responsibility to take care of our environment; however small an effort you make, it will change a big deal."

Editor's Note: *This story was updated Nov. 8 at 12:18 CT with announcements at COP27 related to loss and damage.*

This story appears in the **COP27 Egypt** feature series. View the full series.