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Low expectations from UN climate conference in Baku

One of the few optimistic exceptions at COP 29 was the UK's commitment to more ambitious carbon reduction targets. This can only be achieved if a clean transition is woven into all sectors of the economy and society, including the creative and cultural sector.

Gas, “a gift of God”.

The UN Climate Change Conference COP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, is creating low expectations. Already in the first week of the conference, negative developments have managed to overshadow any positive ones. Whether the next, final week of COP 29 will turn the tide remains to be seen.

Before COP 29 even began, the [BBC](#) revealed that a senior official at the climate conference in Azerbaijan appeared to have used his role to arrange a meeting to discuss potential fossil fuel deals. A secret recording showed the head of Azerbaijan's COP29 team, Elnur Soltanov, discussing “investment opportunities” in the state oil and gas company with a man posing as a potential investor. “We have a lot of gas fields that are to be developed,” he said.

A few days later, Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan and host of the conference, told world leaders that oil and gas were a “[gift from God](#)” and that nations should “not be blamed” for having fossil fuel reserves.

On Thursday 14 November, the [Kick Big Polluters Out \(KBPO\)](#) coalition condemned the approval of 1,773 fossil fuel lobbyists to attend the UN meeting in Baku. In its statement, the organisation said that the fossil fuel lobbyists cumulatively outnumber the delegations of almost every country and dwarf the delegations of the ten countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, whose delegates number just over 1,000. "It is time to prioritise the voices of those fighting for justice and sustainable development over the interests of those who pollute," argued Nimo Bussey of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation, according to the statement.

At the same time, in an [open letter](#) to the COP and all participating countries, senior UN officials, including former UN Secretary-General Ban-Ky Moon and former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres, expressed the view that the climate talks "simply cannot deliver the change at the exponential speed and scale needed to ensure a safe climate landing for humanity".

Similarly, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama raised questions about the summit in his speech, pointing out that the leaders of many of the world's most polluting countries were absent.

In this climate, [Argentina's decision to withdraw](#) its representatives from the talks does not seem to have surprised many, as Argentine President Javier Milei has in the past accused climate scientists of being "lazy socialists". However, the move has reignited concerns about the stance of new US President Donald Trump, who has spoken several times about his intention to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement.

The Paris climate agreement, signed in 2015, outlines a long-term plan to limit warming as countries try to keep it below 1.5 degrees Celsius this century.

One of the positive aspects of the conference so far has been the [UK government's commitment](#) to a much more ambitious target of reducing emissions by 81% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels. The new target will only be met if a clean transition is woven into all sectors of the economy and society, including the creative and cultural sector.

This coincides with the launch of Arts Council England's latest Environmental Programme Annual Report 2023-24, in partnership with [Julie's Bicycle](#), which highlights the climate action being taken by the organisations it funds.

According to the report, of the cultural organisations surveyed

- 90% have an environmental policy
- 84% have an environmental action plan
- 72% have taken steps to save energy & be more energy efficient
- 71% have produced & programmed work dealing with environmental issues
- 68% actively collaborate with other cultural organisations to find and share solutions to environmental problems
- 59% have their environmental activities monitored at board level
- 47% have experienced direct financial benefits from their environmental progress

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Photo author: Alfred Palmer

Photo [source](#)