



17 - 29 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan

Necia Quast of Washington state served as the observer for the United States League of Women Voters for the second week of the United Nations Climate Conference. Learn about her experience on the Facebook page of the League of Women Voters of the San Juans (<https://www.facebook.com/LWVSanJuans>) or on the organization's website (<https://lwvwa.org/San-Juan>) where you can find a PowerPoint and interview link of her time in Azerbaijan.

18 November 2024
Colorado Springs, Colorado



Entrance information touting energy efficiency.



Sign in metro encouraging use of trash cans.

While international travel and exploration has its rewards, it also includes jet lag, which I have found becomes more challenging as I age. I will work to address a few more questions that I have received, now that I have returned from my stay in Azerbaijan. The country noticed, as they sent me a follow-up survey to find out whether I was impressed with their efforts at signage, transportation, and lodging. Fortunately, they did not direct me to a social media site to provide a review as seems to be ubiquitous when you buy any sort of product these days.

Why are the meetings held in such carbon-intensive countries?

The UN Framework Conventions on Climate Change are prestigious gatherings for countries and cities that host them. Agreements growing out of the discussions often become associated with the location. In 2023, people spoke of COP28 in Dubai, although the official logo focused on the United Arab Emirates (<https://www.cop28.com/en/>). Countries are willing to host because of the influx of people and investment that comes with the event, as well as the attention on the place from across the world. Host countries also have the opportunity to structure the agenda and demonstrate their commitments to mitigate climate change. While the UAE has announced a "Net Zero by 2050" strategy, the country continues to be identified as a violator of human rights and contributor to climate injustice, as well as one of the world's largest producers of fossil fuels. Similar

concerns are being raised about Baku in Azerbaijan

(https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/01/world/europe/azerbaijan-climate-summit-arrests.html?unlocked_article_code=1.XE4.1bzZ.c_swSK9d-Byj&smid=url-share).

Many human rights groups across the world try to use the focus on places such as Azerbaijan to highlight injustices faced by people who have been harassed or imprisoned. Holding these types of events in places that have major oil and gas producers risks “greenwashing”, which suggests that countries or companies present themselves as more invested in sustainable products or processes than they actually are

(<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp>,

<https://www.workforclimate.org/post/what-is-greenwashing-and-what-can-you-do-about-it>). It is incumbent on people who participate in these types of conferences to be aware of the structure of the corporations and economies who are hosting and sponsoring the events. The majority of countries in the world – even those who behave badly – are part of the United Nations. These gatherings invite conversations about the tradeoffs between including entities in engagement and ostracizing them in the hope that they make better choices in the future. We should continue to ask questions about what actions will take place in Azerbaijan following the conference.

17 November 2024

Frankfurt, Germany



Instructional sign in an emptying hallway at COP29.



Airbus flight to Denver receives last minute refueling.

As I was departing Baku, riding the buses with workers and attendees alike, I noted that many of the roles of employees at the COP and throughout the slice of Azerbaijani society I observed were extremely gendered. Older women with brooms and dustpans were ready to keep all areas of the venues free of debris. Almost all the security guards and bus drivers were men, along with members of the technical staff. The exception for security was at the entrance to the venue where there were women sprinkled throughout to address any extra screening needed for female attendees. Men and women seemed to be staffing the beverage and food stalls in equal numbers, as well checking us in and out when leaving the Blue Zone. The youngest group and most evenly

divided between men and women were the volunteers – all wearing similar green coats and shirts, carrying their materials in a darker green over-the-shoulder bag, and toting the handy water bottle. At various times of the day they were deployed to shoo us into the right entrance line (only a few people did not follow the zig zag stanchions), keep us moving on the right or the left by standing in the middle of a hall, or holding light sabers to direct us to buses after dark. I made a couple of inquiries as to how many people were hired for this endeavor, but was not provided an answer. Nor was there anything readily available on the web, so I'll just have to wonder about this process. I was amused to discover that the gymnastics stadium nearby was being used for the distribution of uniforms, so that suggests it is quite an undertaking.

The flight to Frankfurt was relatively uneventful, but filled with people who had the sense that they were leaving a community of sorts, deplaning and skittering through the airport to multiple gates and destinations where they would need to offer more background about what was happening in Baku to their seatmates and colleagues. As I had a relatively long layover, I settled in with a cup of tea and some fruit to catch up on my observations. As with many airport terminals, this particular one served as a hub – I apparently had arrived at the early end of the rush and was departing at the end. People are willing to spend a lot of time in line for a cup of coffee or croissant, it seems.

We should be grateful for all the people who have decided what kind of signs lead to what kind of services. Most everything is decipherable, even if you do not read German or English. I managed to keep all my belongings in order, including the collection of materials that I collected for interested parties. The plane headed to Denver, was very full, so at least we were using the plane efficiently as it spewed out the greenhouse gases about which we continue to be concerned.

16 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan



Dancers and magnetized displays draw people in to the Indonesian Pavilion.



Five members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee held a press conference.

By this time I have the process of arriving at the venue, disembarking from the bus, going through security, having my badge checked, and figuring out the first sessions of the day well in hand. I have tried without much success to learn to say "thank you" in the local language - teşekkür, or as written by a helpful volunteer - Teshexkurler. Today I went directly to the cloakroom where I was able to leave my luggage for the day as well as my coat. This service is much appreciated, as it is easy to leave one's belongings behind when the room is being cleared for the next session and the monitors are urging you to move on. This means that most follow-up conversations happen out in the hallway.

This morning's briefing reviewed Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), Agriculture, Adaptation - including GGA (Global Goal on Adaptation), Global Stocktake, and Mitigation. While there were some hopeful signs - mainly some texts being adopted and moved forward to the next stage - but mostly concerns about the lack of progress, which will make the second week's conversations more difficult. Some of the conversations revolve around very technical issues, while others are focused on a lack of practical examples that demonstrate how some of the ideas could be achieved. For instance, there are thousands of indicators available related to making decisions. How many should be written into the agreement? 55? 11? Should each target be required to have the same number of indicators? The constituency groups noted that the majority of participants are there for a week at most, so there will be many new people to introduce to the content and process on Monday morning.

One of the offerings at the US Center was promoting Climate Change and Cultural Heritage, featuring Her Royal Highness Princess Dana Firas, Petra National Trust President, Climate Heritage Network Special Envoy, and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Culture Heritage as well as Dr. Ian Miller, Chief Science & Innovation Officer from the National Geographic Society. They noted that cultural memories, traditions, values, and practices are threatened through the displacement of communities, and that no single solution will address every cultural landscape, so it is important to empower people who live in these places to develop locally-led culturally-sensitive solutions. The diversity of our culture is among our most valuable assets, and it is important to safeguard those in every corner of the world. Andrew Potts, Community of Practice Director, and João Paulo Soares Silva, Researcher, then explained the "Preserving Legacies/Heritage Adapts to Climate Alliance (HACA)" program, which identifies people who are working - often independently - in their communities to figure out how to adapt their situations while maintaining cultural histories. The process involves three years of training and action, with the first year training local leaders; the second undertaking a science risk assessment; and the third is designing, implementing, and testing solutions. These individuals from 21 pilot sites have met, shared information, and are working to build up their teams and figure out the next steps. They want to work in collaboration with policy planning as there is a gap in climate adaptation, with the same type of effort needed in cultural efforts as in finance. It is important to figure out how to leverage local communities. The final tagline - "together we can create a future for our past". As most of the sites are outside the United States, I asked Dr. Miller if they were working with national and state parks on this topic, as the National Park Service has had a climate change response program for several decades (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/ccrp/index.htm>). They have been working with some of the larger museums, such as the Field and Smithsonian, but it seems to me that many places in the United States could benefit from similar training and approaches.

Since finance is really the foundation of the discussion here, I attended a presentation on "Adaptation Finance Reimagined: Fresh Perspectives for Lasting Impact". The presenters were people I would not run into in my work as a geographer, including from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IDB Invest, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, the African Development Bank Group, and the Director of Adaptation for the UNFCCC. However, with an observer badge at COP, you can sit in and learn about any topic on offer. Entities dispensing money - whether in the form of grants or loans - need to have good information about the risk involved in the project in which they are investing. They might choose something cheap and easy to use as an indicator as a way to monitor the outcomes, if they are willing to accept that some information will be inaccurate. Or they might choose to invest more in analysis and collect more robust data. It depends on multiple factors -

how much time and effort? One discussion centered around preparing projects to have revenue streams for adaptation projects, developing them on the village side. But then investors need to think about how they are going to scale up. Another conversation noted that sometimes it is possible to tap into funds from a country's diaspora, which would mean that some of the money could be incorporated through the local currency, providing savings. It is important for investors to take time to understand the products and production processes at the local level. There is a lot of potential for application. I also spoke with the UNFCCC representative and asked if these kinds of financial instruments are able to be employed whether or not there are comprehensive agreements on finance at COP29. He said that was the case, and that these were nimble and agile, which is important as more and more situations require both long-term and short-term intervention.

I stopped by "Mapping the Capacity Building Ecosystem for Climate Mobility", which featured a keynote by former president of Costa Rica, Carlos Alvarado Quesada. He is one of several former national leaders engaging with climate issues. The discussion covered migration, building knowledge on the go, climate change and historical places, and the importance of sharing stories and data while embracing the complexity of climate change. Other participants emphasized the need to preserve culture and heritage, even as one's homeland sinks into the ocean. One of the challenges related to preserving culture is that it is not easily quantifiable. The Global Centre for Climate Mobility (<https://climatemobility.org/>) and The Convergence (<https://theconvergence.co/>) work to address these issues with youth.

"Enhancing Capacities for NDC Preparation and Implementation Knowledge Sharing Workshop" was reviewing "NDCs 3.0 Regional Fora" intended to address the outcome of the Global Stocktake, including implementation, financing, tracking, and monitoring. They expect an early December release with case studies. The common message is that capacity is the foundation of NDC and financing of climate actions remains a barrier. There was also discussion of resource constraints, fragmented climate finance, lack of data availability - collection - sharing, lack of coordination between ministries and other stakeholders, retention of capacities and skills, and the complexity of aligning national frameworks. Following the presentation from experts, participants were invited to gather in four discussion corners, listen to the background and context, and add their ideas. I determined I would likely not have much to contribute.

The next item on the agenda was a press conference with members of the US House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee. There is no guarantee that anyone but members of the accredited press people can access a press conference, but this event was not that well attended. It lasts just half an hour - I invite you to watch and make observations (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlfxiZFzzG8>). Their points included that the United States can reduce emissions without sacrificing innovation, American businesses are interested in improved air quality, heavy-handed government regulations are bad, China's activities are unfair, and that the US needs to reduce dependence on foreign energy sources. The idea is to look forward at innovation rather than back at regulations. There were some interesting questions from members of the press, but everyone pretty much stuck to their talking points. Accidentally, I ended up in a conversation with Representative James from Michigan while he was walking to the US Center and unencumbered by staff members. I emphasized that it was important to understand the basics of what conversations are taking place during the conference (COP29). I talked briefly about the difference between adaptation and mitigation, which require different kinds of interventions and financing. Representative James asked which organizations I thought were doing a good job, and I indicated I could send a list of people I had heard this morning who were looking at nimble options for addressing financing challenges, noting that we don't have to wait for all the agreements to be in place to address existing needs. (Although without the big agreement among governments, everything the private sector does will simply make us feel slightly better without addressing the fundamental issues.) I don't know what will come of that conversation,

but I tried to be respectful and engaging rather than accusatory. Although I do think the members of Congress would have benefited from some background reading about terms and objectives related to the Conference.

Then on to "Ambitious Finance and NDC", which was talking in more detail about the role of the law in this process. The conversation was not as clear to me as the finance discussion, although they did note that they heard both "there is lots of money but no bankable projects" and "there are lots of bankable projects but no money", with the possibility that both are true. Generally, the legal approach is to be integrated so that people are comfortable making investments. One observation was "this COP is very slow". It is also important to scale the law down to the subnational level.

The day ended with a session "From Policy to Practice: How faith actors can promote locally-led adaptation" sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Episcopal Church, Tzu Chi USA, Interfaith Power and Light, Religions for Peace, Catholic Relief Services, and the Maryknoll Sisters. There is a Faith Pavilion which offered a variety of programs. The US Delegation Special Envoy for climate, adaptation, cross cutting issues provided a perspective on how negotiations are going with lessons learned doing work outside negotiations. There has been a lot of programming and thinking about new policies across adaptation, resilience space. PREPARE is a whole government effort to work around the world across federal agencies. They address science and data, good analysis, and project implementation. They are centering communities doing the work and listening to people like those on the panel. One main question was how are we making sure the work that we do is in service of the most vulnerable. It is always instructive to discover the breadth of people devoting themselves to issues surrounding climate change.

Prior to heading to the airport, I took part in a zoom "Liturgy for Planet", sponsored by the Episcopal Church. It was a fitting way to close out my time at the United Nations Climate Conference, thinking about the world and its people and their needs.

15 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan



During the conference, demonstrations are allowed in specific locations. The previous day, there had been an “action” by health care providers, who noted that “the climate crisis is a health crisis”.

The announcement about a new postage stamp in Azerbaijan was made during a session about “Leveraging Postal Networks to Influence Global Freight Emissions”. Receiving a commemorative stamp was an extra bonus for attending this informative discussion.



Issues of language are a constant theme during negotiations. Just as when two parties argue over how something is phrased in a court of law, where the details sit in a document and how they are phrased are not theoretical or esoteric when related to texts being hammered out among the parties at a conference that will eventually affect people's lives and livelihoods. Various groups of countries might agree to a text, while other constituencies push back on one aspect or another. The people in the room must draft, amend, accept, interpret, implement, and explain the material. This type of process happens in every organization and society. In the United States, some lawyers specialize in contract law, which may seem far from one's everyday existence. However, you may be familiar with the text of a will, paperwork required when buying a car or house, or the language we agree to access online materials, or in the case of COP29, attend an event. We are asked to put faith in the people who are working to agree on this language, and that they have the interest of the people they represent in mind. When you hire a lawyer you imagine that person works on your behalf, but you do not necessarily understand all the terms and conditions they are working out. While observing meetings I found it challenging to decipher intent, content, and outcome. The role of experienced civil society observers is to distribute themselves among the various conversations, ask questions and collect many perspectives, sharing them with their respective interest groups. Everyone has particular proficiency of one sort or another, from local geographical knowledge to expertise in medical treatments to mastery of microfinance. I have appreciated the careful observations made by members of various constituencies each morning to bring members up-to-date on the progress (or lack thereof) from the previous day.

This morning we were provided an overview of the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) process which is designed to avoid political figure setting. They discussed Technical Expert Dialogues (TED), which were followed by meetings of Ad hoc work programmes, and finally High-level Ministerial Dialogues. As with many items at COP, there are a multitude of terms to work out. Some involve words that are common, but have a specific meaning within the negotiations. This piece from "The Guardian" referenced earlier continues to be useful (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/11/cop29-jargon-buster-key-terms-for-this-years-climate-conference-in-azerbaijan>). The conclusion from the observers Friday morning was that the layers still need explanation. One of the main points is whether the final numbers will include all finance sources including those that are "debt-inducing", which means that low-income countries will receive funds, but also be adding to their current debt burdens. The session co-chairs or co-facilitators have roles that involve parliamentary procedures as well as (sometimes) drafting the text for discussion. Sometimes the parties are willing to go forward with those texts and sometimes they want revisions prior to discussing particular points. We also heard about the various matters related to the Standing Committee on Finance, and how all the individual conversations eventually have to make it up the ladder to be consistent across all documents. There are formal processes to "put notes forward" for consideration. The objective is to do everything properly so that no party feels disrespected. One common complaint is that texts are published too late for parties to review them properly. Outside events often intrude upon the process as well as the content. Observers reported that Argentina had been acting as the finance coordinator for a particular process when its delegation was pulled from the negotiations (<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/climate-change/argentina-withdraws-cop29-paris-agreement-9668680/>). Another term that is shared is "informal informals", which are negotiations that are closed to observers, leaving people to guess at the conversations that occur based on the text or actions following the discussions. The various constituencies, from farmers to local government associations, will continue to monitor the negotiations.

The booths provide a welcome balance to the formal meeting process. I spoke with a couple representatives at the International Standards Pavilion, who noted that the world runs on reliable understanding of how goods and services interact, both within a country and internationally. Holding up one of the ubiquitous paper coffee cups (along with a water bottle, I wondered whether we should also be issued a "reusable hot cup"), he noted that we expect a certain size and strength for cups, that the lids will fit, and that they will compost if that is part of the description. As financing and investment expand, so have the desires on the part of the entities doing the investing to be sure that expectations are met. They noted that there are standards for construction, transportation, electronics, manufacturing, industrial machines, and food production and distribution. When we go to the grocery in the United States we tend to be surprised if a product is spoiled or a package contains less than is advertised. We rely on the Office of Weights and Measures (<https://www.nist.gov/pml/owm>) in the United States for accuracy, and trust that entity to engage with international requirements. How is this related to climate change? If we cannot agree on how to measure carbon in the air, for instance, then we will not agree when we are failing or succeeding at decreasing emissions.

This morning, a session "AI Gore and Climate TRACE to Release Data Revealing High-Impact Opportunities for Cutting Greenhouse Gas Emissions" took place in the plenary space. The presentation is available to watch on Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0WBeg1NJ7A>) and is designed to communicate information to a general audience using recent data. I attended a session on "Faith and Sustainability: A Spiritual Approach towards Environmental Responsibility", which focused on education and individual decisions, as well as conversion of important persons to promoting equitable climate change. Sessions of interest were not necessarily

in close proximity, so I was glad I had taken the advice of previous attendees and was prepared with sturdy walking shoes.

Although I had sat in on some sessions earlier in the week where language was being discussed, the "Matters relating to capacity-building - Informal consultation: SBI 6" turned out to be quite instructive. There are screens with the document available to everyone (participants and observers) so they can see the text. There were discussions about where to place commas, moving internal paragraphs to replace the preamble, and whether to use the term "emphasize" or "acknowledge". While the tension in the room was primarily between the G77 (<https://www.g77.org/>) plus China and the United States, Japan, and the European Union, it appeared that everyone wanted to come to an agreement, while being sure that their views were recorded. One of the tasks of the facilitators was to allow people time to huddle, and the Co-Facilitator complimented the G77 for not going over their allotted time. She also kept the negotiations going after the official ending time, noting that the UN Secretariat had said they could have the room for another hour, although a couple people wanted to be done. The Co-Facilitator managed the process by saying there was not another time during the meeting to have another session so this was it. Several more language changes allowed a majority of people to agree to move forward, but there was reference to the fact that everyone has to agree, this is not a majority rule situation where people vote, but rather a give and take process. Toward the end, one party noted that they were close to getting a decision, and if there was a particular addition to paragraph 12, then that would really change the content of the paragraph. Another party appreciated the explanation, was willing to move on, but wanted to continue to work on the wording. The Co-Facilitator noted that the document must go through the Secretariat for editing. Eventually they all agreed, were ready to send it to the next step, and gathered together for a celebratory photo. The negotiator for the United States is a climate expert from the Department of State.

What turned out to be one of the most interesting sessions thus far had quite a number of indecipherable acronyms involved: "UPU, ICAO, IMO, UNCTAD, World Bank Group: Leveraging Postal Networks to Influence Global Freight Emissions". The discussion turned out not only to include a presentation by the head of the Azerbaijani post office, but also a panel on "Postal Climate Value Chain: Global Freight Focus" and conversations about sustainability trends. It turns out that freight is responsible for ten percent of greenhouse gas emissions, so the movement of freight and parcels has a significant impact on the climate. The members of the panel discussed the move to digitalization of documents, saving the printing, distribution, and collection of these records, noting that there is not a similar level of digitalization in developing countries. They also discussed approaches such as locating smart lockers in central rural areas so that people could walk to collect their parcels, saving on inefficient delivery. They noted that the industry wants to avoid greenwashing (<https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/intensified-scrutiny-of-greenwashing-ads-reaches-shipping-sector/>) and make sure that the measures they are implementing make a difference to the emissions. Harkening back to the earlier conversation, "every time you step on a plane, you are interacting with 15,000 standards". There was discussion about moving to more efficient fuel, and the unlikelihood that batteries would be a solution for air travel, as well as since shipping is essential for global trade it needs to be at the forefront of energy transition. With Chuck having spent 35 years at FedEx, I was familiar with many of the terms, such as "just-in-time delivery", intelligent packaging, and the importance of having accurate data about pick-up and delivery for forecasting. The richness of the information should drive the policy, such as investment in sustainable infrastructure (solar panels on buildings, electric vehicle fleets) in developing countries. The panelists also recognized that they cannot move too fast with some changes, because it would be too disruptive to their customers. No representative from the United States was present, but I asked one of the participants what the impression of the US Postal service was,

and he indicated that it is doing an excellent job

(<https://about.usps.com/what/corporate-social-responsibility/sustainability/report/2022/usps-annual-sustainability-report.pdf>). He also said FedEx was cooperative

(https://www.fedex.com/content/dam/fedex/us-united-states/sustainability/gcrs/FedEx_2024_ESG_Executive_Summary.pdf) with a good track record. One way to obtain a sense of how sustainability can be addressed at the individual scale is to think about an industry or activity with which you are familiar and to consider where it is overusing the world's resources. Unexpectedly at the end of the session, the Azerbaijani post office issued a limited edition stamp, and everyone (not a lot of people in the room) was given a copy. For someone who likes to send letters, this turned out to be a great session.

Following that, I went to the CERP, EII, WEC, CAN-Rac: Civil Society Equity Review 2024 Report Launch. This is the tenth year of the report (<https://www.equityreview.org/>), and it was much more downbeat than the shipping conversation. This is not to say that the push for efficiency in shipping is not real or genuine, it is just important to understand the overall picture. This group argues that part of the reason the world continues to warm is because the Global North is not acting and that there is money to support system change. We need to scale-up the fossil fuel phaseout and make polluters pay. They provide a great deal of data that illustrates how much wealthy countries are contributing to emissions, and argue that it is important to reduce extraction of resources fastest in countries that are least dependent on those industries for jobs and revenue. There needs to be more recognition that wealthy countries' fair share of the decrease is part of the historical effort. Their responsibility to decrease a particular amount is greater than what they produce, so the wealthy countries need to support the developing countries in reduction as well. Data include that the richest ten percent of the world accounts for nearly half of emissions growth since 1990. There is a great deal of eroded trust and undermined faith in multilateralism because there doesn't appear to be a lot of progress in decreasing fossil fuel production. They also noted that the richest one percent of the population account for 16 percent of all emissions, so that some progress has been "swallowed up by all the consuming rich". Right now there continues to be a transfer of wealth from workers to shareholders, so there is a need for fairer corporate taxes and canceling of the debt of the Global South to the Global North. The speakers emphasized the need for systemic change in international finance, as well as protecting and fulfilling economic, political, and cultural rights to build societies.

The final event of the day was a presentation at the US Center in the Delegate Pavilions by Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm who wanted to send a message that the United States is moving forward with its clean energy transition, primarily through the IRA (<https://www.energy.gov/lpo/inflation-reduction-act-2022>), to meet its goal of net zero emission by 2050. She noted that the majority of investment has been in locations that voted Republican. Additional observations came from Washington Governor Jay Inslee who talked about the US Climate Alliance (<https://usclimatealliance.org/>) and noted that the federal government will not be able to constrain states in their efforts to move forward with guidelines for low-carbon fuel, sustainable building codes, and emissions. The California Secretary for Environmental Protection (<https://calepa.ca.gov/yana-garcia-secretary-for-environmental-protection/>); the Mayor of Blytheville, Arkansas (<https://www.cityofblytheville.com/166/Mayor-Logan>); and the Director of Global Climate Policy for Trane Technologies all discussed how local choices influence the deployment of natural resources in their states and communities. Mayor Logan described the collaboration (<https://www.mrcti.org/who-we-are>) that she and other mayors along the Mississippi River are undertaking to address drought and flooding. Trane Technologies is a leader in supporting policy durability and sustainable approaches (<https://www.tranetechnologies.com/en/index/sustainability/sustainability-reports/esg-report/report-and-data/sustain>

[able-development-goals.html](#)). California has building codes for both new and renovation construction. These discussions emphasized how locally-written and enforced measures contribute to policies that benefit society during this increasingly complex energy transition.

I joined the crowds of people heading past the Green Zone to the bus hub, found my route, and headed back to my lodging. I cannot help but think of all the United Nations negotiators, facilitators, logistics specialists, translators, and editors who must keep this process moving forward. As I was checking out the next morning, I packed up my suitcase in preparation for another early morning departure.

14 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan



United States Pavilion



People's Republic of China Pavilion

This morning I skipped the Women and Gender Constituency meeting to attend a discussion with Ali Zaidi, National Climate Advisor (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/cpo/>). The conversation was sponsored by America Is All In, a group created following the 2017 withdrawal from the Paris Agreement (for more details about the organization, see the website: (<https://www.americaisallin.com/>)). The audience wanted to be sure that the Biden Administration was ready to undertake as many climate actions as possible during its remaining time in office, from establishing an ambitious number for our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to defining a zero emissions building code

(<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/01/09/2024-00203/national-definition-for-a-zero-emissions-building-part-1-operating-emissions-version-100-draft>). Each individual (representing a variety of groups) in attendance had a particular item of interest. Mr. Zaidi emphasized that members of the current administration are not sitting around, but active at COP29, and also headed to the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro

(<https://www.g20.org/en/about-the-g20/summit-rio-2024>), where climate issues are also on the agenda. However, it is important to be realistic about what regulations are likely to be rolled back once the new administration is in office in January, and that states and local governments will need to take efforts to decarbonize their grids. Other

groups raised concerns about pipelines for clean energy transfer going through sacred burial grounds of indigenous people, opportunities for continuing the infrastructure law since 57% of the funding is being spent in districts with Republican representatives (who did not vote for the measure), and make the global stocktake discussion more participatory. The conversation closed with a statement that states and local governments will be called on to do more as the federal government does less.

Following that theme, I attended several sessions that examined the interactions between local or regional activities and national or international efforts. "Local Action, Global Goals: UN support towards cities in the NDCs" presented details about the many ways United Nations organizations come together to address programs in urban areas. Several speakers talked about how to systematically connect the NDCs to urban emissions because scaling up is key. There is a need to develop housing and land management profiles that emphasize efficiency, but cities run into barriers when they try to access financing because the architecture of the finance instruments are focused on the national level and are often cumbersome. A speaker from UN-Habitat noted that we are living in a time of compounding crises, where events don't come separately, but they build up to exhaust leaders and people trying to cope with heat, flooding, and fire. It is important to recognize that climate change does not affect everyone equally, and the urban poor are often bearing the brunt of climate change in cities. Three-quarters of countries' NDCs do not have urban goals or contexts, and that should change going forward. There are a variety of different groups across the world that are connecting mayors and other sub-national leaders to identify best urban practices addressing climate change.

Another session addressed "iLab Finance: The role of the insurance industry in unlocking capital". One of the terms I have heard several times at the conference is "derisking" (<https://ndcpartnership.org/knowledge-portal/climate-toolbox/derisking-renewable-energy-investment>). I have often thought that one approach to encouraging for-profit entities to understand the key tenets of climate change was to examine the change in the insurance industry. Not surprisingly, there are a great many people examining this issue, including a new report, "The Great Enabler" (<https://www.unepfi.org/industries/insurance/transition-plan-announcement/>). One of the points of the discussion was that insurers have a great deal of data they use to manage their businesses, and that it would be helpful to examine that information, confirm that it is up-to-date, and leverage it to make strategic decisions. The discussion emphasized that it is important to be forward rather than backward looking. As with many aspects of climate change, it is clear that one needs to have a broad understanding of the multiple points of discussion, and to know where to find the experts for further analysis.

Looking at the science of climate change, a session presented "Plans and proposals for IPCC's 7th Assessment Cycle: The science and how we deliver it." Several working groups assess various aspects of climate science, and presenters discussed the need for more integration of social sciences in the analysis, emphasizing the best available methodologies to work at scale, and how to use more precise and accessible language. They also noted that it would be important going forward to bring all the working groups together in a single gathering to consider the topics in concert. The final session of the day reviewed weather issues - "Scaling-up: Climate finance for ambitious action on early warning systems for adaptation", which focused on meteorology and weather forecasting. Presenters emphasized that communication needs to be understandable and to be people-centered so that everyone potentially affected can take action when a climate event is predicted.

The photos I shared today are not of people talking, but of the spaces in which events are happening, to provide some context. Along with official meeting rooms of various configurations (with or without translation options, presentation or discussion format, large or small), most pavilions have a space to share information. The United States Center has about forty chairs, with headsets connected to the speaker system so you can hear the person talking in spite of the din surrounding the booth. It is a fairly barebones set-up. In contrast, China has a much larger space, with an area for presenting both technical information, with individual cardboard recyclable seating, offering refreshments and printed materials, as well as a space for drawing people in to the pavilion. Yesterday there were demonstrations of paper cutting, for instance. While there are no doubt multiple reasons for larger or smaller pavilions, it is interesting to observe what countries and organizations decide to highlight.

13 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan



Walking to the Green Zone from the Blue Zone.
Session.



John Podesta delivers remarks in the Plenary

What are the key issues being discussed at the UN Climate Conference?

The overall objective of the meeting is to set new targets for funding to support adaptation, mitigation, loss, and damages due to climate change and to take stock of how countries are progressing on their targets to reduce emissions. Here is a useful overview from the NPR economic program, “Marketplace”, (<https://www.marketplace.org/2024/11/13/cop29-wealthier-nations-energy-transition-spending-industrialized-countries/>). Some meetings are related directly to this process, but many others support conversations leading to the hoped-for agreement. With actual negotiations underway, the Women and Gender Constituency Facilitative Committee coordinated attendance at sessions through various thematic working groups including Mitigation, Action for Climate Empowerment, Adaptation, Agriculture, Climate Finance, Gender, Global Stocktake, Technology, and Just Transition. All these topics contribute to the tone and the details that will eventually be included in various documents produced by the Parties.

After the meeting I went to the Green Zone, which in past years (<https://www.cop28.com/en/green-zone>) has apparently been much more lively than it is this year (<https://www.cop29greenzone.com/cop29-green-zone/>). I was expecting a variety of corporations and nonprofit organizations, with performances and opportunities for conversations. Instead, it was very staid, with impressive technology supporting presentations and structures that were ready to welcome many people to learn about products and services. I listened to part of a presentation by Deloitte, a consulting firm, which discussed its 2024 CxO Sustainability Report: How companies can accelerate change (<https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/climate/cxo-sustainability-report.html>). Ninety percent of the CEOs surveyed indicated that they expect to be able to grow their businesses and reach climate goals. Other conversations I had with different businesses indicated that there is no thought of avoiding sustainable practices, whether in agriculture or construction. There were a few nonprofits, including the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate (<https://gauc.net/>) and vegan advocates (<https://lovinghut.us/>), but mostly the focus was on doing business.

I walked back to the Blue Zone (you are scanned going in and out of the Blue Zone so the powers-that-be know who is where), and made my way to the plenary where the end of the opening statements were taking place. I happened to hear the representatives for the leaders of the Republic of Korea, the United States, and Russia. Many fewer world leaders are attending this gathering. Here is the US State Department review: "Senior Advisor to the President for International Climate Policy John Podesta delivered a special message on behalf of President Biden during the high-level segment of the COP 29 World Leaders Climate Action Summit. He outlined urgent U.S. priorities for the climate negotiations ongoing in Baku to keep 1.5 C within reach and secure a safer, cleaner, healthier future, including a new climate finance goal that is multi-layered, with an ambitious, realistically achievable support layer involving new contributors. "We know what to do. Let's get to work. Let's get it done," he concluded. Read [the remarks](#)." Generally, these are politenesses before groups get to the challenge of actually negotiating.

Following that event, I chose to attend a discussion with state and local leaders. This link is also from the Department of State: the [Subnational Climate Action Leaders' Exchange \(SCALE\) partnership](#) launched a new accelerator to bring together a global cohort of cities, states, and regions committed to ambitious goals for climate mitigation and resilience in the buildings sector, including the collective aim of reducing their emissions at least 40% below 2020 levels by 2030. White House National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi focused on the Biden Administration's efforts to reduce the energy burden for low-income residents by providing more efficient energy sources and building out industrial capacity for construction materials, resulting in more jobs. The conversation focused on the opportunity to undertake some meaningful achievements at the local scale so that residents could see a difference in how processes are working, as described by Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller. Governor Jay Inslee of Washington noted that his was the first state to adopt energy performance standards, spurring new technologies. He reminded us that there is no reason to waste energy. Maryland Secretary of the Department of the Environment Serena McIlwain emphasized that it is important to prioritize what policies should be enacted first and which will need to be delayed, as you can't do everything at once. It is important to work with communities, such as the building coalition, listen to their concerns, and reach consensus.

The U.S. Center at COP29 (<https://www.state.gov/climate-crisis/u-s-center-at-cop29-daily-schedule/>) provided a forum for discussion about "Accelerating Private Capital Mobilization for Global Climate and Sustainable Development" with some excellent insights into how public funding can lay the groundwork for private lenders to

understand how they can make money by lending in developing economies which are often riskier and more complicated than domestic markets. Companies are looking for standardization, clear rules, and strong data to engage with blended finance. It is essential that private entities invest at scale because the government does not have the resources to meet the funding targets. Overall, the objective is to create inclusive economic growth.

From there, I walked briskly to the other end of the complex to arrive in time to stand in a long line of 150 people who all wanted to attend an off-the-record not-for-attribution briefing by John Podesta for members of civil society and research institutions. He and his team provided similar overviews to what he has said publicly elsewhere (<https://az.usembassy.gov/podesta-remarks/>) and answered a variety of questions. At gatherings such as this it is possible to talk with mayors, governors, and other elected and appointed officials who otherwise might not be available beyond a quick handshake. You and they are interested in solving the same problems.

Then it was back through the stadium to a session on "Tackling Corruption: A missing piece in the climate finance goals", featuring participants from Fiji, Norway, Green Climate Fund, International Monetary Fund, and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. This session highlighted the tension between using public money to invest in the lives and communities of people in need in developing nations and the concern that money be well spent as often these are the same countries where there is a high probability of corruption. There is a need for independent units and regulations, as well as processes for measurement and assessment. It is important to keep in mind that benefits accrued by elites in existing systems are often very hard to dislodge. While the internet enables relatively easy access to innumerable statements by people at all levels of government and the private sector, observing the interaction in person provides additional insight through body language and tone of voice that is easy to miss when listening or watching online. While none of the panel participants I heard today offered one path to solve climate challenges, or an easy fix, they all demonstrated a commitment to improving the health of the planet as equitably as possible, giving us hope for the future and instilling in us a sense of urgency about the increasing challenges across the world.

The day was filled primarily with walking and note-taking, but I will add just a note about the systems and processes surrounding the event. The logistics of managing access to the venue are quite controlled, which means that the zigzagging lines familiar to people who visit airports and theme parks have never been filled when I have gone through security. This contrasts with reports of hour waits during recent COP meetings, exacerbated somewhat by COVID-19 checks. In Baku, buses arrive at regular intervals and the system has enough security personnel and staff to move everyone through the access points. As with the attendees, there are a multitude of support people with varying levels of accessibility and responsibility and information. While well-meaning, many of the volunteers (most of whom appear to be students), know where to point you to more information rather than having the details themselves. At one point when there was a crowd in both directions along a busy corridor, they were used as human traffic cones to keep the sides from mixing direction. One does have to be on the lookout for people standing in front of backgrounds for photos or interviews, but generally people are not strolling between meetings.

12 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan



Report of the Adaptation Committee



Raising the Bar and Setting the Pace: Cities, states, and regions leading the race toward the future

What is the theme of COP29? When will you answer my question?

This year's theme is finance. I attended a variety of meetings which included discussions of how to address the actual (not on paper) transfer of funds and resources from more developed to less developed countries and regions as they struggle to address hardships related to the changing climate. The Women and Gender Constituency coordination meeting began with the chair reminding us that we should not put ourselves in danger of being "debadged". A detailed guide explains all the ways to behave during the meeting, including who is authorized to speak during a meeting or by being part of an "action" or demonstration. Protests are limited due to the United Nations' rules and the Azerbaijani government's restrictions. Participants continue to discuss difficult and controversial topics, but large-scale events are discouraged. Members of the organizing group of the constituency attend particular sets of negotiations and report the key events of the day. There was disagreement about how to organize the overall agenda for COP29 during the opening session, so no substantive conversations took place on Monday.

Thank you to everyone who has submitted questions. A few were general and have been addressed through previous days' postings. Others will be addressed a bit later in the week. Some expressed interest in specific topics, such as the health of oceans. Both the United States government and its related agencies often have listserves that you are welcome to join for regular updates about the official actions being taken, so I recommend searching those out. Understanding the framing of the global picture will assist any work you are doing at the local and regional scale.

While in conversation with a variety of entities, I have been pondering how to provide additional data to League of Women Voters members in terms of actions that could be taken across the country. Today at the US Pavilion (<https://www.state.gov/climate-crisis/cop-29/>), there was a conversation about subnational activities that included Emani Kumar from ICLEI (<https://iclei.org/>), California Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot

(<https://resources.ca.gov/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Secretary-for-Natural-Resources>), and Brooklyn Park, Minnesota Mayor Hollies Winston (<https://palebluedot.llc/brooklyn-park-minnesota-climate-vulnerability-and-adaptation>). I spoke with them about engaging with League members - they seemed surprised, but interested. I would like to connect with the local organizations to move this idea forward. Local and regional actors (municipalities and states) will continue to be key actors as they see the effects of a changing climate first-hand. I inquired again as to how local choices (such as closing a coal-fired power plant) are translated into the data collected by the federal government and translated to progress on the Nationally Determined Contribution (<https://ndcpartnership.org/country/usa>). So far, no specific answers, and it does not seem to be a common question. I will keep asking as I think that this type of data - how what happens at the local level impacts national and subsequently global measures - is essential to engaging people within their communities. Does what I do matter? League members need to have some way to answer that positively, demonstrating how greenhouse gas emissions are counted and measured.

Also at the US Pavilion, I heard a briefing from NASA's chief scientist about data collected through the agency and how it is shared. Dr. Katherine Calvin emphasized the importance of looking at change over time, incorporating a variety of sources, and making freely available all the data collected. However, she emphasized that having data out there was not enough, and that it is important to help people interpret and assess the data related to their situation. NASA has a variety of excellent tools for educators (<https://climate.nasa.gov/for-educators/>), so if you are not familiar with those, I invite you to explore them. For anyone interested in the ocean, NASA also offers significant research in that area

(<https://science.nasa.gov/earth-science/focus-areas/climate-variability-and-change/ocean-physics/oceanography/>). She explained the difference between looking at data over a year - so the average temperature or rise in 2023 - as compared to a 20-year average, just a reminder that understanding math is key. When measuring emissions to report as part of the NDC, she noted that it is important to be transparent about what you are measuring, how you are doing it, and how you are combining the information with existing data. Later in the day I attended a session with climate scientists who have clear information about why we need to be communicating about the challenges of uncertainty, a topic that should be discussed within science education classes on a regular basis.

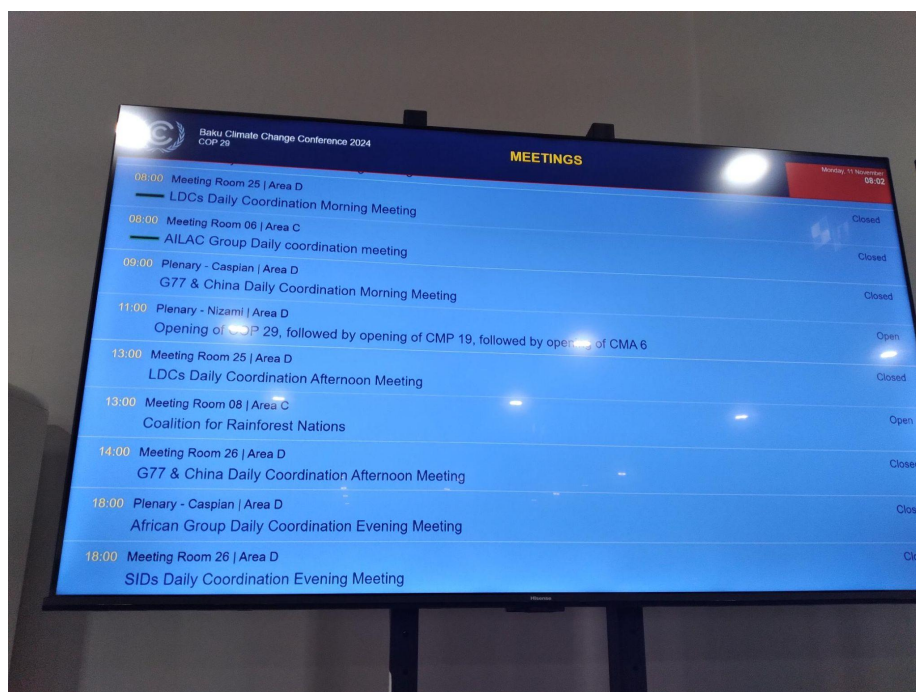
There are several types of sessions happening. Some are informative, such as "Achieving Transformative Climate Action", which featured a variety of speakers talking about their work at to drive a just transition without pushing all the suffering onto vulnerable populations. For the United Nations University Vice-Rectorate in Europe (<https://unu.edu/vie/about/expert/ambe-emmanuel-cheo>), this includes building capacity at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels so that developing countries are able to provide examples of leadership and prioritize upscaling of successful initiatives. This session emphasized that discussion of technical issues surrounding climate choices is not abstract, as we are talking about sustainability of people, and that people in many countries who work to safeguard the environment put their lives on the line when trying to prevent poaching or clearcutting. There was a call for "rights-based environmental action". I also attended presentations by several mayors about their work, including a German county mayor who created rural hubs for learning, as well as the "Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force", where it was noted that we have been making decisions against nature for a long time. There was recognition that it is important to conduct research in a collaborative way between government and academia.

Other sessions are about the actual agreements being made by the parties. Observers are allowed to attend these meetings as long as there is room - I was in one space for about twenty minutes until we were asked to

leave because more Party members needed to be in the space. There are overflow rooms where you can listen to the proceedings, but you don't always get as much insight into the interactions between the participants by simply listening or watching a video. Country representatives expressed their views - everyone is called on by their country or organization (e.g. European Union) - in a fairly polite manner, as these were the opening sessions. The new leaders of the groups were congratulated, and everyone followed parliamentary rules for discussion. However, it is clear that there is tension between the less developed and the more developed countries and blocs. During a conversation about "Long-term Climate Finance", the United States representative observed that while we need to acknowledge the shortfall in reducing emissions, there has been significant work in capacity building and that we should be pleased with this success. The United Arab Emirates representative disagreed with the US that the goals have been met and there needs to be a decision about how the rules are made in terms of counting. I do not quite understand all the references, but anyone who is familiar with a bureaucracy and how things are measured and counted likely is familiar with how different interpretations of the same data benefit one group or another.

These are difficult topics. They are not theoretical as we see the impacts of climate destroying people, livelihoods, and property. It is a privilege to be here and to gain inspiration from so many people dedicated to improving our world.

11 November 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan



Screen with high-level schedule - the app is necessary for details!



https://galschiot.com/EVENTS/FLYER_COP29_2024.pdf

This morning the work of the United Nations Climate Conference began in earnest for most attendees. The bus to the stadium was standing room only, disgorging its badged riders at the entrance. I was very glad I had been able to visit and get my bearings while fewer people were in the space. The advice to wear sneakers and take snacks was exactly on point - there is a lot of walking from one meeting to another. I arrived prior to the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) meeting, which is scheduled every day at 9:00 am (<https://unfccc.int/gender/cop29>). Everyone introduced themselves, although subsequent days will be devoted to updates on positions and actions. There are many aspects of the negotiations to follow, which is why it is helpful to be part of a coalition (<https://womengenderclimate.org/>). The purpose of the WGC is to remind policy makers that climate change often affects women and girls differently

(<https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/five-facts-about-gender-equality-and-climate-change/>). Participants from India, Bangladesh, Brazil, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Zimbabwe, Costa Rica, Uganda, and many other countries were in attendance, representing groups including Oxfam, Latin American Youth Scholarship, and the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO). There was no shortage of passion in the room, but also a clear sense of the limitations of these types of gatherings where there is a lot of talking and minimal action. The WGC leadership emphasized how the actual space of the COP meetings has been made more gender responsive based on the addition of nursing rooms and the availability of free menstrual products at first aid stations. There are many opportunities for the League of Women Voters to connect and collaborate, and we will need more young women to engage in climate change going forward.

The next item was the Opening Plenary session (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPd6qt0XPa0>). I made my way with the crowd to the gathering place to wait for the doors to open. However, it was not clear which line was for which group and I ended up being just close enough to being able to enter to hear that the room was full. While in line, I was interviewed by AZT and asked what I hoped to gain from my experience, and I said more information about how to take action at the local level. I have no idea in which country or where that snippet might turn up, if at all. On the one hand, I missed attending a historic gathering of world leaders. On the other, I had time for some interesting conversations in the Delegate Pavillion, where official groups have their booths - part trade fair and part promotion of accomplishments. Those serving free coffee are particularly popular.

I spoke with the NDC Partnership (<https://ndcpartnership.org/>) and asked how local initiatives are translated into the Nationally Determined Contributions describing the decrease of greenhouse gas emissions. The staff members were not quite sure how that works, so I will do some inquiry with the US Department of State. The European Union suggested exploring EU's 100 Mission Cities (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities_en) as a way to obtain ideas about actions they are taking, both large and small, to address climate change. The United States Pavillion was still be constructed, so I will stop by there tomorrow.

In addition to the Women and Gender Constituency, I am following the Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organizations (RINGO) group, which includes a number of university professors, students, and research institutions. A pop-up meeting with members of the US Department of State communications team provided insight into plans for the remaining weeks of the Biden Administration as well as observations about the media and diplomatic interactions with the host country. The staff suggested using the Sunnylands Statement as a reference point

(<https://www.state.gov/sunnylands-statement-on-enhancing-cooperation-to-address-the-climate-crisis/>). I continue to try and decipher acronyms as they appear, with SPEC Kerry (U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate) being one example. Regarding the incoming administration, many participants are concerned about the choices the federal government may make going forward. However, some acknowledge that their own governments are in sync with President-Elect Trump's ideology, and that there is a great deal that can be done outside of government agencies. The major issue will be whether international agreements are continued.

Later in the afternoon I attended a session discussing language and terms, designed to remind attendees the meaning of words such as mitigation, adaptation, and unabated, as well as the difference between "shall" and "should". If you are teaching about the importance of language and details, this is a good example of why proofreading is important

(<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2015/dec/16/how-a-typo-nearly-derailed-the-paris-climate-deal>) and why it is essential that diplomats be careful in understanding how everyone at the table interpret words. I also could not imagine engaging in these types of meetings with English as one's second or third language, as is the case for many attendees. I was exhausted managing all the logistics without having to translate all the information, so my hat is off to those individuals who must take that extra step.

The day closed with two meetings about the importance of getting resources to local communities. "Nationally Determined Contributions for Climate Justice" featured discussions about resources for examining the work of civil society in reducing emissions and the gap between action and expectations (<https://www.equityreview.org/>). The other considered "Financing Loss and Damage at the Local Communities' Level", with clear statements from countries not producing greenhouse gasses that those places that are polluting need to "start providing needed resources for those who are really living with climate change". While the "Santiago Network" (<https://unfccc.int/santiago-network>) engages with developing countries, there was concern that its work was insufficient. Many people most affected by climate events do not have the language skills or resources to write grants to the United Nations for funding. They find their lives are disrupted, their social networks are broken, and the sense of belonging in the community has been shattered. There were questions - no answers - about the source of money for damage and loss.

Thanks to everyone for your comments and questions. I will try and answer more of them in the days ahead, now that I know where to seek out some of the answers.

10 November 2004

Baku, Azerbaijan



What can you learn from walking around an unfamiliar place?

After spending some time preparing my photos and write-up, I set out to explore more of the city and undertake some errands prior to the start of the conference tomorrow. One of my favorite things to do while traveling is purchase and send postcards, which is becoming more and more challenging as fewer people are writing even short notes by snail mail these days. Mailing postcards means that you also need stamps, necessitating a visit to a post office. The one in Baku was fairly easy to find, and I have learned that it is best to have a postcard ready as an example to obtain the right stamps. Post offices have similar characteristics, often offering banking and other services absent in the United States. To get to the post office from my lodging, I walked to the Central Hospital of Oilmen to pick up a bus to shorten my travel time. With online mapping tools it is now much easier to track where the bus is going and how far it is from your intended stop, and as an added bonus you are able to have a tour of the city. I then walked down to the shoreline for my first in-person observation of the Caspian Sea. From early twentieth century photographs along the waterfront park, it appears that Baku never had to redevelop its coastline from industrial or warehouse use. Many families were out strolling and appreciating the sunshine. Another way to learn about a place is to visit something that is familiar to you in your home country. I stopped by a mall to look for some children's books in the Azerbaijani language, which is related to Turkish. I found the use of space and the architecture generally more interesting than the shops. The COP29 committee installed an information center along the waterfront with interactive exhibits and a timeline so that both local people and visitors would have a better sense of what the event was about. I asked the staff member if the building would remain, and she was not sure. I made my way to the Azerbaijani National Historical Museum which provides an overview from prehistorical times to the present government, often through the thread of political geography and changing maps. Along with understanding the self-conception of a country, historical museums are often in fascinating buildings, in this case it is housed in an oil baron's home, complete with a room with a mirrored ceiling. In contrast, the Carpet Museum is housed in a modern building that looks like a rolled-up carpet. Look to the left of this photo and you can see some fingers rising out of the earth - I'm not quite sure how that connects to the construction and use of carpets, but there it was. I appreciated learning about the different ways that carpets and other woven objects have contributed to the way of life of the Azerbaijani people, including as part of their trading history. One description included this observation, "The importance of this land with rich cultural traditions and ancient artistic heritage is far beyond the boundaries of a country or a state. This territory with favorable geographic always was a tidbit for many conquerors." I am looking forward to discussing this with my political geography students next semester. Nearby, a funicular takes you to a memorial park, a mosque, and the Flame Towers, part of Baku's contribution to modern architecture. Looking at the exhibits in the Historical Museum, they struck me as both lovely individual objects as well as typical of early people's art on every continent, emphasizing how similar we are. I am not a trained anthropologist or archaeologist, but as I begin my first event with the United Nations, I can't help but be concerned that humans continue to spend a great deal of time fighting rather than talking.

Baku, Azerbaijan

How is the host country organizing the UN Conference on Climate Change?



Transportation sign in Baku.
volunteers.

Registration desk for obtaining your credentials with staff and

While sometimes places have many years to plan, the location of COP29 was only decided a year ago, so the Azerbaijani government had a shorter time to organize. The selection of Belém in the state of Pará in Brazil for the 2025 meeting was announced at the same time as Baku. Transportation of all the people coming to an event such as this is one of the main responsibilities of the host country. When I arrived at the airport at three o'clock in the morning, the booths for immigration and customs were fully staffed resulting in short wait times. My visa and passport were all in order and I moved through the process with no trouble. Free eco-friendly wifi-enabled buses were routed to various parts of the city from the airport, with the intention to deliver most people to their lodging efficiently. I was grateful my space was ready so I could settle in fairly efficiently. Almost everyone arriving at the airport was traveling to the conference, and I learned that the registration would be open on Saturday so I could go ahead and pick up my badge, avoiding long lines on Monday morning. The main venue is the Olympic Stadium (<https://cop29.az/en/conference/cop29-venue>), which was built in 2015 to host the European Games. This is the "Blue Zone" location, which is where primary discussions and presentations will take place. Buses were running from the lodging to the venue, so I waited with two "Contractors" (people who knew when the buses were scheduled to show up) and "Host Broadcasters" (two technical support folks for the media). COP29 seems to be relying on both employees and volunteers to keep the program running. On the bus were two representatives from a British renewable energy company who have a booth in the "Green Zone", which hosts a variety of pavilions sponsored by various groups. The space is not particularly pedestrian friendly, surrounded by highways, although accessible by sidewalks and fewer giant parking lots than a typical stadium in the United States. As I looked at the

tents set up, I was reminded of state fairs, the largest of which often host over 100,000 people in a day. The difference is that attendees at state fairs are often very familiar with the program and layout of the space and need less direction. Here in Baku, conference attendees want to spend less time on logistics and more on conversation, so having efficient transportation, lodging, and dining options is important. There is tremendous obvious security presence, especially at places that are likely to house people in need of more protection than I am. Our lodging site has a table staffed by COP29 volunteers who are able to answer logistical questions as well as dedicated transportation for what appear to be members of the media.



Entrance to the stadium - plenty of signage.



Badge ready for Monday morning.

Upon arrival at the stadium, we followed signs to the entrance, went through security screening, and lined up to obtain our badges. This item is the most valuable commodity at the conference, with details about when and where you can move. So far I have found that "Party" - which means you are part of the official delegation - are pink, observers are yellow, and volunteers are brown. I have not yet seen an official list for every category, but I will be on the lookout. As with any kind of large event, you learn a lot simply by standing around and talking with people while waiting in line or sitting on a bus. The British corporate representatives noted that they were surprised at the

number of people who did not speak English, and learned that the best alternative language was Russian (see the previous notes on history and geography of Azerbaijan for perspective on why that could be expected). Many people were enthusiastically greeting individuals with whom they worked, and even though it was my first time at the event, I felt welcomed and respected. People from outside the United States who were not familiar with the League of Women Voters wanted to know more about the organization and its history. I could not really obtain a greater sense of the space, so I headed out to try my new badge on the metro as all COP29 attendees are able to use their badges as a metro card to encourage use of public transportation. The metro is efficient, although I think stations could always use more metro maps.



From top left: Maiden Tower; Tomb in the Palace of the Shirvanshahs; Cover to keep food hot because it was cooked a long way from where it was served, found in museums and still used in the present to keep my soup warm; window of a shop with a variety a sweet and sticky candies as well as different types of baklava.

How are you finding Baku?

This is the most common question I have been asked by people providing services. Now that I have been here for more than 24 hours, I can say it is similar to other large cities with ancient histories that I have visited with newer buildings sometimes towering over historic settings. There is a well-defined Old City, a world heritage site with Maiden Tower, the symbol of the city, and a variety of preserved buildings. I always like to observe what a place emphasizes about itself in explaining its past. For instance, at the Palace of the Shirvanshahs there is a tomb dedicated to Seyid Yahaya Bakuvi, described as a scientist and Dervish, suggesting that study was held in high regard. According to the sign, about 30 of his works on Sufi-mystic character exist today. Local descriptions also require understanding historical events from multiple perspectives, recognizing that there are usually competing views of the same story. I wandered around the cobblestone streets, working to overcome jet lag, while admiring the array of goods available for purchase. Many stores offered the opportunity to try on a typical Azerbaijani hat and take a photo for 1 Manat. One US \$ is worth about 1.70 Azerbaijani ₼ . During my visits to historic sites, I continued to encounter people who were also attending the UN Conference, including two colleagues from the Czech Republic, one of whom was Finnish but had lived in Česko for the past several years. They seemed to be technical support for the official delegation and were familiar with the negotiations, although I am still trying to figure out exactly how the people work together. The Finnish gentleman wanted to know what kind of data was being collected in the United States about the impacts of climate change on women and girls, and noted that collecting that information in the European Union had been challenging. While we talked about a variety of topics, including how to move parties with seemingly intractable positions to compromise - his take, it takes someone with stature and respect, his observation about data reminded me how important it is to collect and analyze information. We cannot make informed decisions about a topic based on instincts or impressions, which is why researchers remain critically important to all aspects of civil society.

8 November 2024
Frankfurt, Germany



Quiet room in Frankfurt Airport.



Departures on Friday, November 8

Why is international travel worth the effort?

The United States is a very large country and I appreciate being able to explore places from Arizona to Maine, all of which have their own geography and character. The world offers even more variety, and crossing borders is a good reminder that there are many perspectives across our Earth. I was traveling on Lufthansa, which is a German-based airline, so all of the information between Frankfurt and Denver is provided first in German and then in English. I know some rudimentary German, so I am able to interpret the basic details, but appreciate the translation. Large airports look very similar across the world, and I spent some time in the quiet room before heading to my gate. You can see on the list of flights the variety of places people will be flying today from Frankfurt. At the gate for the plane to Baku, everyone with whom I talked was heading to COP29. This included two individuals from Mexico who are engineers advising the delegation on science, a water researcher originally from the Philippines who now works from Miami, a photographer originally from Venezuela who now lives in Portugal, and the representative for human impacts of climate change from the Quaker United Nations Office. We talked about issues of migration, how the different interactions at the COP take place - financial discussions are the most important, and logistics about the meetings. I learned that Baku is pronounced with the emphasis on the first syllable.

Where is Azerbaijan and why is the United Nations meeting being held there?



Here is a basic physical map of Azerbaijan (<https://www.freeworldmaps.net/asia/azerbaijan/map.html>) showing the neighboring countries. For more details, visit the website of the Azerbaijan Geographic Society (<https://gsaz.az/en/articles/view/89/Republic-of-Azerbaijan>).

United Nations meetings rotate among the different areas of the world, and Eastern Europe was supposed to be the next region

(<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-are-united-nations-climate-change-conferences>). Ukraine was under consideration for hosting COP29, but then became unavailable due to the Russian invasion in February 2022. Azerbaijan volunteered to host. The country is located in southwestern Asia, with a small territory in Europe north of the Caucasus range, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (<https://gsaz.az/en/articles/view/89/Republic-of-Azerbaijan>). For political geography students, this is an example of an exclave. When you look at a map of a country, think about its borders. Waldo Tobler's first law of geography is "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things." The countries surrounding Azerbaijan will have played a large role in its past as well as influence its present and future. Those include Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, and the Caspian Sea, which might suggest that Azerbaijan would have a large navy. For more information about the recent history and background of the country, visit the CIA Factbook website (<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>). I have found that even when you are not

traveling specifically as a tourist, it is helpful to investigate travel books to obtain some basic insight into an area. Here is what the “Lonely Planet” guidebook had to say about the history of the region in 2016 on page 278: “This mountainous isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas stands at the frontiers of Europe and Asia and of Islam and Christendom, an eternal crossroads of cultures and empires with one of the most complicated, and fascinating, stories in the world. Today’s three South Caucasus nations are just the latest of scores of republics, kingdoms, principalities, emirates, khanates and satrapies that have blossomed and wilted here down the centuries, as Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Ottomans, Russians and others used the local peoples as pawns in their grand imperial games.” I am looking forward to learning more about the legacies left by these groups.

7 November 2024
Denver, Colorado



How do you travel from Colorado to Azerbaijan?

Only a few people attending this conference would take a route other than an airplane, so we must acknowledge the irony of thousands of people boarding planes to fly to a place to discuss the concerns of humans using greenhouse gasses to manage their lives. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of airline passengers has continued to increase, according to Airports Council International (<https://aci.aero/2024/09/18/the-trusted-source-for-air-travel-demand-updates-2/>). One way to decrease emissions is to have more efficient plane (<https://www.capgemini.com/insights/expert-perspectives/making-aircraft-more-energy-efficient/>). Another tactic is to have carbon-conscious meetings, which is the approach discussed by the American Association of Geographers (<https://www.aag.org/program/aag-action-on-climate-change/>). An early - although imprecise - tool to assess one's impact on the planet was a "Footprint Calculator", a usually free platform offered by a variety of organizations to enable individuals to consider the impact they are making on the Earth (<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/resources/footprint-calculator/>). One of the best questions is, how many planets

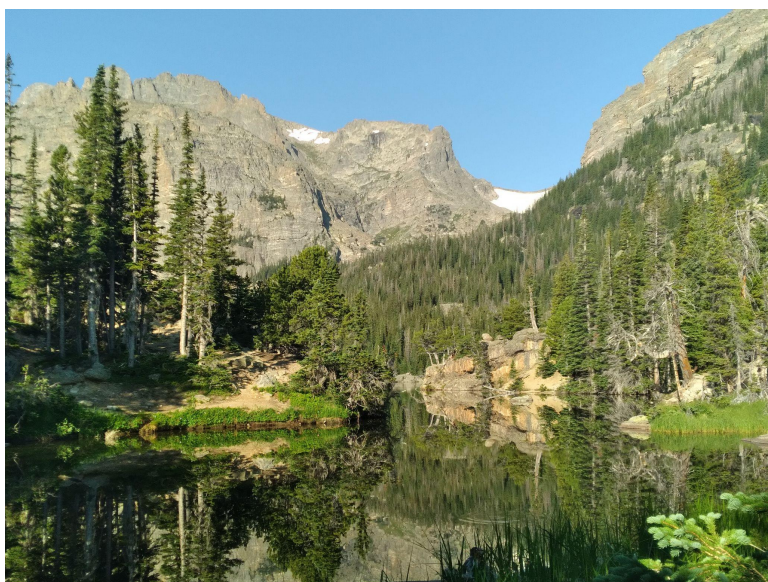
would it take to support your lifestyle? For these types of exercises, once you take an airplane trip, you have tipped the balance to using more than your fair share.

I chose to fly from Denver, Colorado to Frankfurt, Germany, then on to Baku, Azerbaijan. This route meant that my husband drove me from Colorado Springs to Denver International Airport (160 mile round trip, in our hybrid car). I had hoped to take the light rail from a station about an hour from Colorado Springs, but the arrival of a snow storm made public transportation uncertain, so we left early and I spent much of the day at the Denver International Airport catching up on tasks. The flight from Frankfurt was delayed, so that means the return flight to Germany is also delayed. However, since I have a seven-and-a-half hour layover, I am not yet worried. During the wait, an employee from ACI ASQ Surveys invited people in the boarding area to complete a questionnaire about their experience at the airport that day. As a researcher, I believe in survey karma, so I usually try to complete a survey when invited. The scope included how you arrived at the airport, your experience through security, feeling about cleanliness and safety, and amenities. They did not ask about recycling, which I think every airport should have in abundance!

7 November 2024

Colorado Springs, Colorado

What are basic concerns related to climate change?



Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado
August 2024

Changes in the environment have been tracked for centuries. For background and timelines, see the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) Center for Science Education website (<https://scied.ucar.edu/learning-zone/how-climate-works/history-climate-science-research>). Key dates for the United States include: the 1979 JASON scientists' report to the Department of Energy about "The Long-Term Impact of Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide on Climate" (<https://www.osti.gov/biblio/5851500>); NASA climate scientist James Hansen's testimony to Congress in 1988; the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR)'s model using a supercomputer in 1998 to learn more about interactions in Earth's climate system; and in 2006 Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth* (<https://al gore.com/library/an-inconvenient-truth-dvd>), was released. The United

Nations and the World Meteorological Organization created the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1988 (<https://www.ipcc.ch/about/>) to gather scientific information about climate issues and present the information to policy makers. As discussions across disciplines, countries, and industries moved out of a narrow scientific community, many people – particularly connected with and affected by fossil fuel production and distribution – contested the research and complained that addressing climate issues would be very expensive. The BBC prepared a review of climate change denial in 2020 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-53640382>). John Oliver offered irony on “Last Week Tonight” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjuGCJJUGsg>). While the recent debate (<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>) within the International Union of Geological Sciences about whether the Earth has moved to a new Anthropocene Epoch along the Geologic Time Scale rejected this change, there is no doubt that the people of the Earth are experiencing rapid alteration of their engagement with land, water, and air. I am particularly interested in the intersection of civics and geography as related to climate change issues revolving around distribution of natural resources among countries and communities, and discussion of policies to address inequality and impacts on human health and well-being.

6 November 2024
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Why are you attending the conference?



I am a human geographer interested in issues of governance, community, and education. Geographers are concerned with spatial aspects of physical features and processes as well as human activity in relation to place and space. Geography – writing about the Earth – is one of the most comprehensive disciplines because it brings together physical and social sciences, while offering opportunities to inquire about the world using a variety of mapping technologies. When thinking about issues such as climate change, it is essential that research and policies address data collection and analysis from multiple perspectives. Most recently, I have been working with educational resources to explain the practice of electoral redistricting, primarily in the United States (geocivics.uccs.edu). One of the groups with whom I have engaged is the League of Women Voters, which was founded by leaders of the women’s suffrage movement in 1920 to support women as they were preparing to carry out their responsibilities as new voters. In 1945, the League was “[O]ne of the first organizations officially recognized by the UN as a non-governmental organization” (<https://www.lwv.org/about-us/history>), which gives the organization

observer status at multiple meetings. While attending its most recent National Convention in June 2024, I heard more about the League’s work with the United Nations ([HISTORY OF LWVUS AT UNITED NATIONS](#)) as well as local and national League efforts to address climate change. In August, I learned that I was chosen to attend for the first week, and that another League member would attend the second week. At the COP29 meeting, I will be connecting with the Women and Gender Constituency (<https://www.lwv.org/blog/climate-change-and-uns-women-and-gender-constituency>) as well as seeking out information about what actions local governments are undertaking, endeavoring to understand the key choices made by our national and international leaders. I will investigate how data is collected across the world to consider

which indicators are compiled for analysis of climate change in local communities, as well as about policies of various governments and organizations related to women and gender.

In what ways can students get involved in the United Nations Climate Conference?



Students explore Garden of the Gods park in Colorado Springs to learn about how to describe and analyze characteristics of the Earth. The more opportunities students have to investigate their communities, the better prepared they will be to understand what kinds of changes are taking place and to ask questions about what steps should be taken to address challenges.

For students, the first point of contact for COP29 is YOUNGO, the children and youth constituency (<https://unfccc.int/topics/education-youth/youth/younggo>). Although it is too late for students to find opportunities to attend in person or to obtain a virtual badge to listen in on sessions for 2024, you can sign up to receive details of the meeting through activities of Climate Generation (<https://climategen.org/united-nations-climate-conferences/window-into-cop29-digest/>). There are a variety of organizations that seek student representatives. Here is information on how youth (identified as people aged 18 to 35) have been preparing for COP29 (<https://unfccc.int/event/road-to-cop-29-advancing-meaningful-children-and-youth-engagement-in-the-unfccc-and-ndc-30-process>). In 2023, around 85,000 people attended the COP28 meeting in Dubai, with youth making up a greater number of participants. However, there were still challenges in terms of substantive engagement with negotiations (<https://youthdemocracycohort.com/youth-at-cop28-intergenerational-engagement-remains-elusive/>). Here is additional information on how the United Nations is engaging with children and youth through the youth delegates program (<https://unfccc.int/topics/action-for-climate-empowerment-children-and-youth/youth/presidency-youth-climate-champion/cop29-youth-delegates-program>). There are many entry points for younger people to engage with organizations interested in addressing climate change through colleges and universities, research institutes, disciplinary organizations, and advocacy groups. This list of organizations offers different types of connections with the United Nations (<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/overview/observer-organizations>). Investigate the list and see if there is a group with which you might want to work more closely (<https://www.ipcc.ch/apps/contact/interface/organizationall.php>). You can also keep track of what is happening in Azerbaijan through official sites (<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/overview/how-to-engage-without-observer-status>). These materials are available on YouTube and on the web to individuals without observer status.

5 November 2024
Colorado Springs, Colorado

What is the history of the United Nations' involvement in climate issues?



This is a photo of the first Conference of the Parties meeting in Berlin in 1995. As we move to COP 29, consider how the composition of the people attending the meeting has changed over time. Think about whether the questions being asked are the same or different.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/06/the-un-holds-first-cop-climate-conference-in-berlin-1995>

The United Nations was founded in 1945 in the wake of two world wars as a means to support justice and human rights as well as to improve standards of social and economic life and to address problems that cross international boundaries (<https://www.un.org/en/>). Its Charter is a treaty among sovereign nations and considered an instrument of international law. For additional perspective on the contribution of the United States to the founding of the United Nations, see the State Department archives (<https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/55407.htm>). In 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (<https://www.unep.org/>) was formed to coordinate responses to environmental issues affecting the health and economies of the planet; and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was formed in 1988 (<https://www.ipcc.ch/>). Three working groups address physical science; impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability; and mitigation. There is also a Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories to determine how to calculate emissions and their alleviation among countries. All these groups exist because in order for individuals, organizations, and countries to move forward in figuring out how to address a problem, they must agree on the question, as well as how to measure the extent of the issue and what means might be used to solve it. This is made more difficult when the details of the problem are evolving, and when many different interests have to be addressed. For instance, what are the benefits of a carbon tax? ([https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/publications/what-you-need-to-know-about-a-federal-carbon-tax-in-the-unit ed-states/](https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/publications/what-you-need-to-know-about-a-federal-carbon-tax-in-the-unit-ed-states/)) What does it mean when you are offered to pay more for a service or product by purchasing a carbon offset? These are the kinds of questions that arise as part of the climate change discussions.

You might wonder, what kinds of jobs do people who work at the IPCC have? Not surprisingly, lots of the jobs have "science" as part of their titles since they are expected to be able to conduct research, review research, and identify key findings. I am not a climate change expert, so I count on those people who have studied these phenomena to help me understand what is happening on the Earth. There is also a need for people to be employed in information technology (because computers are essential to many aspects of work), communications (so members of the public who want to know what is going on can access those details), and operations (to be sure people are paid and organized).

The United Nations General Assembly voted in 1990 to establish an “Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee” charged with preparing a way to discuss the health of the planet, particularly related to greenhouse gases, and to develop ways to measure and manage commitments to decrease those gasses. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro was a major meeting on sustainable development that identified three natural processes at high risk: desertification, biodiversity loss, and climate change (<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>). The United Nations convened the first “Conference of the Parties” in Berlin in 1995 (<https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop>). This group is the supreme decision-making body of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Everyone else who attends these conferences will not be making decisions, but they will be trying to influence the people who do make the decisions. You might have heard of the recent Biodiversity Summit in Columbia, which was also a “Conference of the Parties”, just on a different subject (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155931>). The Convention to Combat Desertification will be held in Riyadh in December 2024 (<https://www.unccd.int/cop16>). While these groups meet separately, they all address many overlapping issues. For historical information on the development of these activities, visit the UN archives website (<https://unfccc.int/about-us/unfccc-archives>).

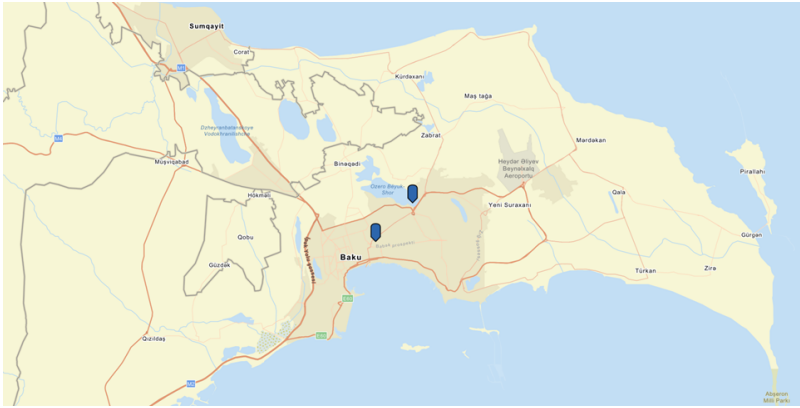
4 November 2024
Colorado Springs, Colorado

What is this update about?



<https://unitingtocombatntds.org/en/get-involved/events/un-climate-change-conference-cop29/>

Rebecca Theobald is preparing to attend the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties, informally known as COP29. This is the 29th meeting since the first event took place in Berlin in 1995. She is trying to figure out all the acronyms and terms that are connected to the program. She is looking forward to answering questions from community members and students of all ages who might be wondering about some of the issues and processes surrounding these types of meetings. If you use this information in a classroom or presentation, please remember to use proper citation formats. These observations represent her own perspective and opinions, and are not those of the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, the League of Women Voters, or the Green Action Fund. As she is not an expert in the science of climate change, or in the workings of the United Nations, she will provide a variety of links for you to explore if you have additional questions. She looks forward to learning with you over the next several days.



Baku, Azerbaijan

