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By: TA | AP Insight

In the absence of the three biggest polluting nations, world leaders demand urgent action on global warming



World leaders called for urgent and decisive action on global warming Wednesday as formal talks began at the United Nations climate conference in Turkey, saying the crisis is disproportionately harming some of the world's most vulnerable countries.

"You might as well bomb us. That might have been easier than watching climate change tear apart our homes piece by piece," said Surangel Whipps Jr., president of the island nation of Palau. "We are at war with a crisis we did not create. A war no peace treaty can end, only urgent action can."

The annual summit follows a year of deadly floods, heat waves and other disasters. Leaders said geopolitical conflicts had diverted attention from climate change.

Leaders of the world's three biggest polluting nations — China, the United States and India, which together account for more than half of global carbon dioxide emissions — skipped the summit at COP31.

Their absence left a handful of national leaders and U.N. officials to press for action as a new report warned of a widening gap between countries' climate pledges and actual emissions cuts.

Scientists say global warming is likely to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels. Limiting warming to that threshold was a goal of the 2015 Paris Agreement and remains a focus of international negotiations.

"We know the truth. Now we must act on it because climate action is more than a fight over a number or a thermometer," U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said in an opening speech. "We are in the fight for our lives and our children's future."

'Every fraction of a degree counts'

Guterres outlined a framework for climate negotiations, saying they must prioritize ending fossil fuel reliance, adapting to a warmer world, increasing financial support for poorer countries bearing the brunt of climate change, and promoting cooperation over conflict.

"We do not need countries to agree on everything. But we do need them to cooperate on the things no country can solve alone," he said.

But addressing climate change has been overshadowed by wars, inflation and geopolitical conflicts, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said.

He pledged to protect the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, and urged world leaders to work together for a just, sustainable future. "Brazil is back to defend the continuity of a healthy planet," he said.

Micronesian President Wesley Simina said his country is already suffering irreversible losses of coral reefs that "protect our shores, sustain our fisheries, feed our families and carry the stories and traditions of our communities."

He called climate change the "single greatest threat to the security, livelihoods, and well-being of Pacific peoples, but perhaps worse than what we've already experienced is what has yet to come" as temperatures continue to rise.

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"Every fraction of a degree counts. Every fraction avoided reduces risk. Every year in which we can slow the rate of warming provides more time for adaptation and reduces the pressure on ecosystems that are approaching their limits," he said. "This is why the world must act not only deeply, but quickly."

Amy Pope, director general of the

International Organization for Migration, called for more funding to help communities adapt to climate change and build resilience.

Climate change displaced almost 30 million people in 2025, while hundreds of millions more live in places unprepared to withstand future risks, Pope told The Associated Press on the sidelines of the summit.

“The issue that policymakers fail to understand is that making these investments in building resilience to climate in these vulnerable communities will actually save millions of dollars, millions of lives in the end,” she said.

Leaders of some major polluting nations absent

More than 70 world leaders and senior government officials are speaking at the summit, though what can be accomplished remains uncertain in the absence of leaders from key nations.

“It really is a disgrace that just one of the seven G7 heads of state and only a handful of G20 leaders are attending this summit,” said Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa, a climate and energy think tank. “The world’s biggest economies should be leading the response to the climate crisis, not leaving it to others.”



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attended, but many leaders of European countries stayed away

The United States, the world’s second-largest polluter after China, is absent from the talks for the second consecutive year.

President Donald Trump, who has called climate change a hoax, has targeted offshore wind projects and removed rules limiting power plant emissions.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attended, but many leaders of European countries stayed away.

“More than half of the top leaders of the EU countries are not showing up at the leaders’ summit,” Climate Action Network Europe Director Chiara Martinelli told The Associated Press. “If Europe wants to help steer the global transition, it needs to show up and be part of it.”

Conference colored by fears over speed of climate action

The gap between nations’ climate plans and action on the ground is widening, according to an annual climate change performance index published Wednesday by Germanwatch and the New Climate Institute.

“Overall, current collective efforts are not enough to prevent catastrophic climate change. But we see clear potential for improvement,” said Jan Burck of Germanwatch.

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The talks come as the war in Iran has driven up global prices for oil, gasoline and products such as fertilizers and pesticides, prompting governments to rethink energy policies and investment in renewable sources such as wind

and solar.

Past talks have been criticized for producing promises that later went unfulfilled.

Delegates at the 2023 conference in Dubai agreed to transition away from fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, the main drivers of climate change.

But subsequent conferences in Azerbaijan and Brazil yielded little agreement on how to reduce their use. Last year's conference in Brazil produced a compromise deal pledging more money to help vulnerable nations adapt to climate change.