

# COP29 Reflection

## Overview

The 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), or colloquially known as the UN Climate Change Conference, took place from November 11 to 22, 2024, in Baku, Azerbaijan. COP29 has been referred to as the “Finance COP” as this year’s conference had a particular focus on “investing in a liveable planet for all” and how to substantially increase the total amount of climate finance needed to support developing countries.

COP28, the 2023 Climate Change Conference held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, was the first of three consecutive COP summits intended to “reset” global climate action — what the UN calls the ‘Roadmap to Mission 1.5°C’ — based on the ambition to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. To support continuity and progress across the three COPs, the UAE (COP28), Azerbaijan (COP29) and Brazil (COP30) have formed a COP presidential ‘Troika,’ or group of three.

In 2023 the first ‘Global Stocktake’ of international action to address climate change indicated that the world was far off track for targets set by the Paris Agreement. The ‘UAE Consensus’ agreement which formed the main output of COP28, set out how parties should respond. COP29 was intended to get the finance in place to enable this response. The aim of COP30, to be held in Brazil in 2025, is to try and agree on how a new round of nationally determined climate plans or ‘contributions’ to global climate efforts (NDCs) should be put into action.

Parties set up an ad hoc work programme from 2022-2024 on the “New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance”, and this is one of the main issues under negotiation at COP29. The NCQG is an element of the 2015 Paris Agreement, and was designed to set a new financial target to support developing countries in their climate actions beyond 2025. It seeks to address persistent gaps in climate finance by providing a more realistic and ambitious financial framework, building on the \$100 billion target set in 2009. Other key issues under negotiation were the transition away from fossil fuels (building on a commitment from COP28), carbon market rules, adaptation measures and Loss and Damage efforts, and enhanced transparency of countries’ emissions.

The COP29 Presidency’s plan ahead of the Conference was based on two core pillars: to “enhance ambition” and to “enable action.” Through these pillars, the Presidency of COP29 aimed to address climate finance to developing countries as a “a key tool to turn ambition into action and reduce emissions, adapt to climate change and address loss and damage.”

## UI Activities at COP29

As official observers at COP and through our accreditation to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UI's aim is to put women and girls at the heart of the negotiations we carry out, offering solutions that bring the voices of the people to the forefront of global policymaking. We advocate for gender equality and social justice as a cornerstone of environmental justice, ensuring that the on-the-ground realities of women and girls are not cast aside or simply limited to one thematic day or panel. This largely entails participating in discussions related to gender equality, local communities building climate resilience, children and youth education and engagement, public health and wellness, human mobility and displacement, just and equitable transitions, and climate justice more broadly. Ahead of each COP, UI collaborates on official side events, writes policy statements and position papers, and engages in advocacy around the key issues to be addressed during that year's Conference.

UI Deputy Director Liana Almony represented UNANIMA International at COP29. We believe that it is extremely important that we attend the proceedings and highlight the voices of the grassroots, uplifting not only the issues they face due to climate change but also the innovative solutions they have implemented in their communities. Like our work at the UN in New York, many new pledges and promises emerge on the sidelines of the official negotiations.

At COP29 UNANIMA International co-sponsored and participated in an official Side Event held in the blue zone titled: "Faith and Justice in Ecological Transition." The theme was "Integrated and Holistic Approaches" and panelists presented alternatives for a genuinely just ecological transition as required by climate justice and following Catholic Social Teaching. This included clear policy guidelines, technology transfer mechanisms, and capacity building: training, education, and social safeguards to support the transition. The event was co-sponsored by the Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Carmelite NGO), Laudato Si' Movement (LSM), Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries (SCMM), VIVAT International, Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique Internationale (JECI-IYCS), and Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESIA). Liana spoke on the panel on "Addressing the gendered dimensions of non-economic loss and damage for a just transition."

Liana was also a Facilitator at an interfaith youth-led side event hosted by the Commonwealth Pavilion titled: "Empowering Faith Communities for Collective Climate Action." The session sought to mobilize faith communities and amplify a moral and ethical call for climate action, moving beyond political and economic motivations. Other Facilitators and participants in the session included representatives from the Climate Interfaith Youth Network, Brahma Kumaris, the Lutheran World Federation, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, the Carmelite NGO, and the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network. Participants discussed the basic religious teaching of the oneness of humanity, value for creation, and the idea that it is our common responsibility to care for one another and the environment. Youth and faith leaders were encouraged to pay attention to this common thread and use it to drive our actions.

UNANIMA International also participated in the launch of the Women Faith and Climate Action Network, an initiative first formed at a conference in Frascati, Italy in October 2024 and attended by UI Executive Director Jean Quinn. The group was convened by fifty women leaders from 8 major faiths and 15 countries, engaging women-led climate action and inspiring collaboration from diverse faiths and geographies. The network aims to mobilize the influence of women of faith to “go further, faster” towards achieving climate goals by increasing the visibility of the vast ongoing women-led practical climate action at the grassroots and national level, scaling up best practices, and fostering radical collaboration among diverse women of faith networks. At COP29, the network was launched in the Faith Pavilion by H.E. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and cofounder of Project Dandelion, a women-led global campaign for climate justice. She was joined by members of the network (Liana as a representative of UI included!) and allies from the UNEP Faith for Earth Program, among other partners.

Throughout the Conference, Liana specifically followed and engaged in dialogues on climate displacement, especially as experienced by women and girls, as this is an area that UNANIMA International has long focused on and will begin conducting research on in 2025.

## Highlights/Key Takeaways

Overall, building community resilience was a central and overarching topic of conversation at COP29, which went hand in hand with discussions around climate financing - the urgent need to boost investments in human development areas took center stage. “Prevention” is no longer an option, and instead there was a particular focus around adaptation and mitigation by building climate-resilient societies and directing investments toward nature-positive solutions.

During COP29 there was the first ever thematic programming dedicated to human development. This culminated in a high-level meeting hosted by the COP Presidency, the announcement of the [Joint Statement on the Baku Initiative](#), and the adoption of the [Baku Guiding Principles on Human Development for Climate Resilience](#), which reflect the strategic direction and aspiration for human development in the context of climate resilience. The Statement and Principles are non-binding of course, and these pledges need to be translated into action. This means accelerating political and financial support to actualize these guiding principles.

Regardless, human development day at COP29 and its outcome documents reflected a people-centered approach to climate action. The day was significant for its explicit recognition of the human dimensions of climate change, including the intersections of climate change and issues like health, education, decent work, and overall well being. The documents also highlighted the need for universal adaptive social protection, which is a point that UNANIMA International has long advocated for, including through the [Policy Paper](#) on “Harnessing Gender-Responsive Social Protection for Resilience, Transformation, and Just Transitions” which we prepared ahead of COP29.

The Faith Pavilion was another highlight of COP29 and a space where people were centered in all discussions around climate change. There was a true sense of interfaith solidarity and community reflected in the Faith Pavilion and in the events organized there. One way that Faith Actors were centering people in the discussions around climate financing throughout the Conference was through a focus on “non-economic loss and damage.” Prior to COP29, a group of faith-based organizations came together to produce a [publication on non-economic loss and damage](#), which reviews its various manifestations and makes recommendations as to how decision-makers should approach the issue. Non-economic loss and damage refers to consequences of climate change that cannot be measured or compensated financially. These losses and damages highlight the social, cultural, psychological, and indeed tangible impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, including loss of human rights, biodiversity, land, territories, health, knowledge, social cohesion, and sovereignty. Financial help may get developing nations hit the hardest by climate change back on their feet, but not all losses are quantifiable. It was important that discussions on non-economic loss and damage were held during COP29 to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience were heard.

As Liana expressed as a panelist for the side event on “Faith and Justice in Ecological Transition”: “Climate displacement in particular is a cause, symptom, and outcome of these types of losses. What’s more of a loss and damage than to have to abandon everything that you have? And yet, how do you quantify not just the loss of a house but the loss of home, and all that comes with it - the loss of life, the loss of livelihood, psychological loss, the loss of culture and identity and community.”

Human mobility in the climate change context seemed to emerge as a key issue at COP29 compared to previous years, with multiple pavilions and side events dedicated to the topic. Throughout the Conference, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) called for common ambition and concrete actions to address climate change and its impacts on migration, emphasizing that negotiators need to discuss solutions to address climate displacement while also advocating for migration as part of the solution to climate change. We know that climate displacement is an ever growing reality for millions of people around the world, so its centrality in discussions at COP29 was a welcome change from previous years. As Amy Pope, the Director General of the IOM highlighted in a side event on “What can Migrants and Displaced Persons bring to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage?” - more people were displaced by climate change than conflict in the last year. This means that policymakers need to be considering not only how to build community resilience so people can stay in the face of climate shocks, but also how to use planned relocation as a tool for adaptation.

Another concept that was emphasized throughout the Conference by advocates and representatives from the Global South was the difference between a loan and a grant - climate financing needs to be in the form of a grant rather than a loan so that it does not continue the pattern of debt which lowers community resilience.

The focus on financial reform at this COP was in many ways a sign of hope, an exercise in seeing potential where others see despair. However, the many challenges faced by all parties at COP29 too often acted as a barrier to meaningful and ambitious negotiations and commitments.

## Challenges

COP29 was challenging in many ways. For instance, Azerbaijan's economy is highly dependent on fossil fuels—the main cause of climate change. There has been a call for future summits to be held only in countries that can show clear support for climate action and have stricter rules on fossil fuel lobbying. Before COP29 began, a group of climate policy experts including former UN-Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, the former UN Climate Chief, Christiana Figueres, and the prominent climate scientist, Johan Rockstrom stated that: “It is now clear that the COP is no longer fit for purpose,” and called for a “shift from negotiations to implementation.”

In a [letter](#) published during the first week of COP29, the group says that the pursuit of consensus, which has always been the great strength of the climate negotiations process, is becoming its greatest weakness. Increasing polarization in global politics means the process is taking far too long and diverting the focus away from delivering the commitments already made. Furthermore, it states that the search for consensus is an inefficient use of valuable time when the need for climate action to limit the rise in global temperature is so urgent. Political issues were also heightened by diplomatic issues with the COP29 Presidency team, which did not have the bandwidth to devote across all the different issues. The strapline for COP29 was “in solidarity for a Green World” but negotiations often seemed to be more divisive than unifying.

Most estimates find that developing countries, after deploying their own resources, will need an additional \$1 trillion per year in climate finance from international sources. At COP, developing countries and advocates from the Global South called for 1.3 trillion dollars per year by 2035, to be contributed by countries in the Global North who are responsible for the majority of carbon emissions. Given these estimates, the 300 billion ultimately agreed upon is a disappointingly low number and reflects a considerable gap in ambition to provide the financing needed.

If their debt burden is not dealt with, developing nations are left unable to invest in climate change mitigation or adaptation, and it will be impossible to keep the 1.5 C warming limit within reach. However, negotiators failed to clearly lay out the timeframe and terms of this additional climate finance, and how it will reach the communities that need it most. Funding the technical arrangements and concrete mechanisms to provide climate finance still remain to be agreed upon and clarified.

Many of the issues being discussed on the margins of the Conference, in the side event rooms, in the Pavilions, and in Special Events, were not incorporated into the legislative agenda or incorporated into binding commitments. For example, while human mobility and climate

displacement received a lot of attention at COP29, the issue was not explicitly included in any of the outcomes. It is clear that parties are still trying to make sense of the intersections between climate change, adaptation, and human mobility. Non-economic loss and damage was also not discussed in negotiations, despite its centrality in the conversations happening at the margins.

Like at previous COPs, women and girl's participation in the Conference, especially at the negotiating table, continued to be limited. Only 8 out of the 78 world leaders who participated in COP29 are women, and the COP29 Presidency originally included no women in its organizational committee of 28 people. It was only under pressure from women leaders around the world that the COP29 presidency added 12 women to the organizational committee, as well as an additional two men.

There were other basic and logistical challenges at COP29. There were no livestreaming or opportunities for virtual attendance at the official side events this year due to "budget constraints." Civil society participation was limited, with very few badges issued to civil society representatives. UNANIMA International, like many other NGOs, was only granted the opportunity to send one representative of the organization to COP29, while in the past we had up to 10 representatives we could designate to attend. Many of our colleagues in the civil society space were left scrambling when their organizations were allocated zero badges to attend COP29 by the UNFCCC.

There is already significant enthusiasm from civil society around COP30 in Brazil next year, where the Presidency will be much more open to civil society participation and there will be more opportunities for indigenous representation. However, the location of COP30 in Belem raises other concerns as well, including the environmental repercussions of hosting an international mega-event in a small city which will need to build significant infrastructure to host the Conference.

## Outcomes

COP29 came to a close on November 22nd with mixed outcomes and reactions. As the UNFCCC [stated](#) following the Conference, "the new finance goal at COP29 builds on significant strides forward on global climate action at COP27, which agreed an historic Loss and Damage Fund, and COP28, which delivered a global agreement to transition away from all fossil fuels in energy systems swiftly and fairly, triple renewable energy and boost climate resilience."

Yet while the commitment of 300 billion to climate finance (annually by 2035) tripled the existing goal of 100 billion, we know it's not adequate - and it will likely fail to directly reach those who need it the most. The NCQG decision failed to explicitly address human rights and the need for gender-responsive climate finance. And while parties agreed to a 10-year extension of the Lima work programme on gender, gender issues seemed to take a backseat at COP29. The negotiations at COP30 need to be significantly more ambitious and people-centered in order to

promote climate justice and ensure the protection of human rights in the face of the ever intensifying impacts of climate change.

Decisions around many key issues were delayed until COP30, limiting progress on both mitigation and adaptation. One of the key adaptation agenda items in Baku, the national adaptation plan (NAP) assessment, was forwarded to 2025 for further consideration, failing to meet the deadline countries set for themselves back in 2021. What could have been a powerful show of solidarity—a clear signal to vulnerable countries that the global community is committed to financing and supporting their adaptation efforts—was absent.

Parties also failed to agree on how to move forward on the “UAE Consensus,” with negotiations and efforts to build on the energy package stalled until next year at COP30. The outcome also failed to explicitly call for a phase out of fossil fuel subsidies, and a text which called on countries to reduce investments in fossil fuel infrastructure was rejected.

The climate crisis poses a serious threat to humanity, causing environmental destruction and increasing natural disasters that claim countless lives. We need courageous international action to address this existential issue as the gap between the agreements reached and the needs at the grassroots continue to widen. The current solutions fail to address the root causes of climate change. Despite the many challenges present by the COP framework and the broader UN system, we at UNANIMA International remain committed to being present in these spaces to advocate for transformative solutions in how humanity interacts with nature, as only then will it be possible to achieve sustainable development and promote the wellbeing of people everywhere in the face of the climate crisis.