

UN climate talks in disarray as developing nations stage walkout at COP29

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People protest against the restrictions climate CSOs have been facing at COP and around the world, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan [File: Maxim Shemetov/Reuters]

Baku, November 24 (RHC)-- Negotiators are racing to salvage the United Nations climate talks after developing nations staged a walkout, demanding more in climate finance from historically wealthy emitters.

More than a day past the scheduled conclusion of COP29 talks, host Azerbaijan urged delegates to seek consensus to avoid failure.

"I know that none of us wants to leave Baku without a good outcome," COP President Mukhtar Babayev told a late-night session on Saturday, urging all nations to "bridge the remaining divide."

The comments came hours after delegations from small island states and the least developed nations walked out of negotiations on a funding package for poor countries to curb and adapt to climate change, saying their climate finance interests were being ignored.

"We've just walked out. We came here to this COP for a fair deal. We feel that we haven't been heard," said Cedric Schuster, the Samoan chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States, a coalition of nations threatened by rising seas.

"[The] current deal is unacceptable for us. We need to speak to other developing countries and decide what to do," Evans Njewa, chair of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group, said.

When asked if the walkout was a protest, Colombia Environment Minister Susana Mohamed told The Associated Press news agency: "I would call this dissatisfaction, [we are] highly dissatisfied."

With tensions high, climate activists also heckled United States climate envoy John Podesta as he left the meeting room. They accused the United States of not paying its fair share and having "a legacy of burning up the planet."

Later on Saturday, representatives from the European Union, the U.S. and other wealthy countries met directly with those of developing nations in an attempt to work out an agreement.

Developing countries have accused the rich of trying to get their way – and a smaller financial aid package – via a war of attrition. And small island nations, particularly vulnerable to climate change's worsening effects, accused the host country presidency of ignoring them throughout the talks.

Panama's chief negotiator, Juan Carlos Monterrey Gomez, said he has had enough. "Every minute that passes, we are going to just keep getting weaker and weaker and weaker. They don't have that issue. They have massive delegations," Monterrey Gomez said.

"This is what they always do. They break us at the last minute. You know, they push it and push it and push it until our negotiators leave. Until we're tired, until we're delusional from not eating, from not sleeping."

The last official draft on Friday pledged \$250bn annually by 2035, more than double the previous goal of \$100 billion set 15 years ago, but far short of the annual \$1 trillion-plus that experts say is needed.

Developing nations are seeking \$1.3 trillion to help adapt to droughts, floods, rising seas and extreme heat, pay for losses and damage caused by extreme weather, and transition their energy systems away from planet-warming fossil fuels and towards clean energy.

Wealthy nations are obligated to pay vulnerable countries under an agreement reached at COP talks in Paris in 2015. Nazanine Moshiri, senior climate and environment analyst at the International Crisis Group, told Al Jazeera that rich countries were being restricted by economic conditions.

“Wealthy nations are constrained by tight domestic budgets, by the Gaza war, by Ukraine and also other conflicts, for example in Sudan, and [other] economic issues,” she said.

“This is at odds with what developing countries are grappling with: the mounting costs of storms, floods and droughts, which are being fuelled by climate change.”

Teresa Anderson, the global lead on climate justice at Action Aid, said, to get a deal, “the presidency has to put something far better on the table”.

“The United States, in particular, and rich countries, need to do far more to show that they’re willing for real money to come forward,” she told the AP. “And if they don’t, then LDCs are unlikely to find that there’s anything here for them.”

Despite the fractures between nations, some still held out hopes for the talks. “We remain optimistic,” said Nabeel Munir of Pakistan, who chairs one of the talks’ standing negotiating committees.

Panama’s Monterrey Gomez highlighted that there needs to be a deal. “If we don’t get a deal I think it will be a fatal wound to this process, to the planet, to people,” he said.

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