COP31 summit in Türkiye collapses: Capitalism blocks any solution to climate crisis

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The 31st United Nations climate summit (COP31) collapsed in Antalya, Türkiye, on Sunday without adopting the main political text of the conference. Delegates rejected the final draft 44 hours after the summit's scheduled close on Friday, November 20, making COP31 the longest UN climate conference on record. It is the first time since the 2009 Copenhagen summit that the conference has failed to adopt an overarching agreement.

"I understand that there is no agreement on this text. For that reason, these decisions have not been adopted," COP31 President Murat Kurum, Türkiye's environment minister, told the closing plenary. He said no further draft would be offered, stating, "There is nothing to do. We did all that we could."

Kurum's statement is an admission of the failure of the whole series of COP summits, going back to the first in 1995. World governments have always been beholden to oil, gas and coal corporations and the banks that finance them. Even the much-lauded agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Accord of 2015 have ultimately been part of the path to COP31 and the complete breakdown of any effort by the capitalist governments to resolve the crisis.

What will actually be implemented in the wake of Antalya is what the WSWS predicted when the summit began, "the subordination of the planet and the lives of billions of people to the profit and geopolitical interests of the giant corporations and the imperialist powers."

The summit broke down over two words: fossil fuels. The first draft of the cover decision, circulated a week into the talks, named "fossil fuel" or "fossil fuels" six times and called for accelerated action to phase them out. The second draft, issued Thursday, removed every reference. The fourth and final draft, released Sunday, began by "recalling the United Arab Emirates Consensus in its entirety," a reference to the 2023 Dubai agreement to transition away from fossil fuels, without naming coal, oil or gas.

Scientists have established for decades that the burning of fossil fuels is the main cause of climate change. Thirty-one years after the first UN climate conference met in Berlin, and three years after the Dubai pledge to transition away from fossil fuels, the delegates in Antalya could not agree to name them. It is as though a medical congress, three decades after identifying the cause of an epidemic, voted to strike the name of the pathogen from its report.

Saudi Arabia, Russia and India fought to keep fossil fuels out of the text, according to NBC News. Speaking for the Arab Group, Saudi negotiator Mohammad Ayoub said, "We believe that climate change requires all solutions on the table and that countries select from these solutions depending on their national circumstances." The Saudi delegation defended the text's references to carbon capture and storage, a technology promoted by the oil industry. Russia's delegate, Sergei Kononuchenko, complained that "from year to year we are urged to have a rapid phase out of fossil fuels."

The European Union, Britain, Norway, Panama, the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu and Belize rejected the final draft. Irish Climate Minister Darragh O'Brien, speaking for the EU, said, "It is unconscionable that we would have a climate pact that makes no mention of fossil fuels," and told AFP the summit had been "hijacked by some oil states." Panama's Environment Minister Juan Carlos Navarro had declared at a November 18 press conference, "We are being held hostage by the petroleum mafia."

Such comments are entirely hypocritical and self-serving. The EU'S climate policy has nothing to do with saving the environment, but in preparing for a direct

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confrontation with Russia. It has been seeking for more than a decade, and especially since the beginning of the US-NATO war in Ukraine, to achieve “energy security” both through establishing more power generation from renewable sources, but also through importing more liquefied natural gas from overseas.

More over, the EU kept off the agenda an African proposal to triple money allocated for countries to adapt to the new extremes caused by climate change. At the same time, European military spending rose 14 percent in 2025 to $864 billion, the highest level of European spending ever recorded by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The United States, the world’s second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases after China according to the European Commission’s EDGAR database, sent no delegation to the COP summit for the second year in a row. Instead, US President Donald Trump spent the weekend with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, a meeting which expressed the sharpening tensions between American imperialism and its rivals in Europe (and Canada).

One of the topics was on fossil fuel production, and the three issued a joint statement saying that they “plan to increase the production and supply of refined petroleum products for the benefit of all nations.” In other words, all three countries are committed to as much fossil fuel production as possible, and if Earth is to be poisoned and burned as a result, so be it.

The cost of such policies is already being felt on the poorest sections of the world’s population. The COP31 draft itself estimated that developing countries need about $305 billion a year to build infrastructure capable of withstanding climate change. And even in the more advanced capitalist countries, every year tens of thousands die each year in heat waves, cold snaps and hurricanes, while hundreds of thousands lose their homes and livelihoods to wildfires, floods and other climate-related causes. Millions more are forced to relocate, sometimes permanently, with no serious government aid ever forthcoming.

The starkly class character of the response to climate change can be summed up in comment by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who said on November 11 that, “in the last quarter alone, the nine largest oil companies pocketed $95 billion in profits,” while the Loss and Damage Fund “has received around $600 million.” Those profits have been swollen by the surge in oil prices following the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The final draft acknowledged that the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit set in Paris will be missed. It noted that even if current national plans are fully implemented, the world is on track for just over 2.5 degrees of warming over pre-industrial levels; the UN Environment Programme’s October Emissions Gap Report puts the figure at 2.6 degrees. At the opening, Kurum had already declared the 1.5-degree target a “compass” rather than a limit. The summit met in amid catastrophic flooding on both US coasts and after a year of deadly heatwaves and wildfires across Australia, North America and Europe, and heavy rainfall and flooding that have caused numerous fatalities and widespread damage in Brazil, East Africa and parts of Asia.

The collapse in Antalya reveals once again the fundamental inability of the capitalist system to deal with climate change. Even the brand of COP31, the “Implementation COP,” gives away the plot: not to resolve the crisis, but to ensure that the profits of the fossil fuel industry and the financial giants underwriting them, and the economic and strategic interests of rival capitalist nation-states, remain unchallenged.

Climate change is a global problem. It requires the planned, international reorganization of energy production, which is impossible under capitalism. The division of the world into rival nation-states and the private ownership of the energy industry rule that out. The energy, construction and banking monopolies must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the working class as part of the broader struggle to reorganize the world on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program.



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