

# Multilateralism lives to fight on as dust settles on UN climate talks

by Arthur Wyns

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The Pacific Rising coalition of NGO representatives prepares for COP30 in Belém, Brazil

Photo Credit: *Unitarian Universalist Service Committee*

As the dust settles on the United Nations COP30 climate talks in Brazil, a lot of questions remain.

Ten years on from the Paris Agreement, are the UN talks still fit for purpose? How can countries shift from climate negotiations to implementation? And what does the arrangement between Türkiye and Australia in connection with the hosting of next year's summit mean for the Pacific?

COP30 took place in exceptional circumstances: the United States has **withdrawn from the Paris Agreement**, trade wars and tariffs are **reshaping geopolitics**, wars rage across multiple continents and development finance cuts are **hurting the most vulnerable communities**.

The fact that 194 countries showed up in Brazil and managed to agree on anything at all is a miracle in and of itself; multilateralism lives to fight another day.

Progress at COP30 remained extremely limited, however. The talks were meant to elevate the importance of climate adaptation and centre the lived experience of the climate crisis for communities around the world. Countries were expected to boost financing for climate adaptation and agree on a set of indicators to monitor global progress on adaptation.

In the end, high-income countries did not commit to any new finance, merely agreeing to an open-ended commitment to increase the share of (existing) climate finance going to adaptation three-fold over the next ten years.

Efforts to establish a global framework for monitoring adaptation were also thwarted, with only the **partial adoption of a set of indicators**. These indicators will continue to be refined over the next two years when they might finally be adopted and enter into force at COP32, which will be held in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, making it the first COP summit to be held in a least developed country. This continued

uncertainty in adaptation monitoring will likely have a negative knock-on effect on adaptation finance.

In a milestone year, the first since the world **breached the 1.5 degree Celsius temperature threshold**, and at a time when communities around the world are facing **the increasingly extreme impacts of climate change**, leaders failed to give adaptation the political attention it deserved at COP30.

This is despite a visible shift in the political narrative, with leaders increasingly framing climate action around the consequences for people's daily lives rather than the more abstract emissions. Many leaders at COP described their climate commitments as central to energy security, people's health and prosperity, jobs, and to addressing the cost of living and rising inequities.

The final negotiated text at COP30 also reflected this shift; **the political decision** for the first time highlights “the economic and social benefits and opportunities of climate action, including economic growth, job creation, improved energy access and security, and improved public health”.

By far the biggest story at COP30 revolved around efforts to reduce fossil fuels.

During the world leaders' summit ahead of COP30, Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva called for “roadmaps to justly and strategically reverse deforestation [and] overcome dependence on fossil fuels”.

The call united a growing group of countries to publicly call for a fossil fuel roadmap in the first week of the COP, including several Pacific Island countries, Latin American countries, and even some countries with significant revenues from fossil fuels such as Australia and Colombia.

Despite the overwhelming support, the final COP decision text did not include a reference to a fossil fuel roadmap. The European Union and others briefly threatened to walk out, but were eventually reassured by Brazil, who confirmed it would take forward the fossil fuel roadmap outside of the formal COP process.

In support of the fossil fuel roadmap, the governments of Colombia and the Netherlands announced they will co-host the first-ever **International Conference on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels** in April 2026 in the Colombian port city of Santa Marta.

Pacific nations committed to host a follow-up meeting in the Pacific region in 2026 to advance the outcomes.

Even though fossil fuels were not addressed in the consensus-based COP text,

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over 80 countries have now shown they're ready to begin weaning themselves off fossil fuels. This coalition of the willing could make real progress in setting timelines and identifying shared actions for fossil fuel phase-out.

If momentum can be sustained throughout 2026, the growing appetite from a critical mass of governments to address the phase-out of fossil fuels head-on could still find its way back into the formal negotiation agenda at COP31.

Another question looming over the aftermath of COP30 is how Australia, Türkiye and the Pacific Island countries might work together in 2026 to organise the most complex global negotiations of our time.

Türkiye will physically host the talks, be in charge of the action agenda, and appoint the COP31 president, while Australia will lead the formal negotiations. With Australia no longer at the helm of COP31, its partnership with the Pacific in this process is now called into question. Luckily, Türkiye, Australia and the Pacific Island countries did reach agreement that a pre-COP meeting will take place in the Pacific, enabling a pathway for Pacific priorities to remain at the centre of the climate talks.

There have been a few previous COPs where the nation holding the presidency was not also the host. For example, Fiji held the COP23 presidency in 2017, even though the summit was physically held in Bonn, Germany; while in 2019, Chile retained the COP25 presidency after the summit moved to Madrid, Spain due to civil unrest in Santiago.

However, the arrangement between Australia and Türkiye — under which Türkiye is COP31 President while **Australia is “President of Negotiations”** and COP31 Vice-President — is unprecedented, and the current geopolitical environment has been pushing countries further apart, away from international collaboration.

With the right strategy, though, this new arrangement can still allow the Pacific to shape the outcome of COP31. If Australia, Türkiye and the Pacific are able to combine their diplomatic assets, they might be able to have a bigger impact on climate diplomacy than on their own.

Next year's climate summit will have a steep hill to climb, but focusing global diplomatic attention on the Pacific could help unlock the political leadership we need.

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Link:

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