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Activists display banners calling for action on climate change and against world poverty in St Peter's Square in Rome on Sunday. Photograph: Gabriel Bouys/AFP/Getty Images

[Rosie Scammell](#) in Rome

Thousands of campaigners and religious leaders have marched through Rome, backing Pope Francis's uncompromising environmental message ahead of a Vatican conference on climate change, and urging world leaders to take action.

Holy See officials will this week discuss the environment with activists and scientists at a meeting at which [Naomi Klein](#), a prominent social activist, will take centre stage alongside Cardinal Peter Turkson, one of the pontiff's most senior aides.

Soon after the release of [Pope Francis's encyclical](#) on the environment, regarded as a landmark intervention in the global climate change debate, campaigners on Sunday travelled to Rome from across the globe to thank the Argentinian pontiff for his papal letter.

In the encyclical, Francis directed sharp criticism at global leaders for their failure to combat climate change. It was greeted with a hugely positive response from environmentalists, who have seized on the pope's message ahead of a [United Nations climate change conference](#) to be held in Paris in December.

The UN summit is aimed at reaching a global deal on climate change, but as the pontiff noted, previous meetings have ended in disappointment, with decision-making paralysed by disagreements.

Alongside Klein and Turkson, the conservation group WWF has been invited to this week's Vatican conference and had a strong presence at the rally on Sunday, described as a "historic event" by Samantha Smith, leader of the organisation's global climate and energy initiative.

"We have seen that climate change is such a big and important issue that you can't solve it in a corner with environmental groups," Smith said. "That's why the mobilisation of people of faith, including the Catholic church, is so important."

Activists at the One Earth, One Family event broke through the silence enveloping early-morning Rome with singing and chanting, waving paper birds high over the central Piazza Farnese before marching to the Vatican.

"The reason we are here is to thank [Pope Francis](#), but above all it is to bring a message to the people and politicians on the Paris climate change conference – to make strong, ambitious and binding commitments," said Andrea Stocchiero, from the voluntary group Focsiv, co-organiser of the event.

While a few hundred people began the multifaith march, holding banners and sheltering from the sun under giant paper leaves, organisers said about 5,000 were present at the end of the march in St Peter's Square. There, Francis exhorted a multifaith effort to help protect the environment. "I encourage the collaboration between persons and associations of different religions on behalf of an integral ecology," he said.

Among them was [Yeb Saño](#), the Philippines' former chief climate change negotiator at the UN, who is now a spiritual ambassador for the march co-organisers, OurVoices, a multifaith environmental group.

Saño praised the pontiff for his "courage and leadership" and said the march represented "a particularly amazing day to celebrate".

"We know that the adverse impacts of climate change are hitting the Philippines and it's unfair, because we have very little contribution to the causes of climate change and we are at the receiving end of it," he said. Pope Francis visited the predominantly Catholic country in January, little over a year after a devastating typhoon killed thousands of people in the Philippines. The November 2013 storm was the strongest recorded to hit land and was seen as an example of the archipelago's vulnerability to the elements.

The pope's encyclical was released five months after his Asia trip. While Pope Francis has ensured Catholic voices reach the centre of the

climate change debate, organisers of the Rome march were keen to fulfil his wish of going beyond the Christian faith.

Kiran Bali, who travelled from Yorkshire in the UK on behalf of the Hindu community, said it was imperative that religious leaders such as herself get involved. "It's so clear that the world is at a crucial tipping point due to climate change and it's so important that faith leaders take action on this important issue," she said. "Now is the time to unite, to come together and to really make a difference to protect the earth from further destruction."

Representing the global Anglican community, David Moxon said a global response was necessary as ultimately all would be affected by climate change. "The challenge facing Europe and all of the industrialised and industrialising world is very important – we're going to choke or cook unless we do something about it," he said.

Massimiliano Pasqui, from the Institute of Biometeorology at Italy's National Research Council, said the *bel paese* has even greater reason than its neighbours to act on climate change.

"For us in Italy – in the middle of the Mediterranean – we're in one of the most vulnerable places. It's necessary for us to build strategies because in respect to other countries in northern Europe, what we are up against has a bigger impact on our society."

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## China makes carbon pledge ahead of Paris climate change summit



China submits carbon-curbing plan to UN ahead of Paris climate change summit, saying it will 'work hard' to peak emissions earlier than 2030 target.



French President Francois Hollande (L) looks at Chinese Premier Li Keqiang leaving after a meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France. Photograph: Philippe Wojazer/Reuters

[Jennifer Duggan](#) in Shanghai.

[China](#) will aim to cut its greenhouse gas emissions per unit of gross domestic product by 60-65% from 2005 levels under a plan submitted to the United Nations ahead of crucial climate change talks in Paris later this year.

The pledge has been eagerly awaited as the country is the world's largest carbon emitter.

China said it would increase the share of non-fossil fuels as part of its primary energy consumption to about 20% by 2030, and peak emissions by around the same point, though it would "work hard" to do so earlier.

The figures are contained in [a document](#) submitted to the United Nations ahead of the next round of UN climate talks in Paris. All countries are expected to submit their national pledges to reduce carbon emissions beyond 2020, also known as Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC).

China plans to increase its installed capacity of wind power to 200GW and solar power to around 100 gigawatts (GW), up from 95.81GW and 28GW today, respectively. It will also increase its use of natural gas which is expected to make up more than 10% of its primary energy consumption by 2020.

According to estimates by E3G, a European-based environmental thinktank, China's plan will see it install as much low-carbon energy as the entire US electricity system capacity to date.

China's pledge largely reflects commitments it made in November last year as part of [an agreement struck with the US](#).

Li Shuo, senior climate and energy policy officer with Greenpeace, said he believes the figures announced are floor

figures and that China is definitely capable of over-achieving.

He said it reflects the actions that are being taken domestically as China attempts to reduce its toxic levels of air pollution that are a result of its rapid coal-based economic growth. China's premier Li Keqiang has previously ["declared war" on pollution](#), describing it as a "blight" on people's quality of life.

Coal consumption still accounts for around 66% of China's energy consumption. Last year, China's cabinet announced a plan to cap coal consumption by 2020 at a level of 4.2bn tonnes and for coal to make up no more than 62% of the primary energy mix by the same year.

Changhua Wu, China director of the Climate Group said China's INDC is a "positive boost" to the international climate change process. "China's effort to align its domestic growth agenda and global climate change agenda is a leading example of how a fundamental shift is needed to grow the economy differently," she said.

In its document submitted to the UN, China said the outcomes of the negotiations in Paris "should take into account differentiated historical responsibilities", a reference to the fact [developed countries have put more carbon into the atmosphere over time than developing countries](#).



China and US carbon pledges. Photograph: Guardian

However, according to the Climate Group, due to China's massive economic development and taking into account emissions from 1990 to now, the country has almost caught up with the US's total historical emissions.

China's pledge is expected to give an important boost to

efforts to reach a global deal on reducing emissions beyond 2020 in Paris, which UN secretary general [Ban Ki-moon warned on Monday were moving at a snail's pace](#).

Mohamed Adow, Christian Aid's senior climate change adviser, said China's pledge is a "huge step". Ahead of the talks in Copenhagen in 2009, China and the US were criticised for holding back progress, and "now China is leading the way. It shows that China is starting to do its bit. This is a new era for climate politics," said Adow.

However, it is not likely that the pledges that have been submitted, including China's, are sufficient to keep global temperatures rises below the internationally-agreed target of 2C, according to Li Shuo.

"We think the collective ambition of what has been putting on the table, in particular major emitters (EU, China, US) are not sufficient to help us maintain below 2C," said Li. "Now it is the task of the political process all the way to Paris to ensure we have a robust agreement by the end of this year to enhance action further."

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# Climate change is a 'medical emergency'



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05 Jul 2015 13:27 [Sipho Kings](#)

The impacts of climate change will reverse decades of progress on improving world health and will be keenly felt by



children, writes Sipho Kings

The world will be up to an average of 5°C warmer by the end of this century. Science says this will utterly change the world and the environment that human beings rely on to live. Numerous reports on that change paint a dystopian future, where humans are constantly assaulted by floods, droughts, crop failures and myriad other ecosystem failures.

In the last month several reports have tried to look at the impacts that this change will have on human health. These all point to a world where the diseases are exacerbated in both impact and the resultant death toll. Most affected will be children.

Emergency response required

The Lancet commission on health and climate change had similar warnings in its findings, published late last month. It looked at current deaths from global warming – such as record-breaking heatwaves in Europe killing tens of thousands of people – and flooding from hurricanes hitting higher ground thanks to increased sea levels.

Professor Hugh Montgomery, the commission's co-chair, said at the launch, "Climate change is a medical emergency." This required the same kind of response that was traditionally reserved for short-term emergencies, using all the technologies available now to lower carbon emissions and adapt to the change, she said.

That technology could avert serious health disaster in the future, the commission found. By cutting carbon emissions within the next few decades, it said premature deaths from air

pollution could be cut by 500 000 a year by 2030. Two-million deaths could also be saved each year by 2100.

Last year the World Health Organisation said that one in eight premature deaths each year are due to a combination of indoor and outdoor air pollution. This equates to seven-million deaths a year, it said. In another report, it calculated that 88% of the years of life lost as a result of climate change – through ill-health, disability or early death – fell on children in developing countries. The causes of death ranged from malaria, malnutrition, diarrhoea and inland flooding, it said.

“Climate change opposes the health gains achieved by social development, and may hold back progress in the poorest countries.”

Children to be most affected

No Time For Games, a report by Australian-based Doctors for the Environment, said that climate change poses a significant and growing threat to public health. But it would be those who did little to cause the change who would be the most affected: “It is our children who, despite being the least responsible for causing it, unfairly bear the brunt of the impact.”

Children were already vulnerable to failings of the economy, society and ecosystems, the report said. “Children are more liable to succumb to bacterial or viral food and waterborne infections.” This was due to their consuming more liquids, placing contaminated objects in their mouths, and their higher metabolic and breathing rate, it said.

Diarrhoea is the second-leading cause of death for children under the age of five, according to the World Health Organisation. Around 750 000 children a year die from this alone, and the WHO predicted that this number would only increase thanks to a changing climate.

The reports also point to the less physical impacts of disaster. In 2001 the World Health Organisation warned of the psychological dangers of climate change exacerbated disasters. It said that up to half of all people exposed to natural disasters develop mental diseases. These range from depression or anxiety, to post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Irreversible climate change

In its five-yearly report on climate change report, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said last year that the world would be up to an average of five degrees warmer this century. This change would be "irreversible" and would completely change life on earth, it warned.

Until 2050 the majority of climate change health impacts would be felt through the exacerbation of existing problems, it found. This ranges from more conditions such as asthma to heatstroke.

Beyond 2050 temperature increases would substantially change life, it said. Temperatures would be so high that the human body would be unable to handle the heat. This would mean unprotected outdoor labour—as well as recreation—will be impossible, it warned.

South Africa's main climate change research and planning—the Long-Term Adaptation Scenarios—warn that the interior of the country will be up to 6°C warmer by the end of this century. Coastal regions will warm by half that, but will have to deal with increasing sea levels.

The impacts of this change will be numerous and profound, the scenarios warn. Communicable diseases (TB, cholera and HIV/Aids) and noncommunicable diseases (respiratory and cardiovascular) would be the most keenly-felt. But there would be myriad other health problems—from mental and occupational health stresses to heat stress and malaria.

These would be put on top of existing stresses, such as low crop yields and water scarcity to create an environment in which people struggled to survive, the scenarios warn.

## Solutions

Every single research group concluded that these potential health disasters could be avoided by lowering carbon emissions. Before the Industrial Revolution kicked off, carbon emissions in the atmosphere were at a level of 250 parts per million. This year they reached an average of 400 parts per million. At this rate, the UN warns that average temperatures will increase by up to 5°C this century.

To avoid this, world governments are holding global climate negotiations in Paris in November – at COP 21 – in order to reach some sort of an agreement to lower carbon emissions. By cutting emissions by up to 80% by the middle of the century, negotiators have said temperature increases could be kept below 2°C.

But the consensus on COP21 seems to be that an agreement will be signed, but without the ambition required to lower carbon emission to a level that would keep the world below such a temperature increase.

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