

Cop29 summit to call for peace between warring states, says host Azerbaijan

Organisers of this year's environmental conference hope cooperation on green issues could help ease global tensions

Fiona Harvey in Baku

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A man rides a rental bike in Baku, Azerbaijan, where the UN climate change conference will convene in November. Photograph: Aziz Karimov/Getty Images

This year's Cop29 UN climate summit will be the first “Cop of peace”, focusing on the prevention of future climate-fuelled conflicts and using international cooperation on green issues to help heal existing tensions, according to plans being drawn up by organisers.

Nations may be asked to observe a “Cop truce”, suspending hostilities for the fortnight-long duration of the conference, modelled on the Olympic truce, which is observed by most governments during the summer and winter Olympic Games.

Cop29 will be held in November in Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan, amid two big wars – the Ukraine invasion and the Israel-Gaza conflict – raging in neighbouring regions and worsening geopolitical tensions.

But the host country's top national security adviser said that the climate summit, which 196 governments are expected to attend, could become an engine for peace, by finding common ground among countries in the urgent need to tackle global heating.

“Azerbaijan continues and will exert additional efforts to make Cop yet another success story with regard to peace, and to make Cop29 a Cop of peace alongside the climate action issue,” said Hikmet Hajiyev, foreign policy adviser to the president, Ilham Aliyev, in an interview with the *Observer* in Baku. “We are working on the advancement of the peace agenda.”



Flame Tower is seen in the background, in Baku. Photograph: Aziz Karimov/Getty Images

The climate crisis is likely to exacerbate food and water shortages, and could increase migration, adding to pressures on states and potentially sparking border issues, he warned.

“Security isn’t about hardware – it has many elements, and you cannot deny climate action, environment change or environmental problems [are relevant to national security and peace],” he said. “We are affected by climate change – it’s part of national security and global security.”

Hajiyev would like to see nations observe a “Cop truce”, but conceded this would be difficult. “We are discussing with different partners about a Cop truce, like in the Olympics. But it is at an early stage of thinking. It will require additional consultations and discussion,” he said.

Until late last year, Azerbaijan was locked in a 30-year conflict with neighbouring Armenia over disputed territory and ethnic differences.

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After the breakup of the Soviet Union, hostilities between the majority Muslim Azerbaijanis and the Christian majority in neighbouring Armenia had been partially resolved in a 1994 ceasefire.

But the simmering tension flared into violence in 2020, leading to more than 7,000 deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands of people. Each side has accused the other of ethnic cleansing.

In December 2023 the countries negotiated a peace deal, which has held. However, there are still disputes over the status of some detainees.

At the Cop28 climate summit in Dubai in December last year, Armenia supported Azerbaijan’s campaign to hold this year’s climate conference, the first international gesture of support between the two longtime antagonists.

Hajiyev said that this experience was what led Azerbaijan to focus on global peace at Cop29. “Our approach to the peace agenda is living by example.”

It is understood that there is nervousness in some quarters at the UN over tying the issues of the climate crisis and national security too closely together. The fear is that bad feeling over global conflicts could spill over to affect the climate negotiations, and it could be safer to keep them as separate issues.

Putting peace on the agenda at Cop29 also throws a spotlight on Azerbaijan’s conduct in the war with Armenia, and its human rights record, which has attracted strong criticism.



Mary Robinson, a former UN climate envoy, welcomed the plan to focus on peace at the Cop29 environmental summit in Azerbaijan. Photograph: Rafiq Maqbool/AP

Mary Robinson, a former president of Ireland and UN high commissioner for human rights, who has also twice served as a UN climate envoy, is now chair of the Elders group of former world political and business leaders. She said she welcomed the intention to focus on peace, noting there were precedents in the work of environmental activists who linked their work with healing conflicts.

But she voiced concern over Azerbaijan's stance. She said: "I think the idea is a good idea. If we could make more of climate and security and peace, that would be a good step."

But she added: "I'm not sure the peace with Armenia is a perfect peace, to say the least. There are very big issues. There are political prisoners, I am part of a campaign to try to get them released. We should hold [Azerbaijan] to account for their own human rights record."

Hajiyev told the *Observer* that NGOs and civil society groups would be "most welcome" at Cop29.