

Youth on every continent united in strikes to demand climate action

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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Young people from more than 150 countries skipped school in a show of unity on Friday, September 20. It was part of another series of global climate protests. They urged world leaders to act more quickly to combat climate change.

The protests started in Australia where an estimated 300,000 young people in the cities took to the streets. Similar scenes soon began unfolding in towns and cities across the globe, from small island nations such as Kiribati to booming cities like Mumbai, India. Protesters gathered in small groups in Africa and in swelling masses in European capitals.

In London, England, thousands marched by the Houses of Parliament. Some held signs saying "Winter is NOT coming" and "I'm taking time out of my lessons to teach you." Martha Lickman, a 13-year-old Londoner, **clutched** a sign that read "Oceans are rising and so are we." "We're doing our bit, eating less meat, using less plastic," she said, "but it's still on the government to do something."

Outside Washington, D.C., students at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, walked out of class. They prepared to meet other protesters near the Capitol building.

World Leaders Will Meet For Climate Summit

Police escorted students on a 50-minute walk to the nearest train station for the ride into the U.S. capital. Maddie Graham, age 16, gripping a red-and-white megaphone, shouted with hundreds of her classmates: "Whose future?!" "Our future!"

The protests had monumental turnout that stretched across every continent. Still, it remains unclear whether the high-profile demonstrations can **fundamentally** alter the global forces contributing to climate change. Can elected leaders be compelled to make the difficult choices necessary to halt the world's warming? Transformative change is precisely what those behind Friday's marches have demanded. This includes a swift shift away from fossil fuels toward clean energy. It also includes halting deforestation, protecting the world's oceans and embracing more sustainable agriculture.

The strikes came three days before world leaders were set to gather at the United Nations (U.N.) on September 23 for a much-anticipated climate summit. U.N. Secretary General António Guterres has insisted countries promise to reach zero emissions by 2050.

These promises could include reduced government funding for fossil fuels, such as oil and coal. It could also mean **halting** the construction of coal-fired power plants. Carbon dioxide is created by the burning of fossil fuels for energy. This causes more heat to get trapped in the atmosphere.

"I told leaders not to come with fancy speeches, but with concrete commitments," Guterres said last week.

Youth Put Pressure On Their Leaders

The U.N. summit will offer a key test of the world's nations. Many countries came together to sign the Paris climate agreement in 2015. This meeting will show if the countries can actually follow through on slashing carbon **emissions** as rapidly as scientists say is needed to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

The Paris agreement reached by nearly all of the world's countries in France

aimed to fight global warming by cutting carbon emissions.

A generation of youth are also adding to the pressure to cut emissions. They are demanding that leaders take the problem more seriously — and act more swiftly. The Friday demonstrations came more than six months after hundreds of thousands of students staged a similar coordinated effort to demand urgent action on climate change.

Among the largest of the protests was likely the one in New York City. It was led by 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who testified before U.S. Congress last week that nations must take unheard of actions to cut their carbon emissions in the next 10 years.

"I am submitting this testimony because I don't want you to listen to me," she said. "I want you to listen to the scientists. And I want you to unite behind the science. And then I want you to take real action."

Protesters in **climate-conscious** Germany planned more than 500 events to mark the global climate strike on Friday. The demonstrations in Germany come as Chancellor Angela Merkel's government faces increasing public pressure. Germans want bold new laws to fight climate action following heatwaves and protests dubbed Fridays for Future.

Germany's governing parties were holding a special meeting on Friday. The government is trying to finalize a new set of climate protection laws.

Strike Events Planned In All 50 States

In Moscow, Russia, Arshak Makichyan is a 24-year-old violinist. He says he was inspired by Greta to stage a one-man protest after the government rejected his request to hold a group demonstration. "I thought climate change was just science, but Greta had the right words to explain why it should worry all of us," he said. Russia, which has been hit hard by climate change, ranks as the world's fourth-largest **emitter** of greenhouse gases after China, the U.S and India.

In Copenhagen, Denmark, several thousand people, most of them high-school-age, gathered. People flew Danish flags that were green and white instead of red and white. "I hope the politicians hear us. They don't really seem to be doing anything," said Albe Gils, age 18, who skipped school.

In the U.S., strike organizers expected events in more than 1,100 locations in all 50 states. In San Juan, Puerto Rico, strikers marked the second anniversary of Hurricane Maria, which scientists say was made more destructive by climate change.

The strikes were planned largely by teenagers, between soccer practices and homework. However, a number of adults offered support. Public schools in New York City and Boston granted students permission to skip school for the strikes. For students in other districts, more than 600 physicians signed a "doctor's note." The permission slip reads: "Their absence is necessary because of the climate crisis."

Personal Reaction