COP31 IN ANTALYA: ANOTHER CLIMATE FAILURE ON THE THRESHOLD OF 1.5 °C

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The Antalya summit ended without a pact to set out the energy transition, strengthen adaptation finance and respond to the prospect of exceeding 1.5 °C. Seventeen years after Copenhagen, the most delicate moment in climate diplomacy once again coincides with a scientific warning: every year of delay increases the warming we will have to face.

COP31 closed in Antalya, Türkiye, on Sunday 22 November. The summit made partial progress on climate finance and a just transition, and several countries announced voluntary commitments. The Antalya Pact, which was meant to set out the summit's common response, was not adopted for lack of consensus. The failure of Antalya is measured by what was left pending: turning climate goals into timelines, policies and finance that match the warming trajectory.

What was left unagreed in Antalya

At COP28 in Dubai, countries agreed to move towards transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems. Three years later, the Antalya draft no longer even mentioned it explicitly. The European Union, Panama and several island states objected to the text. The work programme to reduce emissions was also left pending. On adaptation, the African Group asked for clarity on the baseline from which adaptation finance would be tripled and on what guarantees there were that the money would arrive.

The North's climate debt to the South

Much of the Global North built its industrial wealth by burning coal, oil and gas and extracting resources from colonised territories. Between 1850 and 2019, according to the IPCC, the industrialised economies in its classification accounted for around **57% of cumulative CO from fossil fuel use and industrial processes**. Today, many territories in the Global South that contributed little to warming must prepare for floods, droughts and other impacts with far tighter budgets.

Following the money helps to understand climate ambition. How much arrives, and on what terms? In 2024, international public finance for adaptation stood between **USD 28.2 and 31.7 billion**. For 2035, UNEP estimates needs of **USD 305 billion a year** in recipient countries. Even if the aspiration to triple finance is met, it would cover between **20% and 29%** of needs. If a country has to take out a loan to protect itself from floods, it will also end up paying interest on a crisis it barely helped to cause. The North's climate debt thus becomes financial debt for the South.

Prolonging the exploitation of coal, oil and gas protects the profits of companies and the revenues of governments that depend on them. Every year the transition is postponed, the cost of adapting rises. This explains the importance of the objections raised by island states and the African Group in Antalya. If climate finance is to reflect each country's historical responsibility, it requires predictable

public resources, primarily in the form of grants, and the ability of governments and communities in the South to decide how to use them. That ability to decide who benefits from investment is also part of a just ecological transition.

From Copenhagen to Antalya

In **Copenhagen (COP15, 2009)** a treaty was expected. In the final hours, a small group of countries negotiated a text with voluntary commitments and the goal of mobilising USD 100 billion a year by 2020. The plenary merely **took note** of the agreement. The failure left a question that remains open in Antalya: how much say do the countries most exposed to impacts have in deciding how, and how fast, action is taken?

Back in **The Hague (COP6, 2000)**, disagreement over the Kyoto rules forced the session to be suspended and resumed in Bonn the following year. In **Madrid (COP25, 2019)**, deadlock over carbon markets postponed their rules until Glasgow. In Antalya the framework of the Paris Agreement already existed, and what was at stake was turning it into decisions that would cut emissions and enable adaptation.

Looking at these summits together, the recurring problem is a lack of political will to take decisions that carry an immediate cost. Scientific evidence has shown for decades what happens when emission cuts are delayed, and citizen mobilisation has called for a response that matches the challenge. Even so, when it comes to setting deadlines for phasing out fossil fuels or committing public money to adaptation, governments keep postponing decisions. That postponement is also a political decision.

Every tenth of a degree counts

It took six years after Copenhagen for the Paris Agreement to be adopted. Today, continuing to postpone the decisions that agreement requires has a cost we can already measure in tenths of a degree. Paris aims to keep warming well below 2 °C and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C. The annual average for 2024 already exceeded 1.5 °C. The Paris goal refers to long-term sustained warming, which UNEP expects will also cross that threshold. With current policies, the world is heading for **around 2.8 °C this century**.

The failure of Antalya leaves the Global North two pending tasks: to accelerate cuts in its own emissions and to finance adaptation in the South with public resources that do not deepen its debt. Every year of delay means more warming and more money to protect against its effects. Climate debt will keep growing as long as those who contributed least to the crisis have to borrow to face it.