

Promoting Human Rights in Climate Action: Report from the Baku Climate Conference COP29

The 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Azerbaijan, a petrostate with a detrimental human rights record, and framed as a "Finance COP." When COP29 came to an end a day after planned, the outcomes were an overall lack of progress and several steps backwards when it comes to ambition, human rights, fossil fuel phaseout, and finance. COP29's inability to bring finance at the scale of needs to spark ambition – at a critical moment in time when countries are expected to prepare their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – is yet another example of the continued failure of developed countries and of the UNFCCC process to deliver outcomes that uphold State obligations in the context of the climate crisis.

This report summarizes and analyzes key developments at COP29 related to the integration of human rights in climate policies. Through this narrow but important lens, the report focuses on the overarching developments, the new climate finance goal, carbon markets, loss and damage, and civic space, while also discussing other important developments regarding gender, just transition, and adaptation.

Overarching Developments

The Least Developed Countries <u>called</u> the COP29 outcome "A Staggering Betrayal of the World's Most Vulnerable" after the COP President gaveled a decision without letting countries that had requested to speak take the floor, and only hours after the most climate-vulnerable countries had walked out of the negotiations. The weak finance outcome (see below) is the culmination of the decades-old tactics of major cumulative emitters to deny their obligations to pay. It is yet another blatant disregard of the voices of those on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and a demonstration of the massive power imbalance in the climate negotiations. This all happened in the context of a COP Presidency that disregarded participatory processes and a safe civil society space ahead of the COP and did not prioritize progress, almost entirely shifting to closed-door negotiations in the second week of the negotiations. This also allowed for countries aiming to regress on human rights obligations and gender justice to do so with hardly any scrutiny, with no human rights safeguards at all being part of the new finance goal, and crucial diversity and intersectionality aspects missing from the gender text (see below), among other things.

Of additional concern is the removal of practically all references to the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment from decision texts. Despite being recognized by the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council and consisting of common-agreed language in the UN climate negotiations, this right was continuously questioned throughout COP29 negotiations. As a cornerstone for advancing human rights-based approaches and ensuring interconnected solutions to global environmental challenges, its exclusion from some key outcomes represents a step backward.

COP29 also failed to follow up on the Global Stocktake's decision to transition away from fossil fuels, with no reference to it made at all, an overall weak outcome on the Mitigation Work Programme, and no outcome on the follow up on last year's Global Stocktake. This is particularly concerning as COP29 was the last COP before countries are expected to submit new NDCs, which are the main tools for countries to implement global climate commitments such as a full fossil fuel phaseout. However, this should come as no surprise with a COP host with an economy that heavily dependent on the export of oil and gas, and with <u>over 1700 fossil fuel lobbyists</u>, present in Baku.

Overall, COP29's failure is another item on the long list of UNFCCC outcomes that demonstrate some States' attempts to weaken their legal obligations in the context of the climate crisis. A reform of the process, including a stringent and comprehensive Conflict of Interest policy and human rights safeguards with regard to the hosting of the COP, is urgently needed. In this context, it is important to note that the International Court of Justice is working on an advisory opinion on the legal obligations of States in the context of climate change and the consequences of breaching those obligations, as major cumulative emitters have done and continue to do. The opinion is expected in 2025 and could help break the impasse taunting the UNFCCC for decades.

New Climate Finance Goal

Trillions of dollars short and despite the objections of several countries, Parties adopted a New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance (NCQG). The 300 billion USD "goal" by 2035 is presented by Global North countries as a "tripling" of the previous 100bn USD/year goal, but in reality is barely higher if you take into account inflation, and <u>achievable</u> with hardly any additional budgetary efforts. It is far short of the 1.3 trillion USD developing country Parties came into COP asking for and even further below the trillions needed for developing countries to enable just transitions, a fossil fuel phaseout, and climate-resilient societies, and to address mounting climate harms. This epic fail is made worse given that the final decision was gavelled through without countries having the opportunity to intervene and when India, Bolivia, Nigeria, and Malawi on behalf of Least Developed

Countries (LDCs) came in with strong objections, of which the COP President merely took note.

Looking at the NCQG, it is not hard to see why climate-vulnerable countries objected. Throughout the process developed countries did all they could to shirk their responsibilities and obligations to provide finance. In addition to being too low and too late, there is no actual commitment or guarantee that developed countries will provide this finance rather than just "mobilize" it, there is no provision for finance being provided as grants, there are specific references to including public and private finance, and it even counts the outflows of multilateral development bank finance, and seemingly anything else as there is no exclusion list. The decision also established a "Baku to Belém road map" aiming to scale up finance to 1.3 trillion USD by 2035. However, it is unclear how the two COP presidencies will undertake this work and what steps may be taken based on their report at COP30. This also must be seen in a context of 1.3tn USD being mentioned earlier in the decision as an aspirational number being reached by "all actors", and therefore is not a goal of finance flowing from developed to developing countries, and especially not any sort of public provision of grants, but rather an accounting exercise. There are also no sub-goals for mitigation or adaptation, and loss and damage is excluded entirely. While countries recognize the increasing need for finance to address loss and damage, also in the context of the NCQG, there is no commitment to actually raise and provide such finance. There is also no guarantee that the finance provided through the NCQG will be human rights-based climate finance. In fact, a critical paragraph ensuring that climate finance would respect, protect, promote, and fulfill human rights and be gender-responsive was deleted from the draft text in yet another untransparent move. This lack of transparency was a theme in the NCQG with texts coming late and not being shared publicly.

This COP was supposed to be the "finance" COP, but it was anything but that. This is problematic from the perspective of States' obligations and the rights of those harmed by historic inaction, and for climate ambition. All Parties to the Paris Agreement are expected to submit new NDCs in 2025, and predictable, new, and additional climate finance at scale is critical to enable developing countries to be bold and ambitious in those plans. The failed climate finance outcome is therefore not just a problem in and of itself, but will also have a massive impact on national climate ambition and on trust in the negotiations.

Carbon Markets

COP29 started with bad procedural precedent with the acceptance of incomplete guidelines for the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (PACM) (art. 6.4) and ended with adoption of rules on both article 6.2 and 6.4 that will enable the full operationalization of the

Paris Agreement carbon markets. Carbon markets and carbon offsets are not a climate solution for mitigation or for finance as they enable polluting countries and industries to continue their fossil fuel use on the promise that they will be offset by activities elsewhere, thus, any steps towards operationalizing these market mechanisms can never be a win. And the decisions at COP29 make it even less so.

During the opening plenary, the Conference of Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) accepted the methodological standards and standards for activities involving removals presented by the Article 6.4 Supervisory Body without any discussion. Despite the mandate for the CMA to consider and adopt these two critical documents, it can hardly be said to have done so and instead went along with a highly unusual move. This adoption on day one was procedurally flawed and should not set a precedent for future decisions. Additionally, the underlying documents are problematic including because they open the doors to all types of removals and gaps remain in regards to human rights, land rights, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In this early adoption, it was stressed that the CMA would still have oversight of the PACM and actions of the Supervisory Body, but that was unclear from the subsequent two weeks. The final decision adopted provided little guidance to the Supervisory Body. It did contain a reference to consultation including with scientists and including knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, as well as a reference to requesting the Supervisory Body to consider other international environmental agreements when carrying out its work. This latter reference is a basis for preventing some of the worst removal activities, however, Parties failed to include references to ensure that future policy and standards revisions would be in line with best available science and international law including human rights law.

The final agreement on Article 6.2, which involves the trading of Internationally Transferable Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs), has the potential to lead to worse scandals than those seen in the voluntary carbon markets. The decision includes weak rules on transparency with Parties failing to ask for more information in the initial reports on the activities and worse still there is nothing preventing the use of ITMOs if there are inconsistencies in the activities not actually resulting in the claimed reductions/removals or cause significant human rights violations.

The finalization of these rules bring to a close the outstanding mandates on the Paris Agreement carbon markets until their review in 2028. The CMA will continue to receive reports and should provide critical oversight of the PACM and give it guidance to try and prevent it from repeating past mistakes, including rights violations – such as those repeatedly documented under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. Additionally, the 6.4 Supervisory Body will continue to adopt standards, policies, and tools as it moves towards full operationalization. Looking forward it will also be important to

continue to point out the human rights violations that arise from carbon market projects and reliance on carbon offsets, and the fallacy of relying on carbon markets rather than undertaking emissions reductions, including in the new NDCs that will be submitted in 2025, and that <u>carbon markets are not climate finance</u> and cannot make up for a shortfall nor should they be part of the Baku to Belém Roadmap tied to the NCQG.

Loss and Damage

As a result of the continued failure of historic polluters to reduce emissions and provide adequate finance for adaptation, we are now in the era of loss and damage: the climate crisis is infringing on rights and destroying ecosystems across the globe. Hundreds of billions are needed per year to address these harms. After decades of denial, in recent years countries have recognized a need for scaled-up finance to address loss and damage and even established a dedicated fund for it. However, the denial and delay continued at COP29. The Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) is still largely empty with a mere 750 million USD pledged in total (of which only about a quarter has been converted into actual money) and Baku saw only 57.5 million USD in extra pledges coming in from Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand. This is outrageous in the light of studies estimating the loss and damage needs of developing countries to be at least 400 billion per year, and demonstrates once again the limits of a voluntary pledging approach. With finance for addressing loss and damage excluded from the new climate finance goal, there is no guarantee of increased funding in the years to come. This omission is yet another reminder of how the UN Climate Convention is failing to uphold the right to remedy for those harmed by the climate crisis, and the need for a shift from voluntary approaches to obligations and accountability.

With a Governing Instrument adopted at COP28, the FRLD Board took off in 2024 and presented its first report to the COP/CMA at COP29. Disappointingly, the decision adopting this report did not come with additional guidance from the Parties to the Board. Such guidance is critical given the decisions that still need to be made before the Fund can become operational, and to ensure it meets the needs and priorities of those on the frontlines of climate harms. The functioning of this Fund should not be left in the hands of a small group of Board members while billions of people's lives are impacted and the COP/CMA should take its guiding role seriously. Discussions on the report mostly centered around the United States pushing back against a paragraph calling on Parties to convert their pledges into actual contributions, demonstrating yet again their unwillingness to meaningfully address the massive climate harm that developing countries and their communities are facing. The weak outcome on finance for loss and damage puts even more weight on the FRLD Board's task to develop a Resource Mobilization Strategy, which is in its work plan for 2025. Other important items on the agenda of the Board for next year

are modalities for a "start-up phase" to begin early disbursements in 2025, effective and meaningful public participation of affected communities, Indigenous Peoples, and civil society in the Fund, and developing modalities for access, including direct community access, to the Fund's resources. It is critical for the Board to take guidance from human rights experts and mechanisms that are increasingly addressing the question of climate-related loss and damage, such as the UN Secretary-General's <u>analytical study</u> for the Human Rights Council on "the impact of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, exploring equity-based approaches and solutions to addressing the same," and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development's <u>report</u> for the UN General Assembly on "Climate Justice: Loss and Damage."

Finally, COP29 was also supposed to undertake the 2024 review of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM). The review is important as the UNFCCC loss and damage landscape has significantly changed with the establishment of the Santiago Network – with the objective of delivering technical assistance on loss and damage to developing countries – and the FRLD, and Parties should take this opportunity to ensure streamlining and coordination across these mechanisms, and enhance action and support given to developing countries. The review could also have mandated the development of a loss and damage gap report, to assess finance and other needs to remedy climate harm, and how much finance is currently available, to identify how big the gap is. Parties did not come to an agreement on the WIM review and postponed it to the next meeting of the Subsidiary Bodies in Bonn next year (SB62).

Civic Space

COP29 was held in and Presided over by a government with a detrimental human rights record: Azerbaijan has a closed civic space with no freedom of assembly, speech, or press. In the months prior COP29, an <u>increase in the crackdown</u> on civil society and arrests of activists, political dissidents, trade unionists and journalists took place, with the number of political prisoners going up to over 300. For example, Anar Mammadli, a prominent human rights defender who had launched the "Climate of Justice" initiative in the lead up to COP29, has been arbitrarily detained and his arrest was extended during COP29. Such a climate of fear affects not only those directly targeted, but also discourages others from speaking up, mobilizing, and pushing for transformative climate action. Many activists decided not to travel to Baku or to self-censor, and as the COP unfolded, those activists present at COP29 faced strong surveillance and intimidation within the Blue Zone.

In this context, it is even more concerning that the UNFCCC Secretariat itself is increasingly restricting the ability to organize actions and demonstrations within the COP venue and

policing what can and cannot be said. Such restrictions entail having to prove a link between the environment and any references to human rights defenders, prohibiting explicit references to intergovernmental organizations, and putting in place unnecessary strict sound restrictions effectively leading to silent protests.

The Paris Agreement recognizes the importance of participatory climate action, and the IPCC has concluded that active engagement of the public is a prerequisite for effective and resilient climate action. Excluding the voices of those calling for justice and with lived experience of the climate crisis will further undermine the UNFCCC's credibility and legitimacy. The UNFCCC and all its Parties must uphold human rights and ensure a safe and secure civic space before, during, and after COPs within and outside of the Blue Zone. Strong human rights safeguards in the host country agreement are a critical component of this approach. Despite Parties having repeatedly stressed the need to protect and respect the human rights of all participants in the process, the Secretariat has yet to put in place adequate safeguards. While Parties also stressed the importance of making the host country agreement publicly available, the Secretariat continues to refuse to make this document available to all COP participants on its webpage, making it impossible for those attending COP to understand the extent to which their individual freedoms are guaranteed in the context of the COP were protected. Parties must call this out and demand that the UNFCCC Secretariat proactively publish previous and future HCAs on their website, and engage with host countries to ensure that measures are in place to allow everyone to participate safely in the climate negotiations and establish adequate safeguards with regards to the hosting of any future UNFCCC conferences.

Other Important Developments

Gender

Gender justice faced significant challenges at COP29, marked by the lack of prioritization by the Presidency and backlash against gender-inclusive language across different workstreams. The adoption of an enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender at COP29 extended its mandate to 10 years and established a roadmap for a new Gender Action Plan (GAP) by COP30. However, this was overshadowed by numerous significant shortcomings. By merely maintaining previously agreed language, the Programme fails to address systemic barriers to gender justice and to achieve meaningful progress for rights-based climate action.

The broader regression on human rights across various workstreams at this COP was starkly evident in the gender negotiations, where the first iterations of the text excluded

references to the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Negotiations were also marked by persistent resistance by some Parties to inclusive language, references to intersectionality, and recognition of lived realities. The final decision disregards the unique challenges faced by women, girls, and gender-diverse people in the context of the climate crisis. It also omits mention of Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRD) — key advocates for urgent action to address the climate crisis — and offers no protections against gender-based violence. These exclusions undermine the integral connection between gender equality and climate justice.

The forthcoming GAP presents a critical opportunity to rectify these shortcomings. To be meaningful and effective, it must prioritize human rights, intersectionality, inclusivity, measurable outcomes, adequate funding, and concrete protections for those most at risk, including WEHRDs. Anything less jeopardizes the moral and practical foundations of equitable climate action.

Just Transition

The Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), designed to align climate policy with social and economic priorities such as employment, social protection and labor rights, reducing inequality, and ensuring energy access, failed to get an agreement at COP29. The JTWP is critical for the advancements of rights-based and gender-responsive climate action and COP29 was expected to provide guidance on its implementation and lay the groundwork for actionable outcomes in 2025.

Despite its critical importance, the JTWP process was already hindered by the lack of an agreed text from the SB session in June that addressed key concerns, particularly from the G77 group. This unresolved state exacerbated tensions during the first days of COP29, delaying meaningful progress. While CSOs called for clear guidance to achieve future concrete outcomes, the process closed with a non-consensual text and the JTWP negotiations ended in "Rule 16," meaning that there is no outcome at COP29: no progress was acknowledged, nor was guidance established for advancing the JTWP in 2025.

Looking ahead, a robust outcome on Just Transition is critical for COP30. This includes advancing discussions on urgently and equitably phasing out fossil fuels, renewable energy integration, and human rights-based and gender-responsive approaches, alongside mechanisms for social protection. SB62 in June and a proactive COP30 Presidency will be essential to ensuring Just Transition becomes a priority in the global climate agenda, and to make linkages with international law critical to a just transition such as human rights and labor rights. In this context, it is important to note that the UN Secretary General is welcoming input until 30th December 2024 in the context of an upcoming

synthesis report on just transition and human rights, to be presented to the Human Rights Council at its 60th session (September 2025).

Adaptation

COP29 marked the midpoint of the UAE-Belém Work Programme (2024–2025), agreed to at COP28 (2/CMA.5), to establish indicators to measure progress towards the seven thematic and four dimensional targets set under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, or the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework. Negotiations were dominated by debates over the meaning of "transformational adaptation," and over means of implementation (i.e. finance). This should come as no surprise given the decades-long underfunding of adaptation, and the lack of progress in the NCQG negotiations. While it is encouraging that the final decision includes indicators on means of implementation and establishes a permanent adaptation agenda item, these measures are only meaningful if adequate and accessible public finance is provided and reaches the communities that need it most. This has been perpetually lacking and was not addressed through the flawed NCQG outcome. Clear guidance on tracking means of implementation was deferred to COP30.

Importantly, on human rights specifically, the decision mentions that indicators should include information regarding "social inclusion, Indigenous Peoples, participatory processes, human rights, gender equality, migrants, children and young people, and persons with disabilities." However, the language does not frame it as a fundamental requirement and it therefore remains to be seen how strongly it will be reflected in the final indicators expected to be adopted at COP30. The COP29 decision also established the Baku Adaptation Road Map to track progress on the GGA, for which modalities are yet to be decided.

MOVING FORWARD: RESPECTING AND PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT IN 2025

The upcoming year provides a number of important opportunities for integrating human rights in climate action, including:

• Parties must <u>respect</u>, <u>protect and promote human rights</u> in the context of the planning process, design, implementation and monitoring of their **new NDCs** to be submitted in 2025. This entails ensuring meaningful and effective participation in the planning process of the NDC, setting ambition and goals in line with keeping warming below 1.5°C, and putting in place policies and measures and real solutions to realize these objectives through just transitions based on human

rights principles and standards. The NDCs should explicitly indicate how Parties take their human rights obligations into account in the planning and implementation of their NDCs.

- The failure of COP29 to deliver an ambitious goal for provision of public finance cannot deter or delay the provision of finance. Developed country Parties must follow through and provide public finance, including potentially indicating intention to in their NDCs. The Baku to Belém roadmap must correct course from COP29 and, along with the outcomes of the Sharm el-Sheikh dialogue on art. 2.1(c), demonstrate a commitment to provision of public finance for climate action rather than climate drivers fossil fuels.
- As **carbon market activities** increase under Article 6.2 and 6.4, Parties must ensure that there are robust, thorough reviews to monitor whether the claimed reductions/removals are actually taking place. The Article 6.4 Supervisory Body also must ensure that its policies and standards are human rights compatible and in line with best available science and, as they start to review potential activities, that they ensure there are no human rights violations. NDCs should not include reliance on offsets given the potential direct human rights violations, the fact that they lead to indirect human rights violations stemming from the failure to phase out fossil fuels and the repeated failures for the majority of these projects to demonstrate actual environmental integrity.
- In further operationalizing the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage, Parties and Board members must be guided by international human rights law including by relying on the various relevant reports and studies that have been published by human rights mechanisms and institutions to increase its alignment with State obligations related to upholding the right to remedy in the context of the climate crisis. This has implications for critical questions on the Board's agenda for 2025 such as the operational model of the Fund and initial interventions, the scale of the Fund, meaningful and effective public participation, protecting the funds' governance from corporate capture, access modalities especially for frontline communities, and ensuring that policies are in place to respect, protect, and promote human rights throughout the Fund's activity cycle.
- The Just Transition Work Programme decision at COP30 must uphold human rights, including labor rights, and lead to concrete, actionable outcomes. Parties must learn from critical guidance provided by human rights experts and institutions, including the upcoming synthesis report by the UN Secretary-General on human rights and just transition.
- COP30 must be informed by the **International Court of Justice's advisory opinion** on legal obligations of States in the context of climate change, provided that its expected publication in 2025 happens prior to the COP. It should also be

informed by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights' advisory opinion on climate change, which is also expected in 2025, as well as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea's <u>already released advisory opinion on climate</u> <u>change and the law of the sea</u>. This includes how Parties should assess commitments made in NDCs and related to finance.

Parties also should reflect on the current lack of progress on addressing the climate crisis as well as what these international tribunals identify and deliberate on what changes are needed to the UNFCCC processes to ensure it can become a space where States' legal obligations, which stem from multiple sources of international law, are upheld rather than eroded, and to increase its effectiveness. This includes putting in place a comprehensive conflict of interest policy to stop corporate capture, and ensuring greater transparency and participation modalities for civil society and Indigenous Peoples.

Selected Calls for Submissions	Deadline	Reference
Mitigation Suggested topics in line with the scope of the mitigation work programme to be discussed at the global dialogues in 2025	1 February 2025	Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme (CMA5)
Carbon Markets (art. 6.4) The Article 6.4 Supervisory Body will <u>meet four times</u> in 2025 and there will be a call for relevant inputs prior to each meeting (content to be confirmed)	l week periods prior to each meeting (3 February 2025 and 5 May 2025)	6.4 Supervisory Body <u>calls for</u> <u>Input</u>
Finance flows (art. 2.1c) Views on the issues to be addressed during the workshops to be held in 2025	1 March 2025	Sharm el-Sheikh dialogue on the scope of Article 2, paragraph 1(c), of the Paris Agreement and its complementarity with Article 9 of the Paris Agreement (CMA5)
Food and agriculture Views on workshop on systemic and holistic approaches to implementation of climate action on agriculture, food systems and food security, understanding, cooperation and integration into	1 March 2025	Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security (SBI/SBSTA60)

plans		
Adaptation Views on matters related to paragraph 38 of decision 2/CMA.5 and on the modalities for work under the Baku Adaptation Road Map (Parties only)	25 March 2025	<u>Global goal on adaptation</u> (CMA5)
Gender Views on the format and scope of the in-session technical workshop on the design of gender action plan (§14) to be held at SBI62	31 March 2025	<u>Gender and climate change</u> (COP29)
Loss and Damage Views and recommendations on elements of guidance for the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (Parties only)	no later than 10 weeks prior to COP30/CMA7	Report of the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage and guidance to the Fund (COP29/CMA5)
Indigenous Peoples Views on activities and thematic focuses for the workplan of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform for 2028–2031	30 September 2026	Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (COP29)
Views on the impact of work under the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform	1 November 2026	

For all submission deadlines, see <u>UNFCCC Submission Portal</u>.

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