

Where Do We Go From Here? COP29 and the Path Ahead

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Greg Dalton: I'm Greg Dalton.

Ariana Brocious: And I'm Ariana Brocious.

Greg Dalton: And this is Climate One.

[music change]

Ariana Brocious: So Donald Trump is headed back to the White House in January.

And to be clear - he is a major threat to the global climate. With Trump back in office it will be even harder to meet US and global goals to reduce emissions that are fueling severe fires, droughts and storms.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. It's been a rough couple of weeks for climate folks. As most of us remember, the first time Trump was in office, he withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Climate agreement, which is the most meaningful piece of collective climate action ever.

Ariana Brocious: His administration even removed the words "climate change" and "carbon" from many federal websites.

Greg Dalton: Right. And he rolled back a staggering number of environmental safeguards. The Sabin Center for Climate Law at Columbia University kept a running tally. They called it the "DeRegulation Tracker." The count stands at 176.

Ariana Brocious: That list includes all kinds of things - like:

- rolling back limits on emissions and harmful pollutants
- disbanding the climate science advisory committee
- and approving the Keystone XL pipeline

Trump also appointed former industry execs to run the very government agencies that are supposed to regulate those industries.

Greg Dalton: Myron Ebbel, who helped lead a transition team in Trump's first term, [said](#) recently about the second Trump term, quote: "We're not going to worry about emissions anymore."

Ariana Brocious: (reaction) That could have dramatic consequences. The climate journalism outlet Carbon Brief [found](#) that Trump's re-election could erase more than five years of global progress made by deploying renewable energy.

Greg Dalton: Plus, U.S. policy and behavior help set the tone for other countries.

Emma Shortis: The United States, of course, has not necessarily been a good faith actor when it comes to climate.

Earlier this year, we talked to Emma Shortis of the Australia Institute.

Emma Shortis: And so while, certainly sent a signal internationally withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, it was also very convenient, I think, for nations like Australia, which is a effectively a petro state, because it allowed nations like mine to hide behind the kind of egregious climate policies of the Trump administration to suggest that, you know, our policies were positive for climate action, that we were doing a lot, especially compared to the United States.

Greg Dalton: And it wasn't just Australia. I think it's fair to say that the mere fact of Trump in the White House gave a certain sense of permission to leaders like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil to increase deforestation of the Amazon. That alone had huge climate impacts that will last a long time.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, the ripple effects could be huge. We'll dig into more about what a second Trump presidency could mean for climate in an upcoming episode. For today, our focus is more global.

[music shift]

Mukhtar Babayev: Distinguished delegates, excellencies, dear friends. Welcome to Azerbaijan. Welcome to COP29.

Ariana Brocious: This week, the nations of the world are meeting to discuss climate policy and priorities.

Greg Dalton: COP29 - the 29th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change - opened this week in Baku, Azerbaijan. If it's not been top of mind for you recently, I get it.

Ariana Brocious: But the COP meeting is a big deal. This is the only place where virtually every country in the world gathers to work out what each of them will do to address climate change. It's a two week frenzy of talks that culminates in a collective agreement, but one that, notably, is non-binding. These annual conferences can be contentious and frustrating - but they can also be exciting

and lead to some surprising breakthroughs.

Greg Dalton: Yeah, like the Paris Agreement of 2015. President Obama played a critical role in those negotiations. We'll talk about that history later in the show.

Ariana Brocious: Simon Stiell is Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - the organization that manages the UN's whole climate process, including the COP. Stiell's own neighborhood on the Caribbean island of Carriacou was destroyed two years ago by Hurricane Beryl. Here he is speaking this week at the opening of COP29, with a photo showing a member of his community:

Simon Stiell: In July this year, this was us, standing in all that remained of her home. At 85, Florence has become one of the millions of victims of runaway climate change this year alone. There are people like Florence in every country on Earth. Knocked down, and getting back up again. This UNFCCC process is the only place we have to address the rampant climate crisis, and to credibly hold each other to account to act on it.

Ariana Brocious: He went on to challenge every delegate to take personal responsibility for the impact of their actions at the conference:

Simon Stiell: In these halls, we negotiate on specific pieces of the puzzle each year. So let's make this real: Do you want your grocery and energy bills to go up even more? Do you want your country to become economically uncompetitive? Do you really want even further global instability, costing precious life?

Greg Dalton: That's powerful. Yet, the recent US election is casting a long shadow on the proceedings. The U.S. is sending a delegation, led by John Podesta, who is President Biden's global representative on climate.. But he's representing a lame duck administration. Any proposals he puts forward are unlikely to be taken seriously.

Ariana Brocious: And every other country knows that anything Podesta says today can be undone by Trump in less than 10 weeks. So coming together around some sort of agreement this year will be even more challenging.

Greg Dalton: And these conventions operate on a consensus model. Pretty much every country in the world has to sign on to any final agreement. That makes for a painfully slow process. Think about how long it takes to get a bunch of friends to agree on where to go to dinner. Then imagine they're **not** all friends. And then imagine you need to get nearly 200 countries representing billions of people to agree on where EVERYONE is going to dinner.

Ariana Brocious: And what's going to be on the menu, where every ingredient is coming from....AND, most importantly, who's going to pay for it.

Greg Dalton: Exactly. Who's going to pay for it - and HOW we're going to pay for it - is the biggest question of all. In recent years, we've also seen growing gaps between the money needed by developing nations and the money actually delivered by rich countries. And let's not forget: those rich countries are responsible for most of the emissions devastating the planet.

Ariana Brocious: Money has become so important to addressing the climate crisis that this year's COP is being called "the finance COP." And just to get a bit more specific here... When people at these meetings talk about "finance" they're really talking about three distinct buckets of money. First, they're talking about money for "mitigation" - that means money to cut future emissions. Think: financing to help countries replace coal-fired power plants with solar farms.

Greg Dalton: Second, they're talking about money for adaptation. It's looking increasingly clear that the world is blowing past the 1.5 degree target set by the Paris Agreement. So we'll need to spend big bucks on adapting to more extreme weather. Think: higher seawalls and more firefighters.

Ariana Brocious: Third, there's a bucket of money referred to as the Loss and Damage Fund. The idea here is that billions of people have already lost lives and livelihoods to devastation they didn't cause. And the developed countries that put most of the climate pollution into the air should have to pay for that damage.

Greg Dalton: All of that is going to add up to trillions of dollars.

Ariana Brocious: So fixing this mess is going to be expensive. Not fixing it is going to be even more expensive. Still, I have to say it's hard to imagine rich countries paying poor countries out of the goodness of their hearts.

Greg Dalton: Right. Very few elected officials want to send money to people who don't vote for them. And so the majority of climate finance to poorer countries has come in the form of loans. And because poor countries pay much higher interest rates than rich countries, these loans often make poor countries even poorer and rich countries even richer. It's a cycle known as a debt trap. Here's UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres speaking at COP29 earlier this week:

Antonio Guterres: This is a story of avoidable injustice. The rich cause the problem, the poor pay the highest price. Oxfam finds the richest billionaires emit more carbon in an hour and a half than the average person does in a lifetime. Climate finance is not charity, it's an investment. Climate action is not optional, it's imperative. Both are indispensable: to a liveable world for all humanity. And a prosperous future for every nation on Earth.

Greg Dalton: "Climate finance is not charity, it's an investment." And there **is** plenty of money to be made in shifting whole countries to renewable energy, so an investment framework makes sense.

Ariana Brocious: Now we just need the nations of the world to agree as well... There's one other thing I wanted to touch on: This is the third year in a row that this annual climate conference has been hosted by a fossil fuel exporter. What do you make of that?

Greg Dalton: Well, it's complicated. The COP host country rotates from region to region. It was Eastern Europe's turn this year, and Russia blocked any potential host country that opposed their war against Ukraine. That didn't leave a lot of choices. At the same time, Russia's war on Ukraine has made the EU even more dependent on oil and gas from Azerbaijan.

Ariana Brocious: Okay. But the host country sets each year's agenda. And there's concern that Azerbaijan's leadership can have a serious chilling effect on the process. The New York Times and others have [reported](#) that in the lead-up to COP29, Azerbaijan has increased its repression of journalists and activists. That's never a good thing. And especially when we need to have frank conversations about addressing climate change.

Greg Dalton: Right. And at least some in the country appear to be using this climate conference as a business opportunity. The BBC [reported](#) that a high level executive of COP29, a man named Elnur Soltanov who is also Azerbaijan's deputy energy minister, was secretly recorded touting oil and gas investments to a person posing as a potential investor.

Greg Dalton: Obviously, working oil and gas deals while at a climate conference is hypocritical. But simply being in an oil-producing country doesn't sink COP entirely. The head of last year's

conference in Dubai was also criticized for cutting deals. But progress was made, including an agreement transition away from fossil fuels. It was huge news.

Ariana Brocious: Right, and what's gobsmacking about that is: After 28 years of international meetings to discuss the global climate, that was the first time the words "fossil fuels" made it into the agreement.

Greg Dalton: And it happened when a fossil fuel powerhouse was in charge of the meeting. So maybe they need to be involved. I'm not willing to give up on this conference and this process yet. Here's Mukhtar Babayev, the Azerbaijani president of this year's COP, at least talking the talk:

Mukhtar Babayev: Colleagues, we are on the road to ruin. Climate change is already here. From flooded homes in Spain to forest fires in Australia, from rising oceans in the Pacific to barren plains in East Africa, whether you see them or not, people are suffering in the shadows. They are dying in the dark. And they need more than compassion. More than prayers and paperwork. They are crying out for leadership and action.

Greg Dalton: So now let's see if they'll actually walk the walk. I'm hoping to be surprised.

[music starts]

Ariana Brocious: Coming up, as we mentioned, for years the richer countries of the world have said they'll give money and financing help to the less developed ones to offset the impacts of climate change. At this year's COP, some of those details will finally be hammered out:

Todd Stern: It's important because they need it. It's also important because it is the most stress inducing issue between parties in the COP.

Ariana Brocious: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

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Ariana Brocious: This is Climate One, I'm Ariana Brocious.

Greg Dalton: And I'm Greg Dalton. This week the 29th Conference of Parties, or COP, is being held in Baku, Azerbaijan. For the third year in a row, the world's most important climate conference is taking place in a country whose largest source of export revenue is fossil fuel. Last year's conference was held in the UAE.

Ariana Brocious: And despite nearly 30 years of these meetings and pledges and promises, the UN's recent [Emissions Gap Report](#) shows virtually every country is failing to deliver on its promises to cut emissions.

Greg Dalton: It's hard to extricate political interests from the fossil fuel industries that have driven economic growth for the last century. But we simply HAVE to if we want our Earth to remain habitable.

Ariana Brocious: Ever since the Paris Agreement was signed at the COP in 2015, the focus of this annual meeting has been on how we can make countries actually do what they promised - How can we get the nations of the world deliver on their pledges to cut emissions when the economic interests in doing so aren't aligned to do so?

Greg Dalton: Todd Stern has some insight on this. He was President Obama's chief climate

negotiator for the Paris Agreement and he's attended several COPs since. He says being on the inside track of discussions between countries doesn't leave much time for interacting with the tens of thousands of advocates, civil society groups and scientists that also attend the conference. That keeps the negotiators isolated.

Todd Stern: As a negotiator, when you've got limited number of days to try to hammer out what you're trying to hammer out and to try to keep the thing afloat and to try to have it be as successful as possible. You're so deep into the negotiations. You're meeting with people in other delegations and you're meeting with your own delegation like all the time. You have some sense of what's going on outside, but not necessarily that much.

Greg Dalton: And sometimes those, those worlds overlap. You can see, oh, there's President Macron walking through the crowd, taking selfies with people. The quarters of power often isolated from pressure and civil society has increased over time.

Todd Stern: But I think less so now. I think if I was a negotiator now. I would be hearing it more than we used to hear it.

Greg Dalton: And one of the concerns that came out of Dubai was, of course, that it is in a petro state and that there now are 100,000 people attend these things. There's also a lot of fossil fuel representatives attending these now, and there's some efforts to cap that, to disclose who they are. Are these things being infiltrated by fossil fuel companies trying to slow this thing down and muck it up?

Todd Stern: Well, the only question I have is whether you even use the word infiltrate. I mean, because that suggests sort of quietly under the radar. It wasn't quiet and it wasn't under the radar.

Greg Dalton: So they're driving through the front gate. Yeah.

Todd Stern: Yeah. And I mean, again, Dubai, as you said, is a, is a petro state and, So you, you had a lot of, you had a lot of representation from the fossil fuel industry.

Greg Dalton: It was chaired by the head of the National Oil Company. Yeah.

Todd Stern: Yeah, yeah. Sultan Al Jabbar, who I know well from the time that he used to be the lead climate guy.

Greg Dalton: And, and he, out of that COP, that, that conference was the first time to mention ending fossil fuels.

Todd Stern: Well, yes.

Greg Dalton: And, I have a Nixon to China mind about this. That is like Nixon's the only, you know, a Republican president could open China that a Petro state would be the best one to say no fossil fuels. Yet other people are saying that he was double dealing and doing oil deals on the side. And there, there's a loophole in the transition from fossil fuels. So what do you think about him and his intentions?

Todd Stern: Well, I, I actually think he is an extraordinarily able guy. I like him as a person. I think that, you know, it was an unusual, sort of place for the cop to end up in, in, in Dubai, but they're extremely well organized. They're extremely efficient. They did a good job in a lot of ways. But let me get to the piece that you just asked about regarding fossil fuels. The most important sentence or part of a sentence in the whole outcome last year, talks about transitioning away from fossil fuels

and doing it, not just doing that, in, in some like manana way, but transitioning away from fossil fuels in a manner consistent with the fundamental goal of getting to something like net zero by 2050. So they were like quite a number of very savvy climate people who thought this is the beginning of the end for fossil fuels. Cause it was like an extraordinary thing to agree to.

Greg Dalton: Cause even the words have been kept out of the agreements in the past.

Todd Stern: I was about to say, the thing that astonished me, and I've been doing this for a long time, was when I heard that the two words fossil fuels had never been in a climate agreement. I mean, the UNFCCC, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, was agreed to in 1992, and this was 2023, and the words fossil fuels had never been uttered.

Greg Dalton: Yeah, that's like a you know, midnight comic joke just waiting to be told.

Todd Stern: Right, crazy. So, so quite extraordinary that that was done, but a huge question now about, What will actually happen? Well, will that pledge be carried out? And I mean, we're not gonna know that right away. But I don't know that there's a more important thing that we could be talking about with respect to whether we're gonna get where we need to on climate.

Greg Dalton: So it's astonishing those words didn't get in there sooner. It's important that they're in there now. It has symbolic value.

Todd Stern: Right. And I've read that document many times now, and I don't think there's a legitimate loophole. Are there words that people can try to latch on to to let them kind of get a little bit away from that? Maybe, but I don't think, I don't think it adds up.

Greg Dalton: Cause I've heard that Saudi Arabia is very good at getting in there with some lawyers and wordsmiths.

Todd Stern: Of course, of course. But let's just say that when the whole thing was finally done it was a tough negotiation to get there. There was a standing ovation in the hall and the only guys who were conspicuously stuck to their chairs, not getting up and looking very upset were the Saudis.

Greg Dalton: Interesting. So we tend to look sometimes at oil states as monoliths or, and they're, they're not. The current COP is called the finance COP. The arc of these things is as, you know, there's a problem. Humans are causing it. Paris was like the world came together and said, okay, there's a problem. We need to solve it now. All right. How do we solve it? It takes a lot of money and now it's about moving money. We've gone from the world finally got together a hundred billion dollars to move to the global South who are suffering worst and first. They contributed the least to this problem that Americans and rich countries caused. So they've got to a hundred billion dollars. Now we hear, okay, you need to get to a trillion dollars a year. Wow. Where's that going to come from? So the finance cop in Baku happening now, what are you seeing in terms of mobilizing both government capital, private capital to get to where it needs to go?

Todd Stern: For starters, I think that finance at some level is the most important issue put in place by the Paris agreement. I think for a couple of reasons, one is that it's really important that much, much larger flows of capital go from, let's say the global north to the global south, right? The developed countries to developing. You just need that from the point of view of those countries needing to develop in the right way. Lots of them don't produce much in the way of, uh, fossil fuels now, but, but that's going to be growing by leaps and bounds. Places like Africa are going to become big emitters.

Greg Dalton: So the North needs to say, Here, we can give some money so you can leapfrog fossil

fuels, go solar, go wind.

Todd Stern: So I think that it's important because they need it. It's also important because it is the most, it's the most stress inducing issue between parties in, in the COP. Go all the way back to Copenhagen in 2009, pledged by developed countries to, to mobilize. So it could be from their own pocket, could be from investments from the private sector if they had something to do with helping to make those investments happen. So a hundred billion dollars a year by 2020. Paris comes along in 2015. They say, okay, we're not going to stop in 2020. We're going to extend that to 2025. And then in 2025, we're going to decide what the new number is to replace a hundred and it won't be less than a hundred. That's what was agreed to in Paris.

And there was already tension because the developed countries didn't actually make the 2020 deadline, took two or three years after that to get to a hundred. But now there have also been all sorts of serious studies about how much money is actually needed to deal with this problem worldwide. Right. To get the investments we need for, to build green technology, to build resilience for vulnerable vulnerable countries and all of that. And some very good reports. And the numbers are a trillion, two trillion, whatever, a lot.

Greg Dalton: Look, I mean, no democracy is going to send taxpayer money to, overseas, to non taxpayers, non citizens, right? It's not going to come out of the national treasuries to do this.

Todd Stern: So there needs to be a some number successor that is agreed to in the COP this year that parties can say, okay, yes, the hundred is going to grow to something. It's not going to grow to a trillion. I mean, it just, you're not going to get 100 billion to a trillion like that. It just doesn't work like that. But here's the thing. The money has got to, including all the way up to the trillion levels, it has got to get there, but it's not going to get there through the body of the UNFCCC or of the Paris regime. The places where this is being talked about most fruitfully, most usefully, I think, in my judgment, has been in the G20 meetings over the last few years, and, and the, the best one of the G20 reports that have, have emerged happened last year at the G20 in India in the fall, and they put out a, a report called the Triple Agenda. If you, if you want to read, just read the executive summary of the volume two of the Triple Agenda, and it's excellent, and it gets, it gets into the nitty gritty. And basically what it's about is radical reform of the World Bank and the associated multilateral development banks like Asia, Africa, Latin America, and so forth to, first of all, get more capital from the so called shareholders, meaning the big countries, meaning the United States and Europe and elsewhere, some more, but not a huge amount more, but to start using their capital, using their resources, which are considerable, in a very different way. In a way which is, which is significantly oriented toward allowing investment by the private sector to be de-risked, to lower the risk. So private sector, where the big money really is.

Greg Dalton: Right. Right. Cause a trillion dollars is a lot for any government. It's not a lot on wall street and, and, and financial markets. What I hear you saying is world bank and the Asia development bank. The money's there. It just needs to flow differently and be allocated differently with climate in mind.

Todd Stern: Yeah. And I'm not, I'm not saying there's trillions sitting in those banks. I'm saying those banks have the capacity to you, to unlock. Yeah. And, and, and that I think is important. And there's other banks, there's, there, there are big national development banks. The National Development Bank of Brazil, for example, is huge and, and there are many around the world. And if you could actually get the right, you know, group of people and the right countries fully engaged on this and the leadership of the World Bank fully engaged, I think you could go a long way toward getting there. It's not going to get from 100 billion to a trillion overnight, but I think you could start getting hundreds of billions. In a, in a relatively short period of time and rising, and I think that's

what we need. That's going to make the Paris regime work better, and that's going to have everybody rowing in the same direction.

Greg Dalton: A key to this process, you know, to Paris was when U.S. and China, President Xi and President Obama sat down and said, we can agree, disagree on lots of things. We can, we can work on a climate together. That opened the door to the Paris climate agreement, which then brought all the countries together. China has been classified as a developing country. Now it's, you know, becoming a global economic superpower, but the U. S. - China -

Todd Stern: It still classifies itself as a developing country. Nobody in the world agrees, but it still classifies itself that.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. They like the benefits of being the humble.

Todd Stern: They want to be the biggest economy in the world and still be it and still be a developing country. But anyway, go ahead.

Greg Dalton: So the economy's changed a lot, so have U.S. China relations are in a very different place than in 2014 when Obama and Xi sat down. Relations are at the worst in decades, you know, fears over Taiwan, you know, one thing Republicans and Democrats agree on is bashing China. Um, so how is that affecting climate and U. S. China climate collaboration, given how tense the relationships are?

Todd Stern: Yeah, well, that's a really good and important question. Just to kind of go back for a moment, the 2014 agreement came out of a 10 month secret agreement. Um, back and forth negotiation. And when it was announced, the two leaders literally walking down a red carpet in the Great Hall of the People. It was like quite spectacular. The world was shocked. Negotiators were shocked. The press was shocked. Nobody knew this was coming. It was the headline of every paper around the world,

Greg Dalton: it, was a big deal and it opened the way to Paris-

Todd Stern: All of a sudden it was like we could actually get this done. And by the time countries came to Paris, there were like, I think a hundred and eighty or more had put forward their proposed reductions themselves. So that was a huge big moment. Now it's a lot, as you said, it's a lot harder. The relationship is much much more strained and tense. Uh, in a variety of ways, um, and, I think that, you know, just as I said, all the way back in 2009, that climate change can help provide some positive interaction between our countries.

Greg Dalton: You're saying that climate can be one area where U. S. and China have common interests to act together.

Todd Stern: Yes I think that that is right, and I think it's super important because, you know, we're sort of still the two 800 pound gorillas in the world, and, uh, and, uh, it is important for China to move in the right direction for the world, too. China's now 30 percent of global emissions. More than the entire, the entire developed world put together.

Greg Dalton: Yeah. So they're, they're the biggest current emitter. The other one though, here, of course, is India, which also, you know, is a big climate gorilla. So address India, because that's one that I guess I worry about more because I think China is such a clean tech leader. They see their industrial leadership in the 21st century leading on batteries, leading on solar. Like China, there's an economic case for China to go forward in a clean way. India, I'm unless sure.

Todd Stern: Well, no, I, that's absolutely true about China. So China is the biggest emitter. They have way too much coal, all sorts of things like that. They're also the leader on clean tech. So you're totally right about that. I think India has a great deal of potential to land on the right side of this. Modi has put forward some very far reaching goals, um, which they're, I think, working hard to, uh, to, to follow. They also have way too big a coal economy and coal is really deeply embedded in the use of coal in, uh, in the Indian political culture. But I sort of look more optimistically, uh, at India. I think at the moment it's very hard to get them away from coal, But I think they will, they will ride up the high tech path and they will not want to become, uh, singularly dependent on China for that path.

Greg Dalton: Sure. Sure. So what do you expect to come out of this current COP this year, um, a lot of people have low expectations. A lot of people aren't going even some of the, you know, major banks are not going and people are talking a lot more about Brazil next year.

Todd Stern: Yeah. Well, you know, I think that this finance issue that we already talked about is going to really predominate in Baku and in Azerbaijan. Hopefully it's going to be successful enough that there will be some kind of solution on the, uh, the words will get put together so that we can move forward on the finance issue. I doubt that people are going to look back at this as a big historic COP.

Greg Dalton: How about Brazil next year? That's where people -

Todd Stern: I think Brazil next year. So first of all, the Brazilian, level of, of, kind of skill of, uh, the, um, Brazilian diplomats is of a very high order. They're really good at, at, at doing things like this. The money issue I think won't be finished. It'll hopefully we get over the hurdle this year, but, apart from the money is it's 2025 is the time for all countries to put in their new targets, to reduce their emissions. And it's going to be looked at by the world quite legitimately as a very important moment

Greg Dalton: And this is all really important things in the, you know, the shapes of certain graphs and, and charts going down or, or flattening, and yet it has tremendous human implications and I'm wondering in all your years doing this, uh, in these negotiations, talking about these numbers that have very scary implications, do you ever just feel like there are moments that really like brought you to tears or you get a lump in your stomach with with what what's at stake? You know, we saw recently a weather caster who just was moved to tears.

Todd Stern: I saw that.

Greg Dalton: right? And have you had a similar moment as that weathercaster that you saw?

Todd Stern: No, I, I haven't had a similar moment like that, but I sure, I get I get concerned. Let let me tell you how I look at the climate landscape right now, because it's, it's it's consistent with your with your question. I think there are three big elements that I see in our landscape right now. One is that the scientific analysis as well as the actual impacts around the world are coming faster and harder at us than anybody ever imagined, including all of those scientists back some years ago. It's people who thought that, oh, the scientists are exaggerating. Not at all. Scientists were always being quite careful. And what has in fact happened is, we're having,

Greg Dalton: They were conservative compared to what we've seen.

Todd Stern: There is biblical weather happening all over the world on a regular basis.

Greg Dalton: Yeah,, people know what they are. So bad things are happening faster.

Todd Stern: That's number one. Number two of the three factors is the progress in clean technology, which has been nothing short of spectacular. It's unbelievable. Far, far, multiple times faster than any of the best modelers and, and analysts around the world had ever imagined. Wind and solar and, and batteries and electric vehicles and heat pumps and all of those things have come at an amazing rate. So costs just dropping exponentially, the uptake rising exponentially, and this is going to keep happening. The cheapest electricity in the world by far now is solar. And so you're going to see that happening. That's very encouraging. If there wasn't a third factor that I'm going to mention, I would look and say, you know, we could. We have half a chance to get to, to something like net zero in something like 2050. The third factor is the obstacles. And the biggest obstacle is the fossil fuel industry, both for what they do and for whom they influence, which, which, Our leaders all over the world. We've got to get over that. And that's a big hurdle. So I don't I don't get choked up in the way that weatherman on TV did. But, uh, but there's a real reason to get very concerned. I try -

Greg Dalton: Do you get mad and angry at the fossil fuel companies who are putting their own profits against over global humanity?

Todd Stern: I mean, I think it's easy to get to, to, to, yes.

Greg Dalton: I know you're a diplomat, and you're trained to not have emotions.

Todd Stern: No, no, no, no. I mean, sure, it's what in the best of circumstances, if we really were to meet those net zero targets, we would go from a world where about 80 percent of primary energy comes from the fossil fuel industry to a world where about 15 or 20 percent came in 2050, it would still be there, we can't survive that.

Greg Dalton: And each country and each company wants to be the, in each country and each company wants to be the one producing part of that 80 and someone else have to give up.

Todd Stern: That's right. And this is the biggest challenge. It's both why that sentence, going back to Dubai, was so important that we're going to transition away in a manner consistent with our 2050 targets. It's why it was so important and why it's so important. It's going to be so difficult to meet those pledges and to do that you're going to need a really powerful change sort of in hearts and minds. You can't just wave a wand. Politicians will do things differently when they see that doing things the same way they always have could cost them their jobs. They don't feel that yet.

Greg Dalton: Todd Stern is former United States Special Envoy for Climate Change and author of: Landing the Paris Climate Agreement: How It Happened, Why It Matters, and What Comes Next.

Ariana Brocious: Coming up, we'll talk to an activist who's skipping this year's climate conference, partly because of repression by the host government in Azerbaijan:

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: It's not the only place where we have power. It is one moment that we must then continue outside of it and it's one moment in the climate space that we need to take advantage of when it's there, but we can't put all our hopes into it.

Ariana Brocious: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton.

Ariana Brocious: And I'm Ariana Brocious. Today, we're talking about the Conference of Parties or COP - the global climate conference that takes place once a year.

Greg Dalton: Tens of thousands of people attend the conference, including heads of state and

industry. And activists are also present, lobbying leaders, paying attention to what they promise, and educating the wider public about how climate change is affecting all of us.

Ariana Brocious: Mitzi Jonelle Tan is a climate justice activist based in the Philippines who's attended several COPs. She understands deeply how all this high-level posturing and negotiation connects to the people feeling the impacts of climate change on-the-ground. She experienced climate impacts first-hand, as a child growing up outside Manila.

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: I remember being stuck at home with no electricity for days, and you could hear the winds outside just howling. And the rains were really strong. You could hear trees falling, and you were just always very scared that a tree would fall on us. We would have candlelit dinners because there was no electricity and we would be listening to a battery powered radio to try to hear how our relatives were in different cities if we needed to evacuate at some point. And I remember waking up to like floods in, in some of our places and, and not knowing what to do, being afraid if it was going to go into our room and like drown in our sleep.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, that's very scary, I think, especially as a younger person, right? How did that differ from what you were learning about in school in terms of climate change as kind of a concept?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: It's interesting because in school, we were taught about climate change, but it was in science class in a very practical manner where this is happening, the carbon dioxide emissions are rising, but not that we can do something about it, not that we that we were already experiencing it, how it looked like for us. It was about melting ice caps and polar bears. It was very technical and foreign and alienating and more of a matter of fact than something that needs and can be changed and that can be changed by young people. It wasn't empowering. It wasn't contextualized to our experience. It felt very removed and so it felt like it wasn't what we were experiencing.

Ariana Brocious: Right. Not giving you a sense of agency or, or your own ability to, yeah, change the outcome. That's interesting. So, the Philippines is consistently ranked as one of the most climate vulnerable countries. So today, what impacts are you seeing are more intense, perhaps different from what they were 20, 30 years ago.

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: So in the past 20 years, we have had the highest number of extreme weather events. So what I saw growing up, we just got more and more of that. More extreme weather events in the sense of stronger rains and stronger floods. And even during the summer period, we would have typhoons that were so strong that they matched the rainy season typhoons. And the typhoon season has just expanded. If before, it was just around September. Now it's from September to November to December. We're kind of just constantly expecting these really extreme weather events. And now every typhoon that we experience, the impacts are so strong. Before, you know, it does rain. That is a bit normal. But then people are able to bounce back much quicker. But now it's just happening over and over and over. And with the lack of adaptation also, and a lot of our green spaces and our forests being cut down and being removed. The soil isn't soaking up the water as much anymore. And so the floods are actually getting worse. And now we're also seeing the heat waves a lot more. Like school was canceled because of the heat waves because it was too hot to go to school because our government changed our educational calendar so that our actual summertime is in March, April, May, around those times. And we used to start school in June, but then to be in line with Europe and the US, they made our school start in August and June, July is now our break. So now during the hottest time of the year in the Philippines kids have to go to school and during the heat waves it was just too hot the schools couldn't handle it and so they had to send kids home or like just cancel classes.

Ariana Brocious: Wow. So your Instagram profile describes you as a Filipina anti imperialist climate justice activist guided by love, joy, and collective world building. So first, how do you see the intersection between colonialism, capitalism, and climate vulnerability playing out in the Philippines?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: To start on a global scale, even the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports now say that colonialism is a reason why countries are vulnerable to the climate crisis. And we see this in different levels. On the capitalism side, we see that global emissions started to rise more rapidly during the 1800s, during the Industrial Revolution. And then when we look at how the industrialization process happened, it came from taking resources from the lands, from the global south, from the colonized peoples. And so there you already start to see the interplay of how that process of colonialization led to the over-extraction of resources that have destroyed our natural ecosystems, our biodiversity, and in that process made us more vulnerable to the climate crisis because the forests are being cut down, there are quarries, there are large mining sites and that's causing floods and landslides that's being caused by the emissions that, that's using these resources and so it starts to loop into each other.

And additionally on that you also see In the imperialism side, especially the militarization aspect where the U.S. military trains the Philippine military and they train the Philippine military in counterterrorism and how the military in the Philippines uses counterterrorism to attack environmental defenders, indigenous peoples, who are fighting against environmentally destructive projects. And that's why the Philippines is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental defenders and activists, because they say that anyone who is fighting for human rights, especially usually the ones who are going up against the ones that are taking the resources from the land. So the indigenous peoples are small farmers, are small fisher folk, they tag them as terrorists. And there you see that culture of impunity coming from our previous colonizers, the U.S.

Ariana Brocious: Wow, I just have to sit with that for a second. That's a lot. So, considering yourself as an anti-imperialist activist, how do you feel moving through these United Nations conferences where the most powerful players, arguably, are still these imperial or formerly imperial powers?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: It's difficult because you see how the structures in place are still there, in small things and in big things, in small things in the sense that who has the biggest resources to send a big team of negotiators. It's the global north countries. And what that means practically is that they can keep going on and on and just switching out their people throughout the negotiations, but countries from smaller island states and smaller countries have less people to send because they have less resources, which then means at the end of the day, it's like past midnight, they're tired and they won't hold the line as strongly. Yeah, we'll, we'll give in to what the global north is saying and they have a lot more resources and a lot more energy. And then you also see the other parts where the U.S. has been for a long time. very concretely, like saying that the loss and damage fund is not something that we need. And then at the very end, suddenly saying, Oh, okay, we do need the loss and damage fund, but we can't afford it. How the U. S., one of the largest countries in the, and richest countries in the world say that they can't afford to give anything into the loss and damage fund.

Ariana Brocious: Let's explain quickly what that is for someone who may not know. Can you explain what the loss and damage fund is?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: So part of the climate policy work that we're fighting for is making sure that there's finance to ensure that we actually get somewhere because we recognize that we need money in order to adapt to the climate crisis. We need money in order to mitigate and, and that means to

bring down emissions and to move away from fossil fuels and transition to renewable energies. And we need money for the losses and damages that have already been experienced. So for the longest time, there have already been an adaptation and mitigation fund, but there was no loss and damage fund. The loss and damage fund being actually put in place signifies that, hey, the climate crisis is already here, has already been happening, losses and damages have already been happening, and there are things that we can no longer adapt to at this point and at this stage because we've acted too late. And so they're in a way a form of reparations to the climate crises that people have already been experiencing.

Ariana Brocious: And who brought that notion forward, who was successful in advocating for the creation of the loss and damage fund?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: So it took a very long time, but it started with small island nation states and countries like the Philippines really pushing it over and over and over. And it was only in Egypt in COP 27 when it was finally implemented. And then in Dubai the last year, that was when money started to roll in and now they're going to have this COP, they're going to have the discussions of how the money is going to come in, who's going to pay, who's going to receive the money. And so it just continues that conversation that's really needed.

Ariana Brocious: Right. So this conference of parties now underway is being billed as the finance COP. What are your hopes that this will jumpstart more money actually flowing to developing countries that need these funds to adapt, to repair, to prepare for worse outcomes?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: I expect faster action and ensuring that the finance that comes in is in the form of grants and not loans, because a lot of climate finance flowing in right now from the global north to the global south is in the form of loans, which means we get stuck in a debt trap, and that's worse for our economy, and it's almost like, If we were two people in cars and you bumped into me and you broke my car and you're like, you know what, I'll give you a loan to fix your car, but there's interest. And now I'm suddenly in loan for you for destroying something that I owned. That's what's happening, really. And so at this COP we really need to make sure that we have that and that the money that's happening is additional and not just like taken from a different pot, either from adaptation or from mitigation and then transferred into loss and damage because we do need all of it. When we say climate finance and when we say reparations we don't say that normal people of the global north should be paying this. They shouldn't be the ones shouldering that, but if you look at how much money is going into fossil fuel subsidies, if you look at how much money the fossil fuel companies are still gaining, they're profiting so much money, they're the ones who should be paying up reparations because they're the ones directly responsible for the climate crisis.

Ariana Brocious: Right, it's a handful of companies, really, that are responsible for the bulk of the emissions, So you're not attending this year's conference. And I believe that's partly because of the environment surrounding it, not actually the negotiations themselves. Azerbaijan has increased its repression of journalists and activists leading up to this COP. So tell us a bit about your decision not to go and what also you've experienced in the last couple conferences of parties you've attended.

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: So the last couple of conference of parties that we've attended have been in majority oil or coal or gas countries. So you have Egypt and then Dubai and now we have Azerbaijan. And in all those countries, democratic spaces were just so limited and really repressive and the human rights violations were so intense. And in the previous COPs, we were able to really link up with the human rights activists of the country and really bring that message into the COP and say, hey, this is what climate justice is. It's not just about the emissions rising. It's also about the injustices that are happening, usually because it's fueled by fossil fuels. Like if we look at a lot of war and occupation and militarization, it's because some entity wants resources from the land and there

are other people who are kind of fighting back against that. And with Azerbaijan, we're seeing the genocide of Armenians. We're seeing extreme human rights abuses within their own country, really just a silencing of anyone who's fighting for justice. And I do believe that the people who are at the COP right now, the activists who are there are doing their best to still amplify that message, to really still bring human rights and peace and justice into this COP, because we need to do it at every COP. I've just decided that for this year, I'm putting my energy into mobilizing outside the COP and getting people to realize that, hey, this COP is the COP that's talking about finance. We need to make sure that we get that climate finance from the global north to the global south. And when it gets to the global south in our countries, we actually hold our national leaders accountable so that the money actually goes to the most marginalized because it could still also get stuck in the governments where there's a lot of corruption. And so it's, it's doing that at the same time. And this year I've decided to focus on my work at home.

Ariana Brocious: So in past years, when you have attended as an activist, there in those spaces, for people who haven't been to COP, there's sort of the core negotiations between different teams from different countries, and there's these sort of outer rings, outer circles of civil society, activism, nonprofits, et cetera, et cetera. Elsewhere in this episode, we speak with Todd Stern, who was the U.S. lead negotiator in the Paris agreement. And he says that when he was in that role as a lead negotiator, he was so entrenched in these nonstop negotiations that he didn't really interact with activists and advocates that were on the outside. So what effect do you think that work of activism and advocacy has at a COP?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: I think it also depends who you're talking to because there are some negotiators that we've been able to sit down with, have conversations with, and get information from and say, hey, okay, these are the countries that we need to push a little bit more on. These are the countries who are listening more. These are the countries who are at this position. And we're also seeing that, it's true that the negotiation space is really like separate and they do that on purpose also so that civil society gets distracted almost and forgets that we're supposed to be feeding into what's happening there and that's why it's important to have civil society inside talking to the policy, uh, policymakers, following the negotiations, and feeding that back into the outside movement within COP and then the outside movement feeding that back into the world because the decisions that are made at COP, they're not necessarily going to be implemented unless we can hold them accountable at home. We need to make sure that whatever they're saying at the COPs, whatever promises they're making, either in small rooms and small discussions with you, or on the stages where they're making promises, when we go back home, we say, hey, you said this at this COP. Where are the policies that actually implement it? How do we actually get to the promise that you said? And that's the key role of activists and civil society in these spaces, because if we weren't watching at all, how much worse would it be? We're seeing that every year so much fossil fuel lobbyists are coming into these spaces because they know that this is a space that can really take away their power. So we can't give them that space and leave it to them completely.

Ariana Brocious: To your point, in terms of holding these countries accountable for the promises they make at this conference, the UN's recent emissions gap report shows virtually every country failing to deliver on its promises. It's been three years since Greta Thunberg famously called out climate negotiators for engaging in blah, blah, blah, just talk, empty promises. What do you think it will take for that to really change?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: I think it's already changing. Countries are realizing that they now need to lie in order to keep going. So what we saw is before, countries and fossil fuel companies, for example, would just outright deny the climate crisis, say it's not a problem. And now it's being pushed to, yeah, we're doing something, we're doing something, we're doing something. So we just need to keep pushing. And at the same time, we're seeing other initiatives alongside the COP process that

complement the Paris Agreement, like the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty, which is a treaty that's been signed on now with 14 nations, being written mostly by Pacific Island nations, calling for a non proliferation or basically no more expansion and no more new infrastructure of fossil fuels, a phase out of fossil fuels, inter renewable energy, and doing that all in a just transition so that it's a global plan to a global problem and ensuring that workers don't get left behind in the process. And what's beautiful about this treaty is it's patterned after treaties in the past that have worked like the landmines treaty, the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, where a smaller group of countries come together. And in a much faster and more efficient way, create a treaty because it's not consensus based, unlike the COP processes, which are consensus based, which means that if the Global North or some country, one of them doesn't want fossil fuels in there, we have to, to suffer all of it because of that. But because this is a treaty with mostly Global South countries signing on to it first and creating that, then we're going to have a treaty that actually is going to prioritize people and planet. We've now also have Colombia signed on to this treaty, which is major because it is a coal producing country, , and hoping that some other global North countries will sign on as well.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, we recently spoke with Tzaporah Berman who was involved in creating the fossil fuel nonproliferation treaty. And she was saying that exactly as you said, it can be powerful with only a fraction of the world's countries. You just need enough support and then it becomes its own, Source of pressure. You've been going to these annual climate conferences for three years. You know, we've seen protest signs that passed cops that say, How many cops does it take to arrest climate change? It can feel sometimes, I think, exhausting to have yet another conference. What do you think? How many more of these can you take?

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: I don't know honestly. I see and I've talked to people who have been going to every COP, and there's like 29 COPs. That's a lot. And I talk to them and they say they've seen change and it's important to be there, it's important to take up this space, but also remember that not all of us should necessarily be here. It's not the only place you do your work. It's not the only place where we have power. It is one moment that we must then continue outside of it and it's one moment in the climate space that we need to take advantage of when it's there, but we can't put all our hopes into it. But I don't know how many more I can take. Other people that I've talked to have gone for a few and then will take a break and then come back. And I think maybe that's, that's the more sustainable way for me also, because it is incredibly tiring because it's just, Thank you. two weeks every day of nonstop engagement with civil society, with people, but with also with politicians and with negotiators and with media. And it's, it's, it's a lot. It's a lot in your body. And something that we should be incorporating in our climate activism is realizing that we're just like the earth. There are cycles, there are cycles and periods of rest. And so we should be honoring our bodies and allowing us to rest as well.

Ariana Brocious: Mitzi Jonelle Tan is a climate justice activist based in Manila, Philippines. Thank you so much for joining us on Climate One.

Mitzi Jonelle Tan: Thank you so much, Ariana.

Ariana Brocious: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. Talking about climate can be hard, and exciting and interesting -- AND it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review. You can do it right now on your device. Or consider joining us on Patreon and supporting the show that way.

Greg Dalton: Climate One is a production of the Commonwealth Club. Our team includes Brad Marshland, Jenny Park, Ariana Brocious, Austin Colón, Megan Bisciegli, Ben Testani and Jenny Lawton. Our theme music is by George Young. I'm Greg Dalton.