‘I want a future’
Young people protest around the globe Friday, imploring leaders to tackle climate change

Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg, 16, center, takes part during the Climate Strike on Friday in New York. Railies calling for action on climate change happened in cities around the world ahead of a summit on the issue. Associated Press

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Young people afraid for their futures protested around the globe Friday to implore leaders to tackle climate change, turning out by the hundreds of thousands to demand that the warming world can’t wait for action.

Marches, rallies and demonstrations were held from Cape Town to Tokyo, and German police reported that more than 100,000 turned out in Berlin.

Days before a U.N. climate summit of world leaders, the "Global Climate Strike" events ranged from about two dozen activists in Seoul using LED flashlights to send Morse code messages calling for action to rescue the earth to Australian demonstrations that organizers estimated were the country’s largest protests since the Iraq War began in 2003.

The demonstrations were partly inspired by the activism of Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who has staged weekly "Friday for Future" demonstrations for a year, urging world leaders to step up efforts against climate change: "It’s such a victory," Thunberg told The Associated Press in an interview in New York. "I would never have predicted or believed that this was going to happen, and so fast — and only in 15 months."

Thunberg spoke at a rally Friday and is expected to participate in a U.N. Youth Climate Summit on Saturday and speak at the U.N. Climate Action Summit with global leaders on Monday.

"They have this opportunity to do something, and they should take it," she said. "And otherwise, they should feel ashamed." In New York, where public schools excused students with parental permission, tens of thousands of mostly young people marched through lower Manhattan, briefly shutting down some streets.

"Sorry I can't clean my room. I'm busy saving the world; one protester's sign declared.

Abroad the Staten Island Ferry, young people could be seen wearing pro-earth outfits and holding signs. "Feel that the environment needs our help and our leaders aren't doing anything to help it, so they won't act like adults, we will," said Rachel Driscoll.

"We're continuing to read stories that the ice caps are melting, among other things, and if someone will do anything, maybe the kids have to," added Molly Driscoll.

Wagner College student Catie Shelly told the Advance, "This is the single most important issue facing our world. It's an existential threat that is going to destroy us if we don't change everything now.

Many students explained that this is a push to make the government realize that this is an issue many care about. "I want to go to government and really understand that this is a really big deal and actually listen to science," said Emily Lussow.

Students Stacey Petrow and Kamila Szandrowski are part of the non-profit Kid Up Girls, which hosts cleanups on Staten Island beaches. They attended the rally to demand change based on what they've seen on their beaches.

"People need to be aware of how much trash they leave behind," said Szandrowski. "When you see it and you're fully immersed in it, it's like, 'Oh, I use that, and it's right here on my beach.'"

Added Petrow: "We need to educate people that there is a life without creating trash and without creating unnecessary waste. A lot of people are just too comfortable and too used to using plastic, but there are other alternatives.

"We don't have enough room on this Earth for the plastic anymore," said Szandrowski. "We don't even have enough room for the plastic we've already created."

— Associated Press material was used in this report

Kamila Szandrowski, left, Stacey Petrow, Emily Lussow and Catie Shelly ride the Staten Island Ferry to the NYC Climate Strike, with a poster that reads, "I stand for what I stand for."