



Culture Advocates Leave COP29 with Pride in Their Efforts; Disappointment in the Outcomes. Hope Now Turns to Next Year's COP30 in Brazil

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The 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) has concluded in Baku, Azerbaijan following two weeks of fraught negotiations. Overrunning 30 hours, tense disagreements over the COP's signature issue of climate finance led to walkouts and ultimately outcomes whose adequacy is hotly disputed. Along the way, negotiators missed the chance for an easy win for the planet and its peoples, failing to take even a small step towards systematically addressing the culture gap in current international climate policy and planning.

Advocates managed to secure COP29's single reference to culture in the highly contentious [Mitigation Work Programme](#) (MWP) decision, where the discussion on "cities: buildings and urban systems" notes the "need to tailor solutions to sociocultural and economic contexts." This inclusion reflects extensive engagement by the Climate Heritage Network's Working Group 3 in the MWP's 2024 global dialogues. This effort will be expanded in 2025 via the CHN's new Decarbonizing the Built Environment Through Heritage (DBTH) initiative led by Build Buildings Lab, the University of Lagos A+URH, and Architecture 2030 with funding from the Mellon Foundation and the 1772 Foundation.

The socio-cultural dimension is a recognised enabling condition for the systemic transitions that would limit global warming temperature increases while achieving sustainable development – yet culture receives little attention compared to other enabling conditions such as finance and technological innovation. The lone reference to culture in the MWP decision is the exception that proved this rule at Baku. This undermines the effectiveness of climate action and contributes to maladaptation and mal-mitigation.

In order to shift this paradigm, in advance of COP28 in 2023 thousands of organisations and leaders signed the [Global Call to Put Cultural Heritage, Arts and Creative Industries at the Heart of Climate Action](#), which calls on climate negotiators at the COPs to enable culture to contribute fully to climate solutions. COP28 then took an important step in this direction with the launch of the [Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action](#), an international coalition of UNFCCC member states that advocates for culture-based climate action.

This year, the Global Call campaign sought to unite non-state actors and Group of Friends member countries [behind a proposal](#) to include a few words in the final COP29 decision expressing a request by the COP that the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies hold one or more workshops to consider issues related to culture and heritage in 2025. This seemingly small step would have laid the foundation for adoption of a broader culture decision at COP30, leading to critical "joint work" (JW) on culture and climate action in 2026, culminating in the adoption at COP31 of the first ever UNFCCC work plan for culture. Alas it was not to be.

The Group of Friends did meet in Baku for the 2nd High-Level Ministerial Dialogue on Culture-Based Climate Action. The Ministerial took the encouraging step of declaring securing a UNFCCC Work Plan for Culture to be its primary aim. In the end, however, the Group's members did not translate these words into concerted action in the negotiations,



despite [an impassioned plea](#) from the CHN's Special Envoy HRH Princess Dana Firas of Jordan and support for the workshop request from members Jordan, Malta, and Spain. You can follow the video recording [here](#).

Culture advocates also closely followed the COP's adaptation agenda. COP28 witnessed a breakthrough for the mainstreaming of culture into climate policy with the inclusion in the new UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience of both a thematic target on adapting cultural heritage to climate change and cross-cutting attention to Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge, as well as values and attitudes. The 2023 UAE Framework decision also established a two-year work programme dubbed the UAE-Belém work programme on indicators for measuring the progress made on targets like cultural heritage.

The inclusion of culture in the framework holds the potential to elevate attention to adapting cultural heritage across national and local climate planning as well as climate finance. This was illustrated by Brazil's inclusion in its [new Nationally Determined Contribution](#) released during COP29 of National Adaptation Objectives paralleling the UAE Framework, including "respecting the ways of life of traditional peoples and communities" and "protecting cultural heritage and preserving cultural practices and heritage sites against climate-related risks."

The future direction of the UAE-Belem work programme was the subject of much debate in Baku, especially around the question of attention to "means of implementation" (MOIs) like adaptation finance. A last minute compromise kept MOIs in the work programme's scope, which will be important to realizing the Framework's potential. Efforts to steer attention away from indicators for which data was not readily available (like cultural heritage) were softened but remain a concern. Decisions to launch a new Baku Adaptation RoadMap promises to elevate attention to adaptation in general and the UAE Framework in particular.

The CHN will continue to engage with these issues via the [Heritage Adapts to Climate Alliance](#) (HACA) led by Preserving Legacies with funding from the Mellon Foundation and the National Geographic Society.

Branded "the finance COP," the top mission of COP29 was to secure an ambitious and equitable global climate finance goal. In the end, developed nations agreed to help channel "at least" \$300bn a year into developing countries by 2035, leaving bitterly disappointed many who said vastly larger sums were needed and sooner. Many culture advocates had supported the idea of sub-goals for adaptation and loss and damage finance, neither of which were included. At the same time, a provision in the finance decision linking the targets of the global goal on adaptation to the need to "dramatically scale up adaptation finance" holds out the hope for new channels of finance for adapting cultural heritage.

Overall, COP29 was a critical opportunity to lay the foundation for a joint work decision at COP30 aimed at strengthening connections between climate and culture action. The failure to do so leaves an uncertain path to securing a policy victory for culture in Belem, leaving open the prospect that the most culture-filled COP in history will fail to fill the culture gap in climate policy.

Realizing the potential of the Group of Friends requires a more sophisticated strategy. Rhetoric about mainstreaming culture into climate policy in last year's Emirate Declaration on Culture-Based Climate Action (amplified in the 2024 G7 and G20 culture declarations) requires robust support in national capitals to be translated into action. For this reason, the Global Call under the leadership of Alison Tickell of Julie's Bicycle will reboot its public-facing



campaign in 2025, aiming to create a public movement for putting culture at the heart of climate action that national governments cannot ignore.

An early test will come in June 2025 when the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies will meet in Bonn. It will be crucial to secure there a signal that culture will be on the agenda at COP30.