Arab Reform Initiative

STATEMENT



COP31 · ANTALYA, TÜRKIYE · 2026

After Antalya

COP31's failures and what they mean for the MENA region

A statement by the Arab Reform Initiative

27 November 2026

The MENA region is not shielded from the impacts of climate change. The region is warming at twice the global average. Its people are already living through record heat, increasingly severe droughts, erratic rainfall, water shortages and agricultural shocks. This year, war and the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz added an energy and supply-chain shock to these existing pressures.

WHAT COP31 FAILED TO DELIVER

COP31 not only failed to deliver a unified, consensus-based decision; it also failed to deliver on matters that directly affect this region.

- **Adaptation finance: promises without a clear pathway.** The commitment made in Belém to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035 was left without an agreed baseline, a quantified target or a credible pathway for delivery. COP31 made some technical progress on adaptation, but failed to secure the finance that vulnerable communities urgently need.
- **Loss and damage: a fund without the resources to meet the need.** The Loss and Damage Fund has received just $342 million in pledges against $2.8 billion in funding requests submitted by developing countries. COP31 acknowledged the funding gap but failed to secure the substantial resources needed to fill it.
- **The just transition postponed.** The mechanism agreed in Belém to support workers, communities and countries in making equitable transitions was not made fully operational. Its functions, institutional arrangements and implementation framework will be at the heart of COP32 in Ethiopia in 2027.
- **Agriculture abandoned.** Negotiations under the Sharm el-Sheikh Joint Work on Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security collapsed for the second consecutive year, leaving no agreement on the future of this critical workstream.
- **Water security without a negotiating commitment.** Despite the centrality of water scarcity to climate vulnerability, particularly across the MENA region, COP31 delivered no substantive, adequately financed outcome on water security. Voluntary initiatives cannot substitute for adaptation finance that reaches water-stressed communities, farmers and local water authorities.

> **“There is no just transition under occupation and bombardment.”**
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> ARAB REFORM INITIATIVE

SIX LESSONS FOR WHAT COMES AFTER ANTALYA

ARI has spent years working with researchers, farmers, water activists, policymakers and civil society across the region to understand what a just environmental transition means here. Six lessons from that work should guide what comes after Antalya.

1

A just transition in energy must serve people here first.

The region is increasingly being positioned as a source of solar power and green hydrogen for export, while many of its own citizens continue to face unreliable electricity supplies and rising energy costs. A transition that builds export infrastructure before addressing domestic energy needs, or that is negotiated without the meaningful participation of workers and communities, is not just. Energy-importing countries in North Africa and the Levant also need debt relief and grant-based finance, not more loans, to make the transition without deepening existing inequalities.

2

Water justice cannot wait for consensus.

Water scarcity is the region's sharpest climate risk, and its burden falls unequally: on small farmers, informal settlements, refugees and people living under occupation. But water insecurity is not simply a consequence of climate change. It is also shaped by unequal access, poor governance, conflict and the control of water resources. Adaptation finance must reach local water governance and the communities who manage scarce water, not only large desalination and infrastructure projects. Water justice requires public accountability, equitable access and the meaningful participation of the people most affected.

3

Food sovereignty is climate adaptation.

Many countries in the region depend heavily on imported food and remain exposed to global price and supply shocks, as this year has shown again. Supporting small farmers, agroecology, seed systems and local markets is not a side issue or an alternative to climate adaptation. It is one of its most direct and effective forms. Building resilient local food systems means strengthening the capacity of communities to produce, access and control the food they depend on, rather than leaving them exposed to increasingly volatile global markets.

4

War is an environmental catastrophe, and it is missing from the climate agenda.

From Gaza to southern Lebanon, from Sudan to Syria, wars have destroyed farmland, water networks and power grids, contaminated soil, damaged ecosystems and displaced millions. Attacks on energy and water infrastructure this year have also extended across the Gulf. These are not only humanitarian and political disasters; they are long-term environmental crises whose consequences will endure for generations. Military emissions remain subject to voluntary and inconsistent reporting under the Paris Agreement, leaving major gaps in global emissions accounting. Environmental destruction in war is also rarely investigated or addressed through climate governance. The climate impacts of occupation, bombardment and military activity cannot remain outside discussions of climate justice.

5 Multilateralism must deliver justice, not just consensus.

The failure of COP31 to agree on an overarching political decision is part of a wider crisis of multilateral cooperation. At a time of escalating geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts and deepening inequalities, the institutions designed to enable collective action are struggling to deliver the responses the moment demands. For the MENA region, this failure is particularly consequential. Climate change does not respect borders, and neither do the consequences of war, energy disruption, food insecurity and water scarcity. No country can address these challenges alone. Yet international cooperation cannot mean accepting the lowest common denominator, allowing powerful states to block progress, or asking vulnerable countries to compromise on their right to finance, adaptation and a just transition. The answer is not to abandon multilateralism, but to make it more democratic, accountable and responsive to the needs of the Global South.

6 The digital transition must be just too.

The Antalya AI Pledge recognises an important reality: artificial intelligence can help address climate challenges, but its rapid expansion also carries significant environmental costs. The growing demand for data centres, electricity, water and critical minerals raises fundamental questions about the sustainability of the digital transition and who bears its costs. For the MENA region, these questions are particularly important. Countries are increasingly being positioned as destinations for energy-intensive data centres and digital infrastructure, often drawing on the region's land, energy and water resources. The AI transition must not reproduce the extractive patterns of the energy transition. AI for climate action must be accessible to developing countries, strengthen local research and innovation, and respond to locally defined needs. The Antalya AI Pledge is a useful starting point, but voluntary commitments are not enough: its implementation must be transparent, measurable and accountable, with clear reporting on the energy, water and material footprints of AI infrastructure.

ARI calls on

Arab governments to stop treating climate negotiations as a defence of fossil-fuel revenues. Governments benefiting from fossil-fuel production should lead on an equitable and managed transition, invest resource revenues in regional adaptation, and open meaningful spaces for their citizens, researchers and civil society to participate in climate policy. They must also ensure that renewable energy and green hydrogen partnerships serve domestic needs and public interests, rather than reproducing existing patterns of extraction and inequality.

Developed countries to honour the adaptation finance commitment, fund loss and damage at the scale required, and support debt relief for climate-vulnerable countries in the region. Climate finance must be additional, accessible and predominantly grant-based where countries cannot afford further debt. Partnerships on hydrogen and renewable energy should be judged by what they deliver for local people, not simply by what they supply to global energy markets.

All parties, on the road to COP32 in Ethiopia, to agree on the functions, institutional arrangements and implementation framework of the just transition mechanism, backed by rights safeguards and adequate grant-based finance. They must put food systems and water security back at the centre of climate negotiations, and strengthen transparency and accountability for military emissions and environmental destruction in conflict.

The UN climate process to give civil society, trade unions, farmers' organisations and affected communities from the Global South a meaningful voice in decision-making. This is particularly urgent at a time when civic space in many host and participating countries is shrinking and the people most affected by climate decisions are too often excluded from shaping them.

The Paris Agreement was built on the principle that no country should be left to face the climate crisis alone. But solidarity cannot remain an aspiration repeated at annual summits while communities bear the costs of political delay, economic inequality, conflict and environmental destruction.

Climate justice in the MENA region requires more than commitments on paper. It requires a transition that puts people before profits, treats water and food as matters of justice, confronts the environmental consequences of war, and directs resources to the communities already living with the crisis.

ARI will continue to work with researchers, farmers, activists and movements across the region to document what is at stake, develop alternatives and hold decision-makers to account when they fail to act.

> **The road from Antalya to COP32 must be measured not by the promises made, but by the lives improved and the injustices addressed.**

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