Papua New Guinea to boycott ‘waste of time’ UN climate summit

AFP – Papua New Guinea on Thursday declared a boycott of next month’s UN climate summit, branding the global warming negotiations a “waste of time” full of empty promises from big polluters.
While plenty have criticised the annual COP summit in the past, it is rare for any government to so totally dismiss the UN’s premier climate talks.

“There’s no point going if we are falling asleep because of jet lag because we’re not getting anything done,” Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko told AFP ahead of November’s COP29 summit in Azerbaijan.

“All the big polluters of the world promise and commit millions to assist in climate relief and support. And I can tell you now it’s all going to consultants.”

The island of New Guinea is home to the third-largest expanse of rainforest on the planet, according to the World Wildlife Fund, and has long been celebrated as one of the “lungs of the earth”.

Impoverished, flanked by ocean, and already prone to natural disasters, Papua New Guinea is also considered to be highly vulnerable to the unfolding perils of climate change.

“COP is a total waste of time,” Tkatchenko said.

“We are sick of the rhetoric as well as the merry-go-round of getting absolutely nothing done over the last three years.

“We are the third-biggest rainforest nation in the world. We are sucking up the pollutants of these major countries. And

they are getting away with it scot-free."

– 'Talk fest' –

The COP summit in 2015 hammered out the landmark Paris Agreement, under which almost every country in the world has agreed to slash emissions to limit soaring global temperatures.

But subsequent gatherings have been dogged by growing criticism, stoked by a perception that big polluters are using their sway to limit further climate action.

Meanwhile, adaptation funds set up through COP to help developing nations have been accused of sluggish bureaucracy that fails to grasp the urgency of the crisis.

Civil society groups banded together last year to urge a boycott of the COP summit hosted by the United Arab Emirates, claiming the meeting would "greenwash" the petrostate's poor climate credentials.

Underwhelmed by proposed emissions cuts, dozens of African nations led a temporary walkout of developing nations during the 2009 COP talks in Copenhagen.

And Ukraine has pressed its allies to avoid this year's summit if Russian leader Vladimir Putin shows face.

But Papua New Guinea is among the first nations to have voiced such a full-throated call to boycott the COP summit altogether.

"Why are we spending all this money going to the other side of the world going to these talkfests," said Tkatchenko.

– 'No traction' –

Papua New Guinea is one of five Pacific nations involved in a pivotal International Court of Justice case that will soon

test whether polluters can be sued for neglecting their climate obligations.

Low-lying Pacific nations such as Tuvalu could be almost entirely swallowed by rising oceans within the next 30 years.

Tkatchenko said the decision to pull out of COP talks had been applauded by others within the Pacific bloc.

“I’m speaking up on behalf of the smaller island states that are worse off than Papua New Guinea. They were getting no traction and acknowledgement at all.”

Papua New Guinea would instead seek to strike its own climate deals through bilateral channels, said Tkatchenko, flagging that negotiations were already under way with Singapore.

“With like-minded countries like Singapore, we can do 100 times more than COP.

“They have a big carbon footprint, and we would like to think about how they can work with Papua New Guinea to fix that up.”

A key meeting ahead of COP29 ended in frustration earlier this month, with countries making little progress on how to fund a new finance deal for poorer nations.

COP – or conference of parties – is the top United Nations climate change conference, an annual summit in which nations look to determine legally binding climate commitments.

AFP