From Promises to Plans: COP31 Update #2

United Methodist Delegation to COP31 | November 10, 2026

After a slow start on gridlocked roads, day two turned to the practical work: fossil fuel roadmaps, a push to electrify, and early warnings that reach people in time.

COP31's second day was its Energy and Transport Day, and the irony was hard to miss. For a second morning, the roads to the venue jammed and shuttle buses and trams overflowed. Some participants spent close to five hours getting from their accommodation to the conference center, a trip the UN lists at 30 to 60 minutes, and early events had to be rescheduled. More than 68,500 registered participants and another 24,500 workers are trying to reach a venue about 25 kilometers from central Antalya. The presidency has warned of severe disruptions tomorrow, when 42 world leaders arrive and roads close for their motorcades, and has asked everyone to be at the venue by 7 a.m.

Once inside, the day turned to the practical question of how. How do countries move away from fossil fuels? How does a forecast become action before a disaster arrives? Our team, in Antalya and online, covered a dozen sessions, from negotiators' briefings to Indigenous youth sharing circles. This update shares what we heard and why it matters for United Methodists far from Antalya.

From pledge to roadmap

Nearly three years after countries agreed in Dubai to transition away from fossil fuels, Tuesday's question was how. COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago presented Brazil's new global roadmap for that transition to a packed plenary. It invites countries to draw up national plans for clean energy systems by 2028, with the main cuts to coal, oil and gas coming after 2031. UN Secretary-General António Guterres challenged every country to show, by the 2028 Global Stocktake, what it has done to cut fossil fuel use or production and what it will do next. Former Brazilian environment minister Marina Silva, part of the COP30 team, pointed to a 71% drop in Amazon deforestation and to renewables supplying nearly 90% of Brazil's electricity, while acknowledging that Brazil is itself an oil producer.

Support came from some unexpected places. Nigeria, an OPEC member, said it must industrialize and decarbonize at the same time, and that the real test is turning transition plans into investable opportunities. India's representative said cheap renewables are what make the transition possible. The Netherlands, which co-hosted this year's Santa Marta conference on the transition with Colombia, announced 6 million in new support for developing and implementing national roadmaps and, with Germany, urged that the roadmaps feed into the 2028 Global Stocktake. The United Kingdom argued that no new negotiations are needed: every country should start drawing up its own national transition plan now.

The limits are real. The roadmap is voluntary, and some fossil fuel producers are expected to resist any mention of it in the summit's final decision. The hosts face questions of their own: this week Türkiye's president hailed new oil production in the Gabar mountains, and co-president Australia has drawn criticism for expanding coal and gas.

Electrification is the Turkish presidency's flagship. Its pledge aims to raise electricity's share of final energy use from about 23% today to 35% by 2035. Climate Action Tracker estimates current policies reach only 28%, and the pledge does not require the new power to be clean. Speaking at the Finland Pavilion, Finland's chief negotiator, Marjo Nummelin, said Finland will push hard on electrification. She noted that this COP also opens the second Global Stocktake, the Paris Agreement's review of collective progress, due to conclude in 2028. Her concern was what gets lost among some 77 agenda items: mitigation, the core of keeping 1.5°C within reach, and a just transition mechanism that may sound procedural but decides how workers and communities are protected.

A deficit of willpower

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry, who signed the Paris Agreement for the United States, told COP31 the country would return to international climate leadership. He read last week's US midterm results as a sign that Americans want that partnership rebuilt, citing polling with the Rockefeller Foundation in which roughly two-thirds of respondents backed immediate government climate action. "The public is not asking us to retreat on climate," he said. "What we do now is essential to being able to protect people's lives and livelihoods, and ultimately to hold this planet together."

People experience climate change, Kerry said, through threats to their health, rising energy and insurance costs, insurers pulling out of their communities, and extreme weather. "We have solutions now. We know exactly what we need to do," he said. "Go back to your physics. We don't need a rocket scientist."

He pointed to methane, the main component of natural gas: "If we know it's killing people, if we know we are creating a massive problem, why are we not moving faster to change that equation?" His answer was greed and special interests. He cited Texas, the largest deployer of wind power in the United States, as proof that clean energy can lower costs and strengthen energy independence. Electrifying the economy only helps, he warned, if the electricity is clean; otherwise the data centers now being planned will be met with more fossil generation.

At the roadmap plenary, Kerry called the transition away from fossil fuels the central discussion of this summit, since current policies put the world on track for 2.8°C of warming. Had countries kept every promise made at previous COPs in Glasgow, Sharm el-Sheikh and Dubai, he noted, warming would be held to about 1.7°C. What is missing, he said, is not technology but "willpower to embrace the future," and moral appeals alone will not close that gap; economics and the energy market must. He called for clean power,

high-voltage transmission, advanced nuclear, geothermal and a trained workforce, and he urged that the ocean be put at center stage.

Above all, he argued for cooperation. "No one country, not the largest, not the richest, not the most powerful, can do the job we have to do alone," he said. "The atmosphere doesn't recognize the borders we do." And, he added, "No country can block the sun from shining."

Acting before the storm

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) told COP31 that this year's El Niño is expected to be the strongest since at least 1950, with a possible peak of 3.8°C above normal against the 2015–16 record of 2.6°C. Its forecasters put the chance of the event lasting through February 2027 at nearly 100%. The last comparable event may have been in 1877–78, which brought mass starvation. WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said the science can predict more rain and heat but not exactly where. What El Niño does to people depends on whether warnings arrive, are understood, and lead to action.

That chain is stronger than it was a decade ago. According to the UN's humanitarian office (OCHA), in 2015 it had nothing pre-positioned for climate risks and made its first El Niño payout in November. This year it released funds in March and has about $170 million ready for countries facing drought and storms. The World Food Programme said it now runs 28 forecast-based programs reaching 1.5 million people. In Sri Lanka, irrigation systems were repaired before the expected drought. The World Health Organization has, for the first time, declared an emergency because of a global climate disturbance.

The gaps remain large. A forecast in a developing country is about as reliable one day out as a forecast in a wealthy country seven days out. Less than 10% of predictable hazards are funded in advance. Parts of the ocean observing system behind these forecasts are going dark: speakers noted that the United States, which maintains key Pacific sensors, has recently cut some of that maintenance.

At the Baku High-Level Dialogue on Adaptation, IPCC Working Group II co-chair Bart van den Hurk made the same point: "A warning cannot protect people unless it's being received, being trusted, and also gives the opportunities to respond."

Women, debt and the adaptation gap

UN Women presented new findings: 1.5 billion women and girls live in climate hotspots, where extreme weather meets fragile livelihoods and deep inequality. Women collect water in about two-thirds of households without water at home, and collection times could rise by up to 30%. In some countries, prolonged drought is linked to 21% higher odds of sexual violence against adolescent girls and young women. Of 100 national climate plans reviewed, 73 recognize risks to women and girls, but only 19 address violence against them.

Finance compounds the harm. Almost 70% of climate finance to developing countries comes as loans, and UN Women linked high debt payments to lost jobs for women and rising maternal mortality. Its modeling found that women could hold up to two-thirds of new green jobs by 2035 with the right investment. Under current plans, they would get less than 2%.

At the adaptation dialogue, the OECD reported that only 43% of 2024's $328 billion in climate-related losses was insured; governments, businesses and households absorbed the rest. Panama, speaking for a group of Latin American countries, said they cannot borrow their way out of a crisis they did not create. The Marshall Islands put it simply: "The question is not whether we must adapt. It is whether the world will help us adapt fast enough." The COP31 presidency's youth champion asked that young people, whom she called the "adaptation generation," be part of planning and implementation from the start.

Knowledge holders, not only the vulnerable

At the annual youth roundtable of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, young people from Indigenous communities around the world described how their knowledge carries climate action. Luke Rehmat of the Kalasha people of Pakistan, whose valleys flooded in 2010, 2015 and 2022, said Indigenous knowledge is climate knowledge. He asked that Indigenous Peoples be treated as knowledge holders, rights holders and decision makers, not only as vulnerable populations.

The examples were specific. Ayla Gáren Nutti, a young Sámi reindeer herder, described rain followed by a freeze that seals the ground in ice so reindeer cannot graze. Aivana Enmynkau of the Bering Strait coast said sea ice now forms later and breaks up mid-winter, and thawing permafrost has ended traditional food storage. Michael John Mercredi of the Dene Sųłiné in Alberta, Canada, described a school accreditation system that gives students credit for learning hunting and land stewardship from elders. Thokomelang Ngaka of the San people of Botswana described grandmothers teaching youth to identify and ethically harvest more than 150 plant species, and welcomed moves by Botswana's president, Duma Boko, to restore San communities' rights in the 52,000-square-kilometer Central Kalahari Game Reserve, from which many were evicted.

Alexis Archambault of the Standing Rock Lakota, displaced in the past by dam flooding on the Missouri River, described elders and youth working together to plant native species and bring back the buffalo.

Trust, water and waste

At a side event hosted by Religions for Peace, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Islamic Relief Worldwide, Dr. Osman Albarri of Islamic Relief in Türkiye argued that trust is what faith communities add most to climate response. Climate change, he said, is a crisis of relationships: between people and nature, between decision makers and communities, and between those who caused the most harm and those who suffer it. Lutheran World Federation staff described what that looks like. In Iraq and Syria, where more than half the water system is compromised, they repair water infrastructure for

farming. In Palestine, vocational training in solar and electrical work keeps young people employed; more than 90% of graduates find work. In Jordan and the Holy Land, they teach women and children water conservation and greywater reuse in places where, one speaker said, piped water may arrive only once a month in summer.

Water ran through the day. At an event hosted by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, looking ahead to the 2026 UN Water Conference, speakers warned that water still gets little attention at climate negotiating tables, even as water crises turn into food, energy and health crises, and that the water community too often "only talks to one another." At a session on circular cities, speakers reported that in Lagos and Abuja only about 40% of waste is collected and tracked, and that every ton of food recovered by food banks avoids about two tons of emissions. In Casablanca, a failing landfill is being turned into a waste-to-energy, biogas and solar site expected to supply electricity for about a quarter of the city's residents.

Where the church comes in

From WMO forecasters to Islamic Relief, speakers kept returning to one point: warnings, finance and plans work only when they reach people through institutions they trust. In many communities, local churches are those institutions. Through UMCOR and United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, the church already shows up after disasters; the lesson from Antalya is that the greatest gains come from acting before them.

The day also asked the church to listen: to Indigenous young people who carry knowledge of land, water and seasons, and to women and girls whose burdens grow with every drought. United Methodists in the Philippines and across Africa are preparing for this El Niño now. Congregations in Europe and the United States can press their governments on the finance, forecasting and fossil fuel plans that will decide how severe it becomes. In the United States, that also means the energy demands of new data centers being built near our communities.

Follow our updates throughout COP31, share them with your congregation, and hold in prayer the communities preparing for what this El Niño will bring.