‘The time for change is now’: demonstrators around the world demand action on climate crisis

Up to 100,000, including Kahnawake Mohawk delegates, brave Glasgow rain as 21 arrested after scientists blockade bridge

Climate protestors gather for the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice march in Glasgow, Scotland. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

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People on almost every continent were gathering for marches and rallies on Saturday to mark a Global Day for Climate Justice, halfway through the Glasgow climate change summit.

Activists in the Philippines, eight hours ahead of the UK, had already finished their rally as protesters gathered in Scotland. There were also rallies in South Korea, Indonesia, the Netherlands and France. The Belgian arm of Extinction Rebellion occupied a street in Brussels.
The Scottish morning saw heavy rain, but the early mood was one of cheerful acceptance. “What do you expect protesting in Glasgow?” asked Lucy Bell, who works for the Vegan Kind, an online vegan supermarket based in Rutherglen. “There are so many people here from different backgrounds. It’s easy to get discouraged by the negotiations going on behind closed doors but I’m feeling optimistic this morning despite the rain.”

In Glasgow city centre, direct action group Scientist Rebellion blocked the King George V bridge, one of the main routes to the south side, at about 11.30am. More than 20 scientists, from students to a retired professor, all wearing lab
coats stood chained together by the neck. The coalition of activist academics believes non-violent civil disobedience is the only remaining option to draw attention to the extremity of the climate crisis.

“There have been 25 previous Cops with no measurable impact on GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions,” said Tim Hewlett, co-founder and one of those on the bridge. “In fact, about half of the GHG emissions have been released since COP1 in 1995. So we’re not here to speak truth to power – they already know – but to the powerless, and to raise their voices in turn.” Hewlett added that the lab coats they were wearing were at least offering some protection from the rain. The bridge was blocked until just before 4pm, and the group said that 21 people had been arrested.

The march got under way at about midday, and was headed by a small group of First Nation people from Kahnawake Mohawk territory located in Quebec, Canada.

“It’s so evident that indigenous people hold the answers – they have to start listening and start thinking seven generations ahead, not just the immediate need,” said Karahkwintha, 23.

Ohontsakahte, 26, added: “Inside the Cop venue, unfortunately, it’s corporate interests at the front of the line, so here today indigenous people are leading the
movement – and that’s how it should be inside the Cop venue too. We’re here to put indigenous voices at the forefront of the climate crisis.”

Cop delegates were also scattered among the huge crowds. Tracy Sonny, 37, a Cop negotiator from Botswana focused on climate adaptation and capacity building, was at the march to show solidarity and call for more unity. “We need to see more political will and a change in mindset ... we’re already feeling the impact of climate change; we need to respond now, people are drowning.”

Despite the dreich weather, the atmosphere was electric as each bloc made itself heard with live music and chants such as “system change not climate change” and “world leaders at Cop26 ... your inaction makes us sick.”

Grainne McGinn, 22, a wheelchair user from Glasgow, attended Friday’s youth protest and Saturday’s with a sign that read “sustainability requires accessibility”. “Climate change is so important but youth voices, especially disabled youth voices, are not being heard. We’ve seen in the news how inaccessible Cop has been for delegates. That’s the day-to-day experience for all disabled people and it’s so important that our voices are heard in the conversation on climate change. I’m here to represent.”

Vegan activists fought strong gales to make their point with four giant inflatable animals tethered on ropes above their heads or strapped to the ground. Each
symbolised a different problem with the livestock industry: a cow for methane, a chicken for Covid and health, a fish for microplastics, and a pig for obesity. “The cow in the room is being ignored at this Cop,” said Carl Le Blanc of Climate Healers. “Animal agriculture has been taken off the agenda and put on the menu.”

Roisin Greaney, 28, a postgrad student from Dublin said: “I’m here today because, I would say a small group of people but in this case it’s a very large group of people, wants to put a sustained pressure on the people inside the blue zone.

“I’ve seen it in the past, I’ve seen small groups of people come together and scare governments, scare companies, and make them do things. So I think this kind of direct action works, and it’s amazing to see people from so many different organisations and parts of society.”

There was also despair; Chris Cornroy, 37, who works for Oxfam, said: “The world is probably going to end within our lifetime, so any difference you can
make counts. But I don’t think anything will be achieved from this if I’m being honest. I don’t think anything will make a positive difference today.”

By the afternoon the rain clouds had parted and the sky had begun to brighten as crowds of marchers spilled across the expanse of Glasgow Green, still singing, chanting and playing music.

The mood was “celebratory, positive and punchy” said Mary Martin from Coatbridge, who had marched from Kelvingrove. “Walking the walk,” she laughed as she shivered against a strong gust of wind. As for the progress of the climate talks, “I’m holding my breath.” The lack of inclusivity at the negotiations concerns her, the opposite of her experience on this march where she notes the rapport between different groups.

In London thousands of protesters, including trade unionists, refugee rights groups, students and environmentalists, marched from the Bank of England to Trafalgar Square.

Protesters gather in Trafalgar Square having marched from the City of London. Photograph: Niklas Halle’n/AFP/Getty Images

Demonstrators repeatedly expressed exasperation that politicians were failing to tackle the climate emergency with the required urgency. “We don’t have time,” said Paula Somrisa, 41, from Oxford. “It’s great to make statements about
ambitions and what is going to happen in the future but we really need action now.”

Dawn Fuller, 56, said: “We have had enough of hearing them talk – now we absolutely have to see some real action.” She said her two grown-up children were increasingly anxious about the escalating climate emergency. “We have seen so much greenwashing at Cop26 ... But it has to stop – it is our children’s future at stake.”

Many protesters called for urgent reform of the economic system and linked the climate crisis to global inequality and structural racism.

Rebecca Hotchkin, 23, who is studying medicine in London, said global health inequalities were being exacerbated by the climate crisis. “Health justice and climate justice are linked. Governments must start addressing the underlying causes to the various crises we face.”

In Glasgow organisers estimated that more than 100,000 people were in attendance, but police were reluctant to put a figure on the crowd. In London they said about 10,000 were marchers, although organisers put the figure closer to 20,000. Worldwide there were more than 300 protests, with more than 100 in the UK alone.

Nicola Sturgeon told reporters on Friday that she had confidence that the Glasgow climate march would be policed “appropriately”, adding that Iain Livingstone, Police Scotland’s chief constable, had spoken to the force’s independent advisory group after the concerns were raised in an open letter.

Assistant chief constable Gary Ritchie appealed to marchers to act responsibly and warned people travelling to Glasgow to prepare for delays.

He added: “There will be an increased police presence in Glasgow, and roads, public transport and the streets will be significantly busier than would normally be expected in the city on a Saturday.

“If you’re going to a march, please act responsibly, be respectful in your actions and follow the route and instructions given to you by event organisers or police officers.”
About 100,000 people marched in Glasgow to demand more action on the climate crisis, organisers have said. The protest was the biggest so far during the COP26 summit and took place alongside hundreds of similar events around the world.

Greta Thunberg joined the march but did not speak, leaving activists such as Vanessa Nakate to address a rally. Police arrested 21 scientists who chained themselves together and blocked a road bridge over the River Clyde.

- **Greta Thunberg tells protest that COP26 has been a 'failure'**
- **COP26 youth march: 'We don't have a choice'**
- **In Pictures: Young protesters march for the future**

The "Global Day of Action for Climate Justice" march started at Kelvingrove Park in the west of the city and Queen's Park in the...
south at about midday and made its way along a pre-agreed three-mile route to Glasgow Green.

Media caption,
The march and rally in Glasgow was part of a "Global Day of Action for Climate Justice"

About 100 climate change demonstrations were held in other parts of the UK while events were also taking place in a further 100 countries including Kenya, Turkey, France, Brazil, Australia and Canada.

In London, protesters marched from the Bank of England to Trafalgar Square while another large demonstration happened in Cardiff.
Ugandan climate justice activist Vanessa Nakate told the rally that citizens had to "demand action".

The opening speeches at the protest rally at Glasgow Green came from representatives of indigenous people around the globe.
Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate later told protesters: "The climate and ecological crises are already here. But so are citizens from around the globe. "Leaders rarely have the courage to lead. It takes citizens, people like you and me, to rise up and demand action. And when we do that in great enough numbers, our leaders will move."

It was understood that Greta Thunberg decided to give space to other speakers as she had already addressed youth activists in a march and rally on Friday.

Away from the march, 21 protesters from Scientist Rebellion were arrested after chaining themselves together on the King George V Bridge in Glasgow city centre.

Charlie Gardner, an associate senior lecturer at Durell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, said scientists could not "rely on our leaders to save us anymore" and had a "moral duty to act". He tweeted: "Over 15,000 scientists declared that we're in a climate emergency, but most aren't acting as if it's an emergency."
"We're taking this action to encourage others, scientists and all people, to rise up in rebellion against the system that is killing everything."

Police Scotland closed the bridge to pedestrians and vehicles during the protest. A spokesperson said: "We have facilitated a peaceful protest, but to balance right to protest with public safety and rights of the wider community, our protest removal team is safely removing protesters."

On the scene - Paul O'Hare, BBC News website

Despite the grim weather there was a carnival atmosphere at the start of the march in Kelvingrove Park, with one group playing steel drums to entertain the crowd.

Flags and banners were blowing in the wind and most activists were sporting multiple layers in a bid to combat the cold and rain. One enterprising local vendor who was selling whistles at the youth march on Friday was today offering ponchos for £3.
There was a heavy police presence and officers paid particular attention to a group of socialist activists dressed in black and wearing red face masks. Members of the group were still being closely monitored more than five hours later when they were among the last to arrive at Glasgow Green.

A helicopter hovered overhead as the demonstration snaked through the west end and city centre. One group set off a red flare in Finnieston but the march was good natured throughout and I saw no signs of any trouble. The event was the largest protest in Glasgow since the Stop the Iraq War march in 2003 and groups representing a broad spectrum of causes, ranging from indigenous people to refugees, made for a colourful spectacle. They were entertained along the way by acts including a bagpiper and a man singing karaoke dressed as Darth Vader. One of the highlights was a spontaneous outbreak of applause which greeted the marchers as they arrived in George Square. It was summed by a banner which read: "Glasgow Welcomes Climate Activists".

The sun had come out by the time the mass protest arrived at Glasgow Green and some revellers even enjoyed a dance party outside the High Court in Glasgow.
But the huge crowd was later left disappointed when it emerged celebrated climate activist Greta Thunberg would not be addressing the rally.

World leaders and representatives who came to Glasgow for the climate change summit have so far made promises to curb deforestation, phase out coal, end funding for fossil fuels abroad and cut methane emissions. But there is still a significant gap between the measures countries have committed to and what is needed to avoid more than 1.5C of warming, beyond which the worst floods, droughts, storms and rising seas of climate change will be felt. Countries are under pressure to agree on actions for the next decade, finance loans for developing countries to cope with the crisis and finalise the last parts of how the global Paris Agreement on climate change will work.

Asad Rehman, a spokesperson for the COP Coalition, said: "We are taking to the streets across the world this weekend to push governments from climate inaction to climate justice. "This has been the least accessible climate summit ever - with so many people side-lined at the talks or not able to make it in the first place. Today those people are having their voices heard."

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Representatives of indigenous communities from North and South America joined the march in Glasgow. Some have no formal representation at COP26, despite living at the frontline of environmental destruction caused by mining or deforestation, because they are not recognised by their governments.
Marchers came from across the UK to take part in the Glasgow march, including surfers from Cornwall. Edinburgh COP Coalition put on 13 coaches to travel to the event while a series of "Pedal on COP26" bike rides were organised from more than 20 areas of Scotland, the longest
rides being from Inverness, Aberdeen and Dumfries setting off on Friday.
The cyclists brought up the rear of the march, which took near two hours to leave Kelvingrove Park, making the line of protesters almost two miles (3.2km) long.
Police said they blocked a section of the crowd between Holland Street and St Vincent Street because of "congestion issues".
"Following an escalation in their conduct a small number of people from the group who deliberately stopped on the parade route at the junction of Holland Street and St Vincent Street were contained by police on the grounds of public safety," a Police Scotland tweet said.

Image caption,
Thousands of people filled West George Street as the march made its way to George Square
Bleak weather with heavy showers and gusts of wind greeted early arrivals to the march, but the weather improved over the afternoon.
High winds, however, continued to cause a problem, hampering efforts to set up the main stage at Glasgow Green. and speakers instead used the stage company's lorry as a platform. Saturday's march came after many young activists - including striking school pupils - took part in a mass demonstration in the city on Friday.