

Angels, security and green messages mark first day of climate talks

December 1 2015, by Joshua Melvin



The Eiffel Tower lit up with green color and messages to prevent global warming during the first day of the United Nations climate conference in Paris

From activists in angel wings to armed police and carefully sorted refuse, the much-awaited Paris climate talks opened Monday with a touch of spectacle, hefty security and lofty rhetoric.

Helicopters hovered overhead while a kaleidoscope of people from

nearly every nation hustled between scores of meetings and events scattered across a sprawling 18-hectare (40-acre) site just north of the French capital.

Le Bourget, for now, is a microcosm of the world—a temporary city of 40,000 people, from suave negotiators in business suits to indigenous activists in traditional clothing and harried journalists.

As world leaders delivered speeches in plenary halls, some delegates, exhausted from long flights and eyeing the gruelling road ahead, took the opportunity of a snooze on sofas in rest areas.

"It's busy, you know. You need just the first few days to get your head around it," said Kim Shore, 30, an Australian man who leads a youth organisation. "It's a marathon, not a sprint."

Some 195 nations will spend the next 11 days negotiating what is being touted as a landmark post-2020 deal to roll back global warming, preserving the planet's climate system for future generations.

Some of that effort has a trade show quality, with brochures and business cards being handed out by an array of national delegations and campaign groups.

But the gathering remains very much focused on weighty issues, with language to match.

Climate angels



Women dressed as angels holds signs at the Place de la Republique on November 29, 2015, in Paris, on the eve of the official opening of the COP21 UN Conference on climate in Paris

"Our government is inexcusable to continue its coal mining policy. It pollutes not just Australia, but the whole world," said Deborah Hart of ClimActs, a theatre troupe of Australian climate campaigners.

Clad in white, with gauzy angel wings on their backs, the activists greeted visitors in front of the summit, waving signs that said "Coal kills" and "Climate justice, no excuses".

Before making it into the venue visitors must pass through tight security. Heavily-armed soldiers and police stand guard at the perimeter of the grounds.

Armed United Nations guards, wearing shirts in the organisation's signature shade of blue, patrol the halls.

Security is on high alert just weeks after terror attacks in Paris killed 130 people, most of them young people out for the night at bars, restaurants and a concert in a trendy neighbourhood.

Just like at the airport, visitors to the conference have to go through metal detectors, shedding their belts and emptying their pockets into plastic trays. Laptops are sent through the X-ray machine along with bags.

Guards shepherded the 150 world leaders—who kicked off the event with hours' worth of speeches on Monday—between restricted areas. Some 2,800 police have been deployed to keep the summit safe.

Being a climate conference, Le Bourget is also awash with go-green messages.

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