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Arab NGO Network
for Development

شبكة المنظمات العربية
غير الحكومية للتنمية



**Civil Society in
the Arab Region's
Position Paper on the**

COP29

Negotiations

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INTRODUCTION

The 29th session of the Committee of Parties that ratified the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change is being held this year in Azerbaijan. It comes in the middle of a heated international environment dominated by war crimes and concerns whose devastation overshadows interest in climate disasters. On the other hand, Azerbaijan is an oil-producing country whose economy depends mainly on fossil fuels. Oil and gas constitute 90% of its exports, providing 60% of the government budget. The first oil wells in the world were drilled there in the 1840s. It would not be surprising if this fact were to negatively impact the climate summit in one way or another regarding the acceleration of achieving more pledges than those reached by the previous summit last year, also held in an oil country.

COP29 is chaired by the Azerbaijani Minister of Environment Mukhtar Babayev, who addressed the summit participants (considering it an opportunity for dialogue between industrialized and developing countries), identifying a central goal: "setting a new collective quantitative target for financing." The conference president is seeking to obtain \$1 billion from fossil fuel producers for the climate fund this year as one of the summit's "achievements," while stressing that this contribution would be voluntary, non-binding, and does not fall under the headline of compensation by industrialized countries and those most responsible for climate change to developing countries. Some fear that this may be a preemptive circumvention of the summit's agenda and directions, in particular since the president's program includes gathering a large number of oil companies to participate in the dialogues and a share of climate financing, under the title of "voluntary contributions," and transforming climate funds from legally binding entitlements and compensations into a "donation box," each according to his desire. It also circumvents the decisions of COP28 in Dubai last year, especially the announcement of the need to "move away from fossil fuels," which was already weak. However, it was to be replaced by a more explicit and more substantial phrase such as "phasing out" fossil fuels, which more than 80 countries called for inclusion in the final text. It was supposed to be translated into a tax on the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels, especially by major companies and financing banks. These need to be added to the demands of civil society.

It is also worth noting that the COP29 host country still seeks to increase its fuel production. The EU countries demand long-term contracts to supply gas (as an alternative to Russian gas) to finance more drilling, production, and export projects. Based on data from Rystad Energy, the host country of COP29 aims to increase its gas production from 35 billion cubic meters in 2024 to 47 billion cubic meters in 2034, which contradicts the final statement of the previous summit last year.

To prepare for COP29, the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) organized a virtual meeting on October 25 for civil society representatives in the Arab region to discuss the issues raised in this COP and draft a position from a civil society perspective.

The participants came up with the following general recommendations:

- Transform competitive economic systems and dominant civilizational models toward respecting ecosystems and the sustainability of resources. Competition in manufacturing and marketing green technology and producing and marketing solar panels and batteries must also be controlled or regulated. This competition undermines efforts aimed at international cooperation to save the climate. In this context, emphasis must be placed on the energy conservation methodology and consumption rationalization. The requirements of producing a system that consumes less energy must be considered better than a system that tries to move from relying on depleting fossil energy to a green technology system that requires rare earth minerals.
- Gradually move away from fossil fuels and insist on elaborating serious mechanisms and commitments to retreat from the oil economy in a way that reflects the historical and unequal responsibilities for emissions. It is also necessary to strengthen accountability mechanisms for the massive environmental destruction caused by oil extraction operations, which are often managed by foreign and multinational companies in the countries of the South, especially Arab countries. Pollution from the extraction of groundwater, soil, agricultural lands, and natural resources may have health repercussions on local communities.
- The wars need to stop, and we must avoid further tragedies and victims on the human and environmental levels. War's human and material losses are known. Still, no one has adequately studied the climate cost of wars due to the secret nature of the arms race and preparations, which leads to a lack of relevant data. Wars certainly cause massive emissions¹ that affect the global climate, increase the demand for many minerals that could have been an additional element for climate technology, and waste funding that could have gone to climate funds instead of war industry, trade, and efforts. Thus, civil society must demand an end to these wars and the introduction of accounts of their repercussions and emissions by amending the climate agreement and including provisions that specify mechanisms to measure war emissions and mechanisms to demand compensation from aggressors and destructive countries, which cause devastation that may exceed climate damages.

¹According to a report by the Initiative for Greenhouse Gas Accounting in War (IGGAW), a research group partly funded by the German, Swedish, and Ukrainian governments (published by the Guardian on October 3, 2024), the war's emissions were greater than the annual greenhouse gas emissions of 175 countries. Initial studies have estimated that the carbon cost of rebuilding Gaza in the same period is greater than the annual greenhouse gas emissions of 135 individual countries.

- Work within the framework of carbon budgeting and climate debt as an implementation mechanism for the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, measuring each country's carbon budget and including it in mitigation, adaptation, and financing programs and strategies. The financing mechanisms currently proposed impose debt burdens on countries of the South that are trying to achieve their mitigation commitments or recover from climate disasters resulting from emissions to which they did not contribute. This leads to the transformation of climate debt into economic debt.
- Concerns were expressed about the selection of oil countries to host the COP summits, which could be an expression of a lack of political will to make firm decisions and commitments on climate, especially with the significant reduction in civil society participation in recent years, replaced by oil company lobbies and its impact on the prevailing and acceptable discourse and language in the COP and the ability to agree on legally binding decisions. Here, civil society must consider alternative frameworks, starting with participating in selecting host countries or holding conferences in countries that do not produce fossil fuels or have evident credibility. It is also worth considering frameworks for accountability for failure to meet commitments, especially for countries with historical responsibility.
- Focus on women's participation at the COP and national levels by appointing and strengthening the role of the gender focal point in governments recommended by the Paris Agreement. A gender focal point, especially women's organizations, in ministries enhances the link between civil society, including women's organizations and governments, and opens communication between them. In this context, a call was made to reconsider the deadlines and timeframe for developing gender action plans within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Human rights must be at the heart of the climate decision-making process. The right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a universally recognized human right. The climate crisis also affects many other human rights, including the rights to life, housing, food, and water. Climate change also exacerbates existing social and economic inequalities. People with intersecting marginalized identities and those in vulnerable situations are at greater risk of death, increased poverty, or loss of critical resources due to climate change.

- Emphasize the importance of regulatory frameworks to protect the environment, including adopting and enforcing laws, regulations, and policies. This helps ensure justice and access to effective remedies for human rights violations resulting from climate change or mitigation responses. In this regard, States should ensure that companies that have contributed to climate change participate in grievance mechanisms aimed at redressing harm and that the concerns of affected people are addressed.
- Protect civic space and ensure the full and meaningful participation of activists, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society groups, and youth to ensure scrutiny of government actions and push for an ambitious and successful outcome for COP29. The host State should respect the human rights of all participants, including their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly both inside and outside the official conference site.

The Problem of Financing

There is an urgent need to re-evaluate and estimate the size and ceiling of climate finance commitments in light of the annual increase in global temperatures and the increase in disasters, losses, and damages. It is worth noting in this regard that the estimates of the need for \$100 billion annually are from 2009, approved at the Copenhagen Climate Summit, then agreed to be paid starting from 2020 in the Paris Agreement 2015. So far, however, it has not been paid.

The global assessment, adopted at COP28, estimated the financing needs for adaptation to be more than \$387 billion annually by 2030. Meanwhile, a study conducted by the Loss and Damage Collaboration expected that the cost of losses and damages would be more than \$400 billion annually after 2030. At the last preparatory meeting in Bonn, India had estimated that the total cost of mitigation, adaptation, and addressing losses and damages would be more than a thousand billion US dollars annually. Previous estimates indicated that the cost of losses and damages would be three times the cost of mitigation and adaptation.

Despite these very high and catastrophic estimates, the problem lies in committing, obliging, determining, and distributing responsibilities according to the countries with historical and emerging responsibilities. A binding legal framework for compensation and international litigation can be found, which civil

society should insist on while emphasizing expressions such as "mandatory compensation" for damages instead of "voluntary contributions and donations."

Civil society proposes the creation of new mechanisms and types of financing sources and carbon and climate taxes related to and aimed at reducing emissions from the primary sectors that cause climate disasters, especially those revolving around fossil fuels. Among these sources are taxes on fossil fuel producers and investments that deplete and drain resources and those whose extraction, manufacturing, and consumption cause destructive emissions, as well as on global wealth by reforming the international tax system that now allows many companies and wealth to evade paying real taxes.

This work shall be within the framework of a carbon budget and climate debt as a mechanism for implementing the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, measuring each country's carbon budget, and including it in mitigation, adaptation, and financing programs and strategies. The financing mechanisms currently proposed impose debt burdens on countries of the South that are trying to meet their mitigation commitments or recover from climate disasters resulting from emissions to which they did not contribute. This leads to the transformation of climate debt into economic debt.

The problem is that such crucial and actual financing proposals that require international decisions are not discussed within the framework of climate conferences. They have usually been left to discussions and conflicts within countries themselves, at the local level, or within the framework of other international forums such as the G7 and G20, or other initiatives such as the ongoing negotiations at the United Nations on a framework agreement on taxes, the draft of which was recently completed. Therefore, civil society should demand that serious and honest financing proposals be placed on the agenda of the annual climate summits and that binding decisions be issued on them for countries.

Losses and Damages

The issue of financing losses and damages was not included in the \$100 billion annual proposal launched in Copenhagen in 2009 and approved in the Paris Agreement. After the fund's establishment last year (2023), pressure from civil society is expected to continue to include losses and damages within the question of future financing, especially since the damages after the fund's establishment have been estimated at tens of billions of dollars for this year. Here, civil society is supposed to insist on considering the issue of losses and damages as the third component of climate action (after mitigation and adaptation) and not as a sub-pillar of adaptation.

The question of losses should have structural funding and a special fund based on assigning the same responsibilities to the countries most responsible for climate change (historically and currently) and compensating for losses resulting from climate disasters. Civil society also rejects this deliberate discrimination among developing countries, between the poorest, the most affected, the least developed, or the most affected island countries to camouflage attempts to reduce and neglect responsibilities through differential classifications aimed at reducing the financial and funding burdens of the industrialized countries that are most responsible for environmental and climate destruction, under the pretext of a lack of funding and priorities. Hence, it is essential to separate the loss and damage fund so that compensation becomes obligatory for developing countries affected by climate disasters, whether they are developing or less developed.

As for determining the parties that are supposed to pay and compensate, and regardless of the demand of industrialized countries that want to include emerging countries such as China and oil countries in the list of financing countries, civil society believes that everyone should pay according to the principles of climate justice. It should be based on the UN principle of "common but differentiated responsibility." The major oil companies and banks should also be included, in addition to the tax on wealth in all its forms and sources.

In determining responsibilities and those who are supposed to compensate and pay for the climate, the fundamental classifications must be reviewed, especially the so-called "developing countries" that have remained unchanged since 1992, the date of the conclusion of the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Moreover, countries like China and many oil

countries with the highest per capita income should be excluded from this classification. Thus, in addition to asking these countries to stop the vast and ineffective financing of so-called carbon capture and storage technologies (which are not proven to be climate solutions) and transfer this funding to climate funds or to finance civilizational models that consume less non-renewable resources.

Technology Transfer

So far, most of the funding for the countries most responsible for climate change has gone to mitigation in the form of (practically) funding new technology produced in these countries, which is a form of support from industrialized countries for their companies working in so-called green technology. These companies have sold their products of solar panels, batteries, and air conditioners (or in the form of loans) to developing countries instead of as compensation as stipulated in the Framework Convention on Climate Change under the title of "technology transfer."

Therefore, civil society is calling for repositioning the question of "technology transfer" as a main item on the agenda of climate summits and for science and its technical products to be considered public property. Science is originally a historical legacy, and countries and taxpayers have historically contributed to financing it before the stage of comprehensive privatization. Climate technology (and its inventions and applications) has to be at least removed from the provisions of intellectual property protection laws, and its industry needs to be transferred and localized in all countries of the world, especially developing ones, as part of their historical compensation.

National Contributions

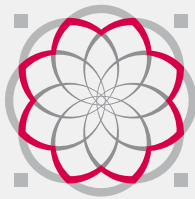
Civil society in the Arab region believes that the so-called increased ambition and nationally determined contributions being worked on until 2025 are not fundamentally suitable for saving the climate. They emerged from a settlement agreement in Paris in 2015 after the failure of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which was binding on industrially advanced countries. Their pretext is that some developing countries, such as China, have exceeded industrialized countries' emissions. These "contributions," which came as an alternative to "commitments," are valid and included all the world's nations, but they were emptied of any binding and compelling content. The countries that signed the Paris Agreement are obligated to submit them, but they are not obligated to implement them.

On the one hand, they do not specify the standard year for emissions that they are based on in a unified and binding manner, the percentage of reductions, or the year they aspire to reduce their emissions. Hence, these contributions appear useless, especially since they still respect the sovereignty of countries and their priorities, which may be to protect their fossil fuel investments or the interests of their major companies that are the most polluting and cause an increase in emissions. Consequently, civil society must demand a review of this agreement, which cannot achieve any progress in reducing emissions and does not include any commitments within specific ceilings. In this context, efforts must be made to involve civil society in formulating and developing nationally determined contributions in 2025, and civil society may work to prepare parallel reports to government reports that better reflect the people's reality.

Conclusion

The international environment is not ready to accomplish anything significant on the issue of climate change. Half the world is witnessing diverse elections this year. The results in most countries where the elections were held indicated the progress of right-wing parties, which are divided in the world between those who doubt this issue, in the manner of US President Donald Trump, and those who marginalize the issue of climate change, in the manner of the European right in general. With the devastating effects of this "democratic" transformation on the climate, semi-dictatorial regimes still consider control of resources to be part of control over people and that protecting and sustaining the political system is more important than protecting and maintaining resources and looking at climate change.

Global civil society must expand its intellectual and political activity and engage more in direct political work to explain its climate agenda after integrating it with social and economic issues and contributing to the production of a new global values system that protects the sustainability of resources and the rights of future generations and ensures climate justice along with economic and social justice.



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