COP31 Ends Without Agreement Amid Disputes Over Fossil Fuels and Climate Finance

The 31st session of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31), held in Antalya, Türkiye, has ended without a consensus agreement due to deep divisions over fossil fuels and climate financing. The two-week-long conference failed to deliver a breakthrough on how to phase out fossil fuel use and provide financial support to countries most affected by global warming.

Despite more than two weeks of negotiations and an additional 44 hours of talks beyond the scheduled deadline, representatives from nearly 200 countries failed to reach an agreement on a final deal.

Several countries, led by the European Union (EU), rejected the proposed agreement presented by the COP presidency after two weeks of negotiations. The EU said it could not support the proposed “Antalya Agreement” because it was inconsistent with scientific evidence and recommendations.

The last major failure to reach political consensus at a COP summit occurred in 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed deep disappointment over the outcome. This was his final COP summit before leaving office as UN chief. He strongly criticised influential groups associated with the fossil fuel industry, accusing them of following the tactics of major tobacco companies.

Guterres said these groups were distorting scientific evidence, delaying policy decisions and obstructing effective climate action while making enormous profits. Ordinary people

around the world, he added, were paying the price for their actions.

Although the negotiations were scheduled to conclude on Friday, November 20, they continued beyond the deadline. At the closing plenary session on Sunday, November 22, COP31 President and Turkish Environment Minister Murat Kurum announced that no agreement had been adopted.

The biggest point of contention was the absence of clear language on transitioning away from fossil fuels in the draft agreement. The European Union argued that coal, oil and gas are among the main drivers of climate change, yet the final document contained no clear guidance on reducing their use.

EU representative Darragh O'Brien said, "We cannot support any cover decision that does not even mention fossil fuels as the main cause of climate change. We will not accept any discussion that takes us backwards."

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries opposed the inclusion of the term "fossil fuels" in the agreement. They argued that all possible solutions, including technological approaches, should remain open in tackling the climate crisis.

The Marshall Islands, which faces an existential threat from rising sea levels, also opposed the proposed agreement, declaring, "We will not compromise our future to protect the interests of the fossil fuel industry."

Russia supported an agreement that did not include any language calling for an accelerated phase-out of fossil fuels. Pakistan and Ghana also supported the proposal.

COP31 President Murat Kurum said no further draft agreement would be prepared. Discussions on outstanding issues would continue within the framework of the Paris Agreement, focusing on implementing previous decisions.

“We have done everything on our part. We did not impose this document on anyone or force anyone to accept it. Some parties opposed the document, and therefore, it was not possible to adopt these decisions,” Kurum said.

Dispute Over Climate Finance

Developing countries blamed the European Union and other wealthy nations for the failure of the negotiations. They accused rich countries of failing to increase the financial support needed to address extreme weather events caused by climate change and to help vulnerable nations adapt to its impacts.

The European Union is one of the largest contributors to international climate finance. However, it has repeatedly expressed reservations about setting a new target for adaptation funding.

The final draft decision proposed further discussions on a roadmap to triple adaptation finance by 2035. However, it did not specify any concrete financial commitment.

According to the draft, developing countries would need approximately $300 billion annually by 2035 to meet their climate adaptation requirements. It also expressed concern over the widening gap between climate finance flows and the actual needs of vulnerable countries.

Nearly two decades after the failure to reach consensus at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, the latest conference has once again exposed deep divisions among nations over climate action.

Against a backdrop of global conflicts, economic pressures and rising living costs, COP31 ended without a unified agreement, raising fresh concerns about the international community’s ability to address the growing climate crisis.