



Response

26 September 2025

The High Level Climate Summit

"The science demands action. The law commands it. The economics compel it. And people are calling for it." Antonio Gutierrez.

On 24th September the Secretary General of the United Nations, together with President Lula of Brazil (the host country of the upcoming COP 30 meeting), hosted a High Level Climate Summit at which various countries were invited to share their concrete pledges and plans, leading to 2035.

The meeting was preceded by two days of 'Solution Dialogues.' These dialogues covered the most critical areas for reassessment and adaptation. They included: early warning and extreme heat; climate change adaptation; digital public infrastructure; climate finance; non-state actors; information integrity; the 'tropical forest forever' facility; industrial decarbonisation; methane reductions from fossil fuels; and energy transition. The latter, usually the most focused-upon issue, raised concerns around the priority actions and solutions needed to accelerate a just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels and to realise the socio-economic opportunities of advancing renewable energy deployment and energy efficiency improvements.

It has for a time now been noted that the outcomes of this critical meeting will set the tone and frame the discussions for COP 30, and will build momentum for the Brazil meeting. Speaking of the importance of the September meeting as a preparation for COP 30, in his opening remarks President Lula called COP 30 'the COP of Truth'. President Lula also underscored the importance of climate financing for the Global South. "Developing nations confront climate change even as they battle other challenges. Meanwhile, wealthy countries enjoy a standard of living built on two centuries of emissions. Demanding greater ambition and greater access to resources and technologies is not a matter of charity, but of justice." South Africa later made a similar plea.

The Summit received increased publicity following on the remarks of President Trump at the UN General Assembly, where he called climate change a hoax, and "the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world." He castigated the European Union countries and China for reducing their carbon footprint and embracing renewable energies, which he claimed had taken a toll on their economies. He said wind turbines were 'pathetic', and that all the predictions made by the UN and others were wrong and that they were made by stupid people, for bad reasons. It is worth noting that when President Trump came into Office in January 2025 he withdrew the USA from the Paris Agreement for the second time, thus joining Iran, Libya and Yemen as dissenting voices.

In the expert introductions to the meeting, Prof Katherine Hayhoe said (as did all the experts) that the science was clear. Firstly, that instead of cooling the earth was heating up, and that all of the detrimental changes were human made. Secondly, that despite the increase in the dissemination of disinformation, most people know climate change is real and that it is caused by humans; it is serious and the experts agree. Despite this, awareness doesn't lead to action. To act we need to know that we are not alone and that there is hope. Hope is not wishful thinking but the realisation that if we act together then we create an environment of hope. The rest of the discussion took place against this deceptively simple backdrop.

The biggest announcement at the meeting was made by China, which is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gasses – in the region of 31 per cent of the total – due mainly to its reliance on coal for power generation and industrial activities. For the first time ever, China pledged to cut its emissions by 7-10 per cent by 2035. This is in contrast to its previous commitments to merely limit the growth of its emissions. President Xi, in a video link-up, also pledged that over the next ten years China would increase its installed capacity of wind and solar power to more than six times its 2020 levels. China also plans to boost its share of non-fossil fuels in domestic energy consumption to more than 30 per cent. He pledged to ensure that pollution-free vehicles would become increasingly mainstream, and went on to call for stronger global climate co-operation.

In its contribution to the Summit, South Africa said that it was working to “sharpen Africa’s message on climate change by pushing for strong implementation of national adaptation plans and a final, credible roadmap for achieving the \$1.3 trillion annual climate finance goal by 2035.” South Africa also made a strong appeal for the finalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund and a Baku-Belem (the host city of COP 30) Roadmap to ensure that vulnerable nations can access the necessary climate finance.

Fresh hopes, renewed commitments and a keen sense of just how small the window of opportunity is to reverse the trajectory of climate change, all contributed to the Summit being a stimulus for countries to accelerate their transition to low emission energy before it is too late. Leaders called for bold action and climate justice for poor nations. This, despite the pall of President Trump’s unverified comments over the meeting. We may hope that his words will indeed have the opposite effect and galvanise nations into expediting their national plans, honouring their pledges, and holding the dignity of every human being in front of them as they put their proposals into action. Pope Leo XIV has joined the call in this area, to move from words to actions. He has urged fossil fuel companies to transition their portfolios and to promote clean energy investments.

Peter-John Pearson
Director
pearson@iafrica.com