

COP 29: CHALLENGES, FAILURES AND UNCERTAIN PROGRESS

Cop 29 was held in Baku, Azerbaijan and, like all recent Cops, attracted both tens of thousands of participants and some controversy. It was hosted by a petrostate, with frustration about the chairing of the conference leading to walkouts at different times by France, Argentina and small island states. The election of Donald Trump also caused shock with the near certainty that the USA will withdraw from the Paris agreement in 2025. A highlight for faith groups was the return of a Faith Pavilion for the second year, providing a platform for faith-based discussions on climate justice.

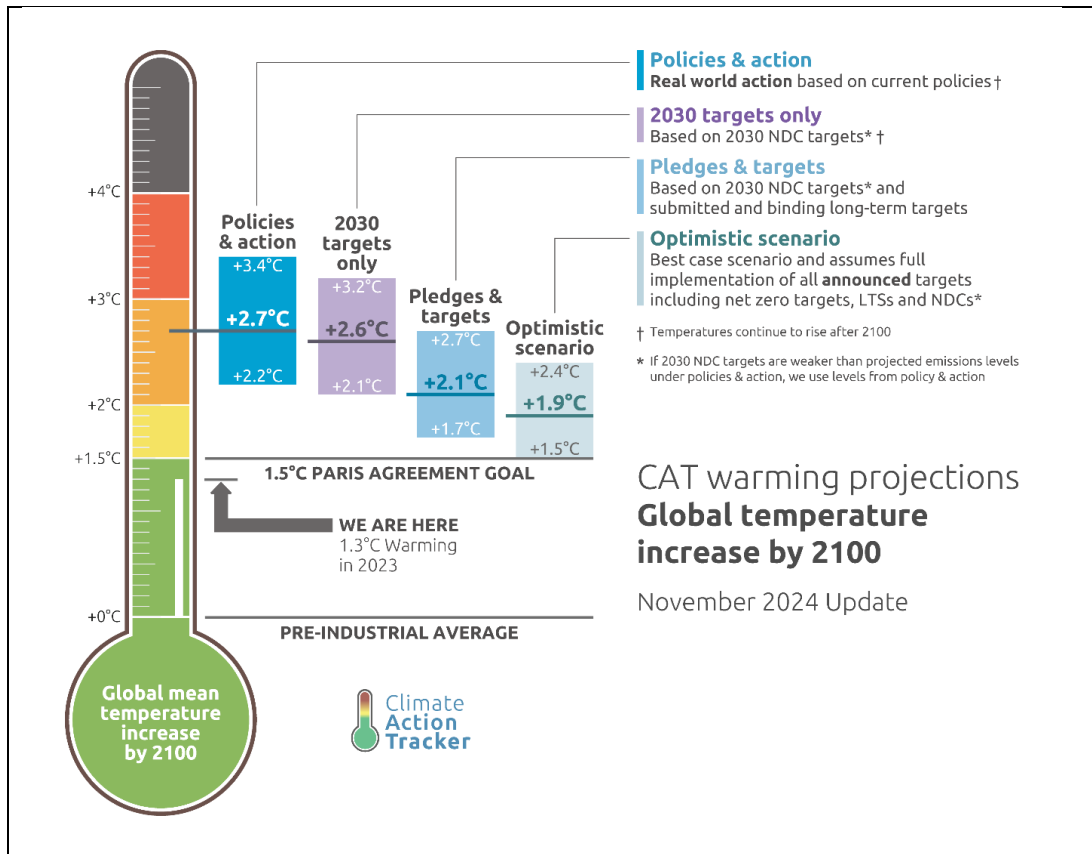


The highlights

- In a [last-minute deal](#) developed nations agreed to help channel at least \$300bn each year to developing countries by 2035 to support their efforts to deal with climate change. Countries most affected by climate change were calling for \$1.3tn a year in climate finance this decade. The timetable, who contributes and how the resource will be delivered remain unclear.
- There was agreement on technical rules for [carbon trading](#) to try and overcome some of the problems in making carbon markets effective.
- There was critical comment on the host country, on alleged blocking tactics by [Saudi Arabia](#) and on the lack of progress on mitigation and just transition. For many, there was a frustrating [lack of progress](#) overall at Cop29.

The context: 2024 will be the hottest year ever

The year 2024 is set to be the [warmest on record](#), capping a decade of unprecedented heat fuelled by human activities, according to the [World Meteorological Organization](#). It will also be the first full year to [surpass 1.5C](#) above pre-industrial levels. An analysis by [Climate Action Tracker](#) suggests that the best we can hope for in the long term is to limit warming to 1.9°C but that warming of 2.7°C is a more likely given current government policies and actions – see figure below.



Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise

The [Global Carbon Project](#) estimates that emissions from burning fossil fuels will grow in 2024 to 37.4 billion tonnes of CO₂. The consequence is that atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide have now risen to over 420 ppm, according to the UN [State of the Climate Report 2024](#), from preindustrial levels of 280 ppm. The same report lists examples of extreme weather associated with rising temperatures, including flooding in Europe and more intense Atlantic hurricanes. [Attribution Studies](#) are a recent development that link such examples of extreme weather to climate change. With over 600 such studies now published scientists can point to the impact of climate change on weather with increasing confidence.

Questions of the host nation and the Cop process

The [President of Azerbaijan](#), Ilham Aliyev, referred to oil and gas as a ‘gift of God’ and the chief executive of Azerbaijan's COP29 team, Elnur Soltanov, was filmed offering potential [fossil fuel deals](#) to an undercover reporter. Global Witness, a campaign group, claimed that at least [1,773 fossil fuel lobbyists](#) were present at the Cop and there have been media reports that Saudia Arabia and other petrostates used [blocking manoeuvres](#) to delay discussions on the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. Given these uncertainties, questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the

Cop process. Former UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon and others have called for reforms, suggesting the current Cop negotiations are [no longer fit for purpose](#).

Around the Cop: the Faith Pavilion

Faith groups have no formal place in the negotiations but for the second year there was a [Faith Pavilion](#) organised by the Muslim Council of Elders, with events to promote interfaith cooperation and action on climate justice. It hosted over fifty dialogue and discussion sessions (available [online](#)), with over 230 speakers from 97 organisations representing 11 different religions and denominations. Among the events was the launch of the Women, Faith and Climate network to increase visibility of climate action led by women. There was also an online [media conference](#) with leading faith climate activists.

Around the Cop: food and farming

With tens of thousands of delegates much of the interest at the Cops takes place away from the plenary sessions. An example is the [Agri-Food Systems Summit](#) that met during COP29 to promote climate action in agriculture. Food and farming is responsible for about [a third of all greenhouse gases](#) produced by human activity with global greenhouse gas emissions from animal-based foods twice those of plant-based foods. Without effective reform in the sector, it will be very difficult to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet Paris targets.

Global growth in the low carbon economy

Away from the Cop there has been remarkable growth in the low carbon economy. Renewable energy is booming with installed capacity of over 4000gW globally, projected to increase to 7,300gW by 2028 according to the [International Energy Agency](#). China accounts for over half of all growth in renewable energy and also leads in the sale of [electric vehicles](#). Almost 14 million new electric cars were registered globally in 2023, bringing their total number on the roads to 40 million, 16 million of which are in China. The economic momentum for change is building but without any guarantees of a 'just transition' or benefits for countries most in need.

A detailed technical report on the Cop29 and its outcomes is available from [Carbon Briefing](#).



Challenges for faith communities and religious leaders in Scotland

As the Cop process falters, emissions continue to rise and too many governments remain indifferent to climate justice. Faith communities and religious leaders cannot wait passively for others to resolve these problems. **Faith communities and religious leaders are urged to step up to show leadership in promoting climate justice.**

Spirituality

Creation Time is an ecumenical initiative that offers opportunities to all denominations. The inspiring example of the Faith Pavilion suggests that Creation Time could be an initiative of interest to all faiths. Is this an interfaith initiative that could be explored in Scotland?

Taking action

Denominations across Scotland are taking action to promote net zero emissions in church activities. This is a huge challenge for denominations and congregations: can we support and encourage this work?

Advocacy

The Scottish and UK governments face tough decisions in moving away from fossil fuels. Can we support governments and encourage politicians to do the right thing in partnership with [Stop Climate Chaos Scotland?](#)

Support Eco Congregation Scotland

Eco Congregation Scotland is faith-based movement supporting congregations to care for the environment, in worship, in practical action and in advocacy. Your support will ensure the charity can continue to support congregations across Scotland, taking forward the essential work of caring for creation and promoting justice.

<https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/donate/>

Adrian Shaw, Eco Congregation Scotland, January 2025