

UN Secretary-General pushes COP29 negotiators to seal deal after draft spurned

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Activists demand that rich countries help developing nations tackle global warming at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, on November 21, 2024 [Laurent Thomet/AFP]

Baku, November 22 (RHC)-- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has urged negotiators at the United Nations' annual climate talks to launch a "major push" for an agreement after they rejected a draft agreement with just one more day of the summit to go.

Nations attending the COP29 summit lined up to spurn a vague draft deal released by host Azerbaijan on Thursday, which failed to address the key issue of how much money rich countries should provide developing nations to transition to clean energy and adapt to global warming.

"We need a major push to get discussions over the finishing line," said Guterres, noting "substantive differences" between rich and poor nations, the former group baulking at demands to provide a substantial slice of the \$1.3 trillion the developing world says it needs to fight climate change.

Developing countries plus China, an influential negotiating bloc, want at least \$500bn from developed nations in the form of grants or money without strings attached, rather than loans that add to national debt. But developed countries want all sources of finance, including public money and private investment, counted towards the goal. They also want China to chip in.

The European Union and the United States, two of the biggest providers of climate finance, have refused to put forward a figure without more precision on the finer points of the pact. With the summit set to conclude on Friday, the draft agreement was notably vague, eliding any mention of concrete figures, using an "X" to denote the overall climate finance commitment.

Ali Mohamed, the chair of the African Group of Negotiators, said the "elephant in the room" was the figure. "This is the reason we are here ... but we are no closer and we need the developed countries to urgently engage on this matter." "The time for political games is over," said Cedric Schuster, the Samoan chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a group of nations at threat from rising seas.

Many nations also said the proposals failed to uphold a pledge made at last year's United Arab Emirates summit to transition away from fossil fuels. The burning of fossil fuels has helped raise the planet's long-term average temperature by about 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, driving disastrous floods, hurricanes, droughts and extreme heatwaves.

Australia's Minister for Climate Change Chris Bowen said countries had "hidden, pared back or minimised" explicit references to fossil fuels.

As the clock ticked down, frustration boiled over at the COP29 hosts. "Could I please ... urge you to step up the leadership?" EU Commissioner for Climate Action Wopke Hoekstra said in pointed remarks. "I'm not going to sugarcoat it. I'm really sorry to say, but the text we now have in front of us, in our view, is imbalanced, unworkable and unacceptable."

COP29 Lead Negotiator Yalchin Rafiyev appealed for "compromise and solidarity," telling delegates, "This is a moment where you need to put all your cards on the table."

The Republic of Ireland's Climate Minister Eamon Ryan insisted negotiations were "advancing" behind the scenes. "This text is not the final text, that is clear. It will be quite radically different. But I think there is room for further agreement."

Azerbaijan said a "shorter" draft would be unveiled Thursday evening and would "contain numbers".

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES]

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