

**ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

**AFTER COP29: WHAT'S NEXT FOR CLIMATE AND HEALTH?**

**Danielle Lynn Goh**, Associate Research Fellow with the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University

29 November 2024

This year's COP29, touted as the "finance" COP, came to a close with a rather lacklustre deal on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for climate finance. Wealthy developed countries pledged just \$300 billion per year by 2034, [falling short](#) of the \$1.3 trillion that developing nations were pushing for. Frustrated by the outcome, groups representing small island states and least developed countries [walked out](#) of negotiations a day before the agreement was reached.

Not all was lost, as progress was made on the carbon markets front, with countries agreeing on rules for [carbon trading](#) under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. Another positive step forward was the formation of the [Coalition for Climate and Health](#), co-led by Azerbaijan, Brazil, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and the UK, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Prior to COP29, the WHO released its [special report](#) on climate and health, as well as a guiding document on [integrating health](#) into nationally determined contributions. It remains to be seen whether this momentum will gain ground in next year's COP30.

What is clear, however, is that the impacts of climate change on health are devastating. According to the WHO, climate change is projected to cause an estimate of 250,000 [additional deaths](#) annually between 2030 and 2050. Climate change impacts on human health include heat stress, malnutrition, and the [rise of infectious and zoonotic diseases](#).

**Fossil Fuel Health Impacts**

The health impacts of fossil fuel combustion on both human and environmental health must be brought to the forefront. A [2021 study](#) published in *Environmental Research* found that fossil fuel combustion – particularly coal, petrol, and diesel – emits harmful airborne particulate matter, and estimates that these emissions contribute to 10.2 million premature deaths annually worldwide.

Another [2022 study](#) published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* warns of the vulnerability of children to air pollution and the effects of climate change, such as extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, and food insecurity.

While countries committed to transitioning away from fossil fuels at COP28, concerns abounded at this year's COP on potential backsliding or weakened resolve, especially with an impending Trump administration, and the lack of a clear reaffirmation from the [G20](#) and [COP29](#) on the need to move away from fossil fuels.

Countries are still struggling to wean off their reliance on fossil fuels. In 2023, [over 60%](#) of electricity generated globally was produced by fossil fuels, with countries such as the US, China, India, and Japan sourcing more than half of their electricity from these sources.

### **Uneven Impacts on the Most Vulnerable**

Those most vulnerable to health risks arising from climate change are the “least developed” countries in the Global South, which face increased extreme weather and health systems that are under pressure or have little capacity. However, across the board, groups at higher risk include refugees, children and pregnant women, older adults, persons with disabilities, and persons with chronic illnesses. Social and economic factors also play a significant role, impacting a person's access to healthcare, living environment, and education. These factors must be considered in countries' future energy transition plans and climate targets. For instance, the WHO called for [migrant health](#) to be included in the COP29 declaration and at future COPs.

### **Planetary Health as Impetus for Climate Action**

Placing the spotlight on the impact of climate change on human and environmental health can serve as a clarion call for greater climate action and ambition from governments, corporations, and individuals. With planetary health as a guiding goal, all stakeholders can work towards adopting a holistic approach to tackle the [triple planetary crisis](#) of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

It would be a positive development for future COPs to emphasise the polluting effect of fossil fuels on health, encouraging countries to commit to cutting out major sources of pollutants, particularly coal, and to be more ambitious in the transition to renewable energy. The international community, including both developed and developing countries, should contribute to financing those most at risk from the impacts of climate change in the least developed countries of the Global South, and to build their capacity to adapt and mitigate. Refugee and migrant health must also be included in climate funding and discussions.

*The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.*

*This commentary is also published on the [APLN website](#).*

## ABOUT APLN

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organization and network of political, military, diplomatic leaders, and experts from across the Asia-Pacific region, working to address global security challenges, with a particular focus on reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons risks. The mission of APLN is to inform and stimulate debate, influence action, and propose policy recommendations designed to address regional security threats, with an emphasis on nuclear and other WMD (weapon of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



@APLNofficial



@APLNofficial



apln.network