



The Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) 30, in Belém, Brazil

10-22 November 2025

A Reflection from QUNO

The Brazilian President Lula Da Silva offered to host the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) in the Amazon. In their role as COP Presidency, he and his team wanted this to be the COP of Truth and Multilateralism. They achieved this, though not as they expected. By the end, there was a cracking of denial, and flowers blossoming in the cracks.

International climate negotiations

The COP is the decision-making space for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its related agreements, including the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. The outcomes that emerge from COPs are not the sole solution to avert catastrophic climate change. However, they are essential for coordinating international efforts to mitigate global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), to support adaptation and loss and damage needs, and to ensure that the best available science is heard.

COPs also offer a global platform where Indigenous Peoples' rights, human rights including just transition and intergenerational justice, gender equality, and biodiversity integrity are given voice before more than 196+ countries, even if these principles are being crushed within one's country. COPs also enable the latest available science to be heard in negotiation rooms that would otherwise be dominated by power and money. COPs also enable the most vulnerable to sit next to the most powerful, the UN and civil society to engage, as they face a shared destiny: either we act now and live sustainably, or we avoid sufficient action and suffer existentially.

The Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC is an imperfect yet remarkable mechanism. Nearly all countries have ratified it, creating a universal framework for climate action in areas such as reporting, tracking, compliance, and financial support. However, as any international law instrument, it is grounded in states' sovereignty and therefore relies on governments' choices to use it well—or poorly. Additionally, the UN remains the Secretariat of the Agreement and is vulnerable to political storms. This year, the UNFCCC, like many UN bodies worldwide, saw a quarter of its donor support disappear suddenly when the United States retreated from international cooperation. There is trauma in these rooms.

The current international political environment

This is the most dangerous international relations period in many decades, with unprecedented attacks by UN Member states on the laws and norms of international peace and justice that were built from the ashes of World War II. Countries are increasing military budgets at rates unseen since the Cold War,

while dramatically decreasing funds to multilateralism. The wars in Ukraine and Sudan, the genocide in Gaza and ongoing humanitarian crises in several lands have paralysed an already dysfunctional UN Security Council. In the climate change field, the deadline for new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) faced delayed and often disappointing responses. And at the last COP, in Azerbaijan, the COP President called fossil fuels ‘a gift from God’ and the negotiations over climate financing were brutal. Trust was at a very low ebb. This was the legacy inherited by Brazil.

The Brazilian Presidency

Brazil is a beautiful country located in South America, home to the largest portion of the Amazon Rainforest and a member of the powerful emerging economies—BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Brazil’s current government is led by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a man whose life is defined by his efforts to sustain democracy and reduce poverty through social programs in Brazil. In his second time as President, Lula appointed a group of Brazilian climate negotiators who breathed imagination and listening into the COP space. His team included Marina Silva, his Minister of Environment, a woman whose life has been defined by environmental and social justice commitments. Silva prioritized ethics and care for nature in this process and elevated ethics as a mainstream principle at COPs by spearheading pre-COP “Ethical Stocktakes” around the world.

Additionally, Belém do Pará, the host city located in the middle of the Amazon, lacked wealth and luxury but offered reality. COP participants cohabited with hardworking people of limited means, living in heat and humidity, in mostly basic apartments offering cold water and limited air conditioning. When delegates complained about the venue’s dysfunctional air conditioning, it was hard not to coyly suggest that they complain less and get moving on climate change action.

COP30 in Brazil was also the first COP to be held in a democratic country since the 2021 COP in Glasgow, Scotland. Like in Glasgow, civil society was everywhere in Belém, filling community halls, worship spaces and streets with vision and voice. COP30 had record Indigenous Peoples’ participation both in number and diversity of groups, and Brazil assembled an exciting and imaginative ‘Green Zone’ for the public.

This was not an uneventful COP. In addition to the heat, humidity, and brief but daily torrential rains, COP30 saw protesters crashing into the venue, high levels of military and police presence, and civil society locking arms to shield Amazonian Indigenous groups—including children and animals—from feared military charges. On top of all this, there was a fire.

Yet, unlike the Glasgow Climate Pact—under which the UK avoided addressing its national economic dependencies on oil, gas and unsustainable economic systems- the Brazilian Presidency called for phasing out of fossil fuels and deforestation, two major economic dependencies for Brazil. And toward the end of the COP, a growing group of developed and developing countries calling out denial and calling for action on fossil fuel phase out. This was a brave new world, a cracking of denial.

Denial

For the purposes of this reflection paper, we will define ‘denial’ as the refusal to take responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions. Denial is one of our greatest obstacles in facing our role in existential planetary crises of climate change, species extinction, chemical pollution, ocean acidification and land use change.

Denial has been peaking in this current period of ‘push back’. As humanity, we have recognized the danger of climate change and identified the root causes in our unsustainable energy, economic and

agricultural systems. Now, we need to act, we need to transform these drivers. Yet when these transformations challenge the existing inequitable distribution of wealth, they are fought.

Denial is practiced by many wealthy, developed countries that call for ambition in mitigation while simultaneously increasing fossil fuel extraction, except from the UK. Denial is also practiced by several extraction wealthy developing countries which suppress references to fossil fuels in negotiations. At COP30, we were concerned to witness a significantly intensified effort to discredit climate science assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In these rooms, it is hard for many “emerging economy” countries to support ambitious mitigation language, when all extraction wealthy developed countries (exception UK) are increasing fossil fuel production.

We were also very concerned by some states seeking to weaken already agreed language on gender equality, human rights, and mitigation. In this first week, denial was hitting new levels of damage.

It is normal for us to respond with despair when such levels of denial feed a deeply confusing moral time. People are being arrested for protesting insufficient action on climate change. People are being arrested for protesting a genocide. UN agencies and staff are being targeted—or even attacked— by UN Member States, with no consequence. UN institutions are facing sudden and drastic budget reductions. Governments, in turn, are increasing spending on weapons to kill people despite escalating planetary crises. For most people, real and tangible security is sufficient food, shelter, clean water, meaningful work, a healthy and sustainable environment, access to education, and freedom of movement without fear.

At COP30, the Brazilian Presidency’s vision faced intensified and coordinated denial. COP30 was easily labelled a disappointment. And yet – behind these headlines- was a COP of truth. Denial was being challenged, and flowers were beginning to grow in the cracks.

Flowers in the cracks

Coalition of the Willing – After a first week of dystopian blockage and an increasingly frustrated Presidency, we returned to the second week with rebellion in the air. By Tuesday, attention moved to the press conference room where ‘a coalition of the willing’ of around 80 States urged the inclusion of a roadmap for the phase-out of fossil fuels in the COP’s final agreement. It was fascinating to hear how, from their own positionality, diverse countries supported a just transition, framing it even as a matter of national security. (Iceland, for example, had recently identified the collapse of the Gulf Stream as a national security threat.)

On Friday, at another Ministerial Press Conference, Colombia, following on its leadership commitment to reduce fossil fuel extraction, read the Belem Declaration on Transition Away from Fossil Fuels. The Declaration, signed by 24 countries, reaffirm fossil fuels as the main drivers of climate change; reaffirmed the value of the IPCC science, the ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, and the Global Stocktake; and even mentions the need to phase out inefficient subsidies to fossil fuels and reconsider the global financial architecture. Colombia and the Netherlands also announced that they will co-host the First International Conference for the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels in April 2026. (The Tuesday Ministerial Press Conference can be seen [here](#), and the Friday Ministerial Press Conference [here](#).)

In a COP with so much potential, it was deeply frustrating to sit in negotiating rooms full of denial, where language on fossil fuels, the latest science, the lucrative drivers of greenhouse gas emissions and even the recognition of human rights was actively silenced. As Panamá negotiator Juan Carlos

Montgomery said, ‘*There is more information on climate change in our elementary school books in Panamá than the draft COP Multirão decision*’.

For that reason, it was a heartily welcomed breath of fresh air to witness, in those press conferences, a growing coalition of countries determined to look forward. It was the most genuine and intense coalition across developed, developing and least developed countries that we had witnessed since the 2015 Paris Agreement. Though still early days, there is a cracking of the wall that has silenced fossil fuel language. The cracking is coming across and within a range of different negotiation groups.

Other flowers in the cracks

- **Adoption of a new Gender Action Plan** – The first week of COP30 saw fears that the already agreed and human rights-based gender language would be weakened by several States and the Holy See. However, these efforts did not succeed, and the adoption of the new Gender Action Plan was viewed as a success.
- **Decision to develop a Just Transition Mechanism** – The concept ‘Just transition’ describes a human rights-based approach to climate action, recognized in the Paris Agreement. But, only in recent years become more central to negotiations, primarily due to efforts by civil society, trade unions, and the International Labour Organization. At COP30, States agreed to develop a “Just Transition Mechanism,” an initiative proposed by civil society. The purpose of the mechanism is ‘to enhance international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity-building, and knowledge sharing, and enable equitable, inclusive just transitions, noting that the mechanism is to be implemented in a manner that builds on and complements relevant workstreams under the Convention and the Paris Agreement.’¹
- **Conclusion of the Review of the Warsaw International Mechanism** – Least Developed Country representatives and the UNFCCC Secretariat working on Loss and Damage were pleased with progress at the COP, enabling them to move forward on work following the acceptance of the Review of the WIM. Recognition of Loss and Damage, once fought for survival at the COP, it is now integral to the negotiations.
- **New Commitment on Adaptation Finance and Adaptation Indicators** – Finance for adaptation has traditionally been underprioritized compared to mitigation finance. Yet, decisions at the COP30 reaffirmed the doubling of adaptation finance *provided by developed countries*, and called for efforts to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035. This language of responsibility and recognition of need was seen as a success of the COP30. Additionally, for the first time, 59 indicators were adopted, which will serve as an initial benchmark to track the Paris Agreement’s Global Goal on Adaptation. There was some disappointment here, over the political interference in reducing the number of expert-defined indicators. Still, the adoption was an important step forward.
- **Global Mutirão: Uniting humanity in a global mobilization against climate change** – While considered by many as a disappointment, those of us who have spent years advocating for the inclusion of rights-based approaches and human rights in this space, were celebrating the

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Presidency's inclusion more 'rights' language than in previous COP decisions, including highlighting of the right to a healthy and sustainable environment.

- **Reference to People of African Descent:** For the first time in UNFCCC history, People of African Descent were directly referenced in core negotiation documents, including COP30's texts on Just Transition, Gender Action Plan and the Global Goal on Adaptation.
- **COP Presidency Commitment on Roadmaps to Transition Away from Fossil Fuels and Reverse Deforestation** – Although these two issues were a priority for Brazil, countries could not reach consensus to include the two roadmaps in the COP's final decision, **the Global Mutirão**. Nevertheless, Brazil, in its role as COP Presidency, unilaterally committed to lead the dialogues to develop a roadmap for a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels, as well as a roadmap to halt and reverse deforestation, ahead of COP31.

Often, we leave a COP with exhausted souls. We did not leave COP30 with exhaustion. We left tired but filled with determination and gratitude for the courageous voices saying “enough.” We left with the assurance that people are rising and calling for justice—calling for peace on Earth and peace with Earth; calling for the security of a healthy environment; calling on the moral conscience of the human family. We have hope.

The way we address planetary crises driven by our human activities will determine our future. We can choose a more value-based, fair, and sustainable human existence. Or, on the contrary, we can continue prioritizing wealth accumulation over the health of people and the planet. Our courage is needed, in every way we can offer it, to help build a livable and sustainable world for all.

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