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African civil society at UN Climate Conference demands for finance, emission budget

Warsaw, Poland (PANA) – As the UN Climate Change Conference opened Monday in Warsaw, Poland, the civil society groups across Africa have demanded that developed countries fulfill and implement their commitments under the UN climate convention, in order to fairly share a necessary 'emissions budget', and avoid catastrophic climate change.

The group said at a press conference here Monday that Africa is in the frontline for climate change impacts.

"We watch with horror what has happened in the Philippines, and know that it is happening in our homes too," Mithili Muthyala, the Secretary General of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), said.

"I don't know how rich countries can ignore the facts being screamed by mother nature, nor the cries being made by the poor - the time has come to cut climate changing causing emissions and to cut them deep," Mwende added.

Habtemariam Abate, from the Ethiopian Civil Society Network on Climate Change who spoke at the same conference, said "Africans expect our governments to stand firm on setting an emissions budget, as recommended by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). They must then share this budget fairly, based on historical responsibilities and capacities."

"These negotiations are about the emissions budget, whether governments admit it or not, they either negotiate to share the budget fairly, or they plan to exceed it," Abate stated.

The UN Climate Change Conference in Warsaw began Monday with the newly-elected President of the Conference of Parties (COP 19), Marcin Korolec, who is also Poland's Environment Minister, promising that he would over the next few days spare no effort to find a consensus and also promised transparency and an inclusive process.

"Climate is a global issue, global problem. It's a problem if we can't coordinate our actions. It becomes opportunity when we act together. One country or even a group cannot make a difference. But acting together, united as we are here, we can make a difference," he stated.

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), who addressed the opening session, highlighted the key areas in which COP 19 can make progress.

"We must clarify finance that enables the entire world to move towards low-carbon development. We must launch the construction of a mechanism that helps vulnerable populations to respond to the unanticipated effects of climate change. We must deliver an effective path to pre-2020 ambition, and develop further clarity for elements of the new agreement that will shape the post-2020 global climate, economic and development agendas".

The meeting in Warsaw is also expected to focus on decisions that will make fully operational the new institutional arrangements of the UNFCCC for developing nations in finance, adaptation and technology. These are the Green Climate Fund, the Technology Mechanism and the Adaptation Committee, all agreed in Cancun in 2010.

In order to showcase the growing climate leadership and contributions to the climate challenge from all sides, a Business Leaders' Meeting, organized by the UN and the Polish host government will take place next week alongside the meeting, the UNFCCC stated.

Cities and regions will gather for the first ever "Cities Day" that highlights their actions. And a Gender Day will showcase women's role in meeting the climate challenge.

Also next week, the UNFCCC secretariat will showcase Momentum for Change lighthouse activities, climate action stories that demonstrates positive results for innovative finance, women and the urban poor.

In addition, the initiative will launch a new area that focuses on contributions by the information and technology sector to reduce emissions and increase adaptive capacity to respond.

The conference in Warsaw, holding from 11-22 November, is currently being attended by government delegates, representatives from businesses and industries, environmental organizations, research institutions and the media.

More than 100 Heads of State and Government and Ministers are scheduled to attend the high-level segment of the conference which begins on 19 November and ends with a decision-making plenary on 22 November.

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