Hollande called on to lift ban on climate protests at COP 21

written by Global Justice Now | December 1, 2015

An international coalition of NGOs, civil society groups and political figures such as Naomi Klein and Susan George have called on the French president to lift the ban on protests during the COP 21 climate talks in Paris, which began on November 30th.

Following November's terror attacks in Paris, the French government has imposed a temporary state of emergency that has prevented any protests from taking place in France. The local coaltion of NGOs and trade unions in in France, Climat 21, had planned a series of protests in Paris before, during and at the end of the climate talks which have now been banned.

Over forty different groups and individuals from countries including Brazil, Belgium, India, the USA, Korea and the UK have signed on to the letter which tells President Hollande that "we are deeply concerned by the decision of your government to prohibit the mobilisations in Paris during COP21. This will make it extremely difficult for ordinary citizens of the world to make their voices heard and to create the political space necessary to build a brighter future. We believe this strips the COP process of its legitimacy."

Nick Dearden, the director of Global Justice Now said:

"People from all over the world are flocking to Paris to have their voices heard on one of the most urgent challenges of our lifetime – the threat of climate change. It is essential that there is robust participation from civil society during the climate talks and that world leaders are held accountable for how they engage with the issue.

"One of the aims of terrorists in carrying out atrocities like we have seen in Paris is to attempt to disrupt and derail how ordinary people go about their lives. The French authorities have said that 'life must go one' with regards to public occasions like football matches, and we call on President Hollande to use similar logic in standing strong against these attacks by allowing people the fundamental right to protest on crucially important issues like climate change during the UN talks."

Thomas Coutrot, the spokesperson for Attac France, one of the NGOs that had been involved in organising demonstrations in Paris said:

"The French authorities are using the shock of the 13 November killings to cancel demonstrations throughout the country, even in small cities where no terrorist threat is plausible. Do they want to keep us silent in the face of the results of COP 21, and its probable failure to tackle effectively climate change? Attac and its partners will be pushing hard to ensure our voices are not silenced."

The letter has also been made into an online petition that members of the public are being invited to sign.

The letter and its signatories

Dear Mr. President,

We want to express our sympathy with the French people for the terrorist attacks that took place last weekend. The barbaric attacks on civilians in Paris, Ankara, Bamako and Beirut in recent weeks are the latest terrible symptoms of a world economy experiencing multiple crises.

One of those crises is climate change. As you will be aware, we have driven our planet to the verge of environmental catastrophe. The impacts are being felt everywhere to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed the conflict in Syria was partly fuelled by climatic events. And unless we start enacting very different policies, climate change will increasingly fuel war, migration, poverty and dispossession.

That's why many of us are coming to Paris in the next fortnight – to demand world leaders begin the radical transformation to a low carbon economy, with serious financing to assist less industrialised countries to build societies without resort to fossil fuels. We understand that the challenge is huge. It isn't possible for politicians to carry out the changes needed without massive movements and mobilisations creating political space and will.

For this reason we are deeply concerned by the decision of your government to prohibit the mobilisations in Paris during COP21. This will make it extremely difficult for ordinary citizens of the world to make their voices heard and to create the political space necessary to build a brighter future. We believe this strips the COP process of its legitimacy.

We urge you to reconsider the decision to prohibit the demonstrations in Paris. We understand the need to keep citizens safe, including those mobilising on climate change. It must be possible to find a way to do this short of banning our demonstrations. Many other mass events and gatherings continue to happen in Paris on a daily basis. We would also like to ensure that the police treat us with dignity and that you send a clear message that our civil liberties be respected.

We must not suspend democracy and freedom while proclaiming our commitment to democracy and freedom. A peaceful world can only be built on equality, solidarity and sustainability. We must be able to say this in Paris.

Yours,

Naomi Klein, writer
Friends of the Earth International
Avi Lewis, filmmaker
Shalmali Guttal, researcher and writer
Susan George, writer
Global Justice Now, UK
Bolivian Platform on Climate Change
Focus on the Global South
Fondacion Solon, Bolivia
Friends of the Earth, Scotland
Ecologistas en Acción (Spain)
Ekoloji Kolektifi / Ecology Collective Association, Turkey
Iniciativa Construyendo Puentes – Redes de Latinoamerica frente al cambio climatico
Campaign against Climate Change, UK

Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, India
Public & Commercial & Service Union, UK
Attac Japan
Transnational Institute
Engajamundo, Brazil
Beyond Copenhagen collective, India
End Ecocide on Earth
Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development
Our Rivers, Our Life (OROL) – Philippines
Corporate Europe Observatory
IBON International
Philippine Movement for Climate Justice
Friends of the Earth Sweden
Public Advocacy Initiatives for Rights & Values in India (PAIRVI)
Energy and Climate Policy Institute for Just Transition, Korea
UK Tar Sands Network
Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO), Phillipines
Platform, UK
Sanlakas, Philippines
Planet Defenders, Brazil
DeSmog, UK
Labor/Community Strategy Center, USA
WomanHealth, Phillipines
New Internationalist, UK
Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program, USA
York Climate Action, UK
Ecological Society of the Philippines
The Otesha Project, UK
GAIA – Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives
Povod Institute, Slovenia
Abibiman Foundation, Ghana
Clubs Nations Unies, Senegal
Excellent World Foundation, Nigeria
Swedish Antinuclear Movement
GCAP, Action/2015
Ageing Nepal
Global Call to Action Against Poverty, Burundi
Burundi Child Rights Coalition (BCRC)
Union de Jeunes pour la Paix et le Développement (UJPD/asbl)
SÜDWIND, Austria
Association for Promotion Sustainable Development, India
The Network of African Youths for Development (NAYD)
Somos el Presente, Peru
Alliance Contre la Pauvreté/GCAP Mali
Youth partnership for Peace and Development, Sierra Leone
Pakistan Development Alliance
Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)
Climate & Sustainable Development Network of Nigeria (CSDevNet)
Freshwater Action Network. FAN. Geneve
Red Centroamericana de Acción del Agua. Central America
Asociación Regional Centroamericana por el Agua y el Ambiente (ARCA)

Youth Association for Development (YAD), Pakistan
Norway Social Forum
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
Freshwater Action Network, Mexico
Coletivo Bahia 21, Brazil
Hagancatwright Organisation, Germany
PAPDA, Haiti

This article originally appeared on November 26th at http://www.globaljustice.org.uk/news/2015/nov/26/hollande-called-lift-ban-climate-protests-cop-21.