



WELCOMING REMARKS

by

First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva



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*Distinguished First Ladies,
Dear guests,
Dear young participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

First of all, I would like to greet you in Azerbaijan and wish you good health, and wish peace, and prosperity for the countries you represented at COP29. The title of our panel, “Youth at the Forefront of Climate Action,” speaks for itself.

According to recent studies, over 60% of the world's youth consider climate change as an urgent issue. I hope that within the framework of COP29, we will have the opportunity to initiate the creation of platforms for cooperation, the exchange of experiences, and the generation of common projects by the younger generation.

I welcome all representatives of youth organizations, eco-activists, and all young people who care and are participating in COP29.

I express my gratitude to the First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye for her initiative in founding the Zero Waste Foundation and for her personal contribution to projects that protect environmental and cultural heritage.

I highly appreciate the efforts of Uzbekistan, whose initiative led to the adoption of the Central Asian Strategy last year to promote sustainable development and involve children and youth in the climate agenda for 2024-2030. I would like to thank the First Lady of Uzbekistan, Ziroat Mirziyoyeva, for her personal patronage of this important mission.

I am grateful to the First Lady of Kyrgyzstan for her participation and her active role in raising awareness and involving young people in the environmental agenda.

Dear friends, it is great honor for us to be chosen as the country for COP29, and we are proud that the first conference in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the broader region is being held in Azerbaijan. The world faces serious environmental challenges, such as biosphere pollution, freshwater shortages, droughts, and emerging risks to food security. Our country is no exception. We observe a decrease in river water levels, the shrinking of the Caspian Sea, and face the threat of water shortages.

I would like to note that Azerbaijan accounts for only 0.1% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We are adjusting our national targets to reduce emissions and transition to clean energy. With the current pace of achievements in renewable energy, we expect to reach 32% of our installed capacity by 2027, three years earlier than our original target of 30% by 2030.

We are also focused on creating a net-zero emission zone in Karabakh and East Zangazur regions, liberated from occupation of Armenia, and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic by 2050. Active work is already underway on major solar and wind energy projects. The production and export of green energy are priorities in Azerbaijan's energy strategy.

Climate action has long been one of the most critical and prioritized issues on the international arena. Despite the steps taken, the challenges and threats facing humanity grow more serious day by day. Given this, perhaps it is the time to rethink approaches and methods in addressing global issues. Today, I want to address an important topic that needs to be spoken about openly and honestly. The hypocrisy and double standards are evident in the international environmental agenda.

Azerbaijan, as the host of COP29, has faced an unjust wave of attacks, false narratives, and double standards, driven by consideration far removed from environmental issues.

In undertaking the responsibility to host COP29, Azerbaijan seeks to build bridges between the Global South and the Global North, between the developed and developing world. We aim to ensure that our contribution to solving this issue becomes a contribution to a common future. However, instead of support and constructive dialog, in some cases, we became the subject of slander and blackmail campaigns through numerous Western media. It is evident that these media have become tools for discrediting countries that do not follow imposed scenarios or play by imposed rules—countries that pursue independent policies and defend their national interests.

Some large media platforms, influenced by certain states, start spreading negative narratives about Azerbaijan upon command.

What truly lies behind this? What goals are the sponsors of this dirty campaign pursuing? Actually, we know the answer.

Our citizens have the right to fair and honest representation of their country on the international stage. They have the right not to be subjected to pressure and manipulation by those who might see Azerbaijan's independent position as a threat.

Our achievements and work deserve respect, not distortion for the geopolitical purposes of some states.

Hypocrisy also manifests in how various countries set their climate commitments.

Developed countries, which for centuries were the main sources of pollution and irresponsible resource consumption, now take the role of strict judges. They advocate for strong restrictions for all while simultaneously pursuing ambitious goals in their own policies and continuing to act in their own interests. They demand transformation from other countries, yet they are slow to assist financially or technologically.

Azerbaijan is a country that wants to see effective action, real solutions, and fair interaction—not manipulation and pressure.

We wish to use our platform to create a global coalition where every country, big or small, developed or developing, has a voice and the right to fair treatment.

False narratives and hypocrisy not only distort reality but undermine fundamental concepts like justice, honesty, virtue, and responsibility.

The use of media to spread and distort information, to conduct smear campaigns against countries, does not harm those countries as much as it devalues the essence of moral values, erodes trust, and creates division.

I urge all participants, all partners to remember that COP29 is not an arena for political attacks but a place where we must unite in the face of the climate crisis.

Only fair cooperation and readiness for real action will lead us to success.

Dear friends, in conclusion, I would like to present a proposal regarding the organization of future conferences. I suggest considering the possibility of holding future conferences online. This approach would not only save significant resources but also reduce environmental impact by cutting emissions from flights and large events.

Working groups could meet in person for detailed discussions and coordination, while leadership summits could be held via video conferences. This would allow us to focus resources, efforts, and time on targeted tasks while making the process more environmentally responsible.

Thank you for your attention.

Then, young eco-activists from Azerbaijan, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan gave presentations highlighting the environmental concerns and initiatives of their respective countries.

The conference also featured a signing ceremony for the "International Strategy for the Promotion of Cultural Development and Involvement of Children and Youth in the Climate Agenda" for 2024-2030.

A group photo was taken afterward.

Following the conference, the dignitaries toured the Solidarity Center at COP29 in the Green Zone, a joint pavilion of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and