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Climate activists demonstrate inside Baku Stadium at the United Nations climate change conference, COP29, on Nov. 16. A major focus is a new climate finance target, with developing nations calling on developed nations to deliver trillions of dollars in the next decade. (UN Climate Change/Habib Samadov)



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As the United Nations climate change conference reached the halfway point, faith organizations urgently appealed for countries to seize the limited time left and set an ambitious new target to finance the transition to clean energy and adaptation measures for a rapidly warming world.

With the clock ticking down on COP29 (Nov. 11-22), negotiations concerning a new global climate finance goal — the main objective here in Baku — are at an impasse. With ministers arriving this week, significant disagreement remains between developed and developing nations on the amount of funding needed, who should contribute and its overall framework.

Developing countries, backed by many civil society groups, have rallied around an economists' report that put necessary funding at $1.3 trillion annually by 2035 cumulatively from governments, banks and the private sector.

That sum would represent a tenfold increase over the prior goal of $100 billion annually by 2020 set 15 years ago.

The latest draft of the new financing target (in U.N. parlance, the new collective quantified goal) was released late on Nov. 16. Hours earlier, protests took place over the stalled proceedings, with faith leaders and activists at one point creating a human chain outside the main plenary halls in the negotiations' blue zone.



Climate activists demonstrate at the COP29 U.N. climate summit, Nov. 16 in Baku, Azerbaijan. (NCR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

"Although we might be silenced, we are still present, we are still here standing our ground for climate justice and solidarity until the end, for now and future generations," said Lydia Lehlogonolo Machaka, energy and extractivism officer with the international Catholic development network CIDSE.

"We are here to demonstrate and speak on behalf of climate-vulnerable countries," Damian Spruce, advocacy associate director at Caritas Australia, told EarthBeat. He said that wealthy nations have a "responsibility, as the primary carbon emitters for hundreds of years, to take action regarding the climate crisis we are currently facing."

The 25-page draft text on finance underscores the need to rapidly scale up climate finance, with proposals ranging from $100 billion to $2 trillion annually by 2035 to developing countries from developed ones.

"We will continue reminding the responsible countries of their moral responsibility, holding them accountable and making our demands known," Machaka told EarthBeat.

The 20 largest economies in the world, known as the G20, account for roughly 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions.



Lydia Lehlogonolo Machaka, energy and extractivism officer with the international Catholic development network CIDSE, is pictured during COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, on Nov. 11-22. (NCR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

The United States and China — the top two economies — accounted for 11% and 30% of emissions in 2023, respectively, per the U.N. Environment Programme's 2024 emissions gap report. The European Union contributed 6% of emissions, as did Africa, which faces some of the direst climate challenges.

COP29 is the latest international gathering on implementing the 2015 Paris Agreement. Catholic organizations here have closely monitored the finance target negotiations with a focus on the Global North repaying its "ecological debt" to the Global South amassed from a disproportionate use of natural resources.

At a Nov. 16 event, Caritas Internationalis, the church's global network of 162 development and aid organizations delivered a moral plea to COP29 delegates to reach a strong financial package for the Global South. Fall short, it said, and "the opportunity to prevent irreversible climate breakdown would be lost."

Caritas echoed Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who spoke earlier at COP29 on behalf of Pope Francis, in calling on wealthier nations to commit to a new financial target to help countries most vulnerable to climate impacts in creating low-carbon economies.



Gina Castillo, senior climate policy adviser at Catholic Relief Services, is pictured during COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, on Nov. 11-22. (NCR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

The new goal must address "the ecological debt owed by the Global North, without creating further financial burdens," Victor Genina, Caritas director of integral human development, said in a statement.

The overall package, he added, should be large enough to cover debts owed and provide funding primarily as public grants and not loans "which would only prolong the injustice we aim to address." Faith groups have also joined calls that the new target include climate mitigation, adaptation and the loss and damage fund.

Gina Castillo, senior climate policy adviser at Catholic Relief Services, said she was hopeful countries would ultimately reach agreement on a finance sum commensurate with what is necessary.

"This new number must be a turning point for action because we desperately need to support the communities that are on the frontlines experiencing repeated climate shocks," she said.

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In their own way, the weekend protests represented an attempt at "a shock to revive the negotiations," Spruce said.

Groups observing the negotiations have described them as slow-moving.

COP29 opened with an agreement on standards for a carbon market, where credits for emissions allowances can be traded among countries. But that deal was reached without debate, drawing some criticism.

In the finance negotiations, longstanding divides between developed and developing nations have persisted. Developing countries have pushed for $1.3 trillion, while developed countries have been largely quiet on an exact number. Observers say one reason is they want to determine first who will be contributing, believing that should include China and oil-rich Middle Eastern nations. A new analysis from Carbon Brief reported that China has moved ahead of the EU into the No. 2 slot in historical

emissions.

Outside finance talks, there has been little conversation about new national climate targets that are due in early 2025, nor next steps on COP28's first-ever commitment to a transition from fossil fuels. Numerous heads of state in their speeches remained steadfast that the Baku talks keep alive the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) temperature limit target under the Paris Agreement.



Climate activists, including faith leaders, demonstrate at the COP29 U.N. climate summit, Nov. 16 in Baku, Azerbaijan. (NCR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

Activists have questioned how serious countries are taking climate change, pointing to the absence of several prominent world leaders.

Heads of the G20 countries are currently meeting not in Baku, but in Brazil. In their concluding statement, G20 leaders committed to accelerating financial reforms to meet the climate challenge and reiterated "the need for rapidly and substantially scaling up climate finance from billions to trillions from all sources."

Religious climate activists have questioned Azerbaijan’s leadership role at COP29 due to its dependence on fossil fuels.

The location of the first oil well drilled in the 1840s, Azerbaijan is the second consecutive country whose economy is deeply tied to fossil fuels to host the U.N. climate summit. Oil and gas make up roughly half of its gross domestic product and more than 90% of its exports. Still, the eastern European country accounts for less than 1% of global oil and gas production; the U.S. is the leading user and producer of both.



Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev speaks during the opening of the world leaders climate action summit Nov. 12 at COP29, the United Nations climate change conference. (UN Climate Change/Kiara Worth)

Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev caused a stir with his speech Nov. 12 during the world leaders summit where he referred to fossil fuels, among other natural resources as "a gift from God." He emphasized that nations should not be judged

solely on their natural resources or how they utilize them.

"Whether it's oil, gas, wind, sun, gold, silver, copper, they are all natural resources. Countries should not be blamed for having them, and should not be blamed for bringing these resources to the market because the market needs them. The people need them," Aliyev said.

A total of 1,773 fossil fuel lobbyists registered to attend COP29, dwarfing the delegations of most countries.

Spruce said it was "essential" to counter the narrative of the fossil fuel industry, including through protests, in order to "foster an environment that highlights the importance of addressing climate change."

Protests, a regular feature at the U.N. climate conferences, have been limited in Baku. Activists were advised they were prohibited from "loud protests" and restricted to quieter forms of demonstration.

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"We didn't let that stop us," Spruce said. "We expressed ourselves through song, humming and action, while also waving flags. We were visually powerful despite these limitations, and we need to find ways to make a significant impact."

As COP29 enters its final week, with the possibility of extending into extra days, Catholic climate advocates are calling on the ministers taking over negotiations to acknowledge the urgent need for action. The choices they make, they said, will profoundly impact the lives and livelihoods of millions in the most marginalized communities.

"We must secure a just outcome on climate finance, especially adaptation finance, to strengthen resilience and promote sustainable development across our region," said Damiana Lanusse, advocacy coordinator for Caritas Latin America. "With COP30 in Brazil next year, we call for an urgent, inclusive global transition. The time for decisive action is now."

Catholics here vowed to remain steadfast in their commitment to applying pressure on negotiators through protests, ensuring that the most crucial issues receive the

attention and outcomes they deserve.

"We hope that when the ministers arrive today [Monday] and tomorrow [Tuesday], we will witness significant progress," Machaka said. "We have more demonstrations planned to ensure that decision-makers recognize the seriousness of the global demand for action on climate change."

This story appears in the **COP29 Azerbaijan** feature series. View the full series.