

COP30's Fraught Finale Masks a Quiet Surge in Global Climate Progress

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Drawing extensively on the official COP30 podcast from Outrage + Optimism, which includes insights from Christiana Figueres, Tom Rivett-Carnac and Paul Dickinson

The final hours of COP30 in Belém were as tense and unpredictable as any seen in recent climate diplomacy. According to the official COP30 podcast from the team at Outrage + Optimism, the closing plenary veered from delay to confusion to open anger, before an exhausted room finally agreed a text that almost fell apart at the last moment. Yet behind the procedural drama lay a more significant truth. For all the political struggles, nations once again chose to stay in the room and keep multilateral climate action alive. And beyond the headlines, the economic story emerging from Belém is far more optimistic than most coverage suggests.

The drama of the plenary unfolded slowly. The session was repeatedly delayed before the COP President finally entered the hall and began pushing through the decisions. But within moments, Colombia raised a point of order that should have been taken before the gavel fell. They insisted they had asked for the floor and been ignored. Other countries had done the same. Lawyers were summoned. Proceedings halted for more than an hour. Delegates worried openly about sovereignty and due process.

When the President eventually returned, visibly tired, he offered an unusual and disarming explanation: he had not seen the raised hands, and he was exhausted. His apology could not undo the gavel (once struck, the rules meant the decision had to stand) but the humility with which he accepted personal responsibility eased a moment that might have shattered the talks.

Frustration nevertheless had run high. Several Latin American and African nations said the text did not reflect their interests. Some had considered walking away. Colombia, Panama, Uruguay, Sierra Leone and others said their concerns on fossil fuel transition, deforestation and climate justice had been sidelined. Yet, as the podcast stresses, they chose not to leave. Nations stayed, negotiated into the early hours and eventually accepted a document many considered too weak. They did so, Christiana Figueres argues, because they were unwilling to give up on multilateralism at a moment when other global negotiations, from plastics to shipping, are fraying. Choosing to keep the process alive matters.

The agreement itself holds the line on some essentials: the primacy of IPCC science, the 1.5°C temperature ceiling, and the continued expectation that countries must implement their nationally determined contributions. It also includes a call to triple adaptation finance and creates new mechanisms, including the "Global Implementation Accelerator", intended to restart work on fossil fuel phase-out and halting deforestation, though, as Figueres notes, much will depend on how these processes unfold.

Whilst this is the political story and the one that catches the headlines, as Tom Rivett-Carnac outlined for Outrage and Optimism, there is another *economic reality* that just isn't being told. It is an astonishing good news story of the economic transformation already reshaping energy systems at extraordinary speed, driving down the cost of energy for businesses and individuals and being a liberating force for poor communities across the world.

This news includes: World solar costs falling 12% last year; battery storage costs falling 93% since 2010, and 94% of renewable power built last year was cheaper than the cheapest fossil fuel alternative. This is not idle theory. Spain's industrial electricity costs have flipped from one-third above Europe's average to 20 percent below after a rapid expansion of wind and solar. Pakistan has installed twenty times more solar in three years than the UK, France, Canada and New Zealand combined. Uruguay now generates 98 percent of its power from renewables, halving costs and creating 50,000 jobs.

Deployment is accelerating everywhere. India's renewables have met more than half of national electricity demand on multiple occasions this year. Solar mini-grids in Cameroon and Zambia now power tens of thousands of rural homes and businesses. Global transport electrification is already displacing two million barrels of oil a day, more than Germany's daily oil use. It is such economic reality that is driving the political pushback from certain sectors against renewables, financed by oil lobbyists. The writing is on the wall for the oil industry: renewables provide far cheaper energy than fossil fuels.

Meanwhile, COP30 saw a shift toward implementation: billions pledged for forests, land rights, methane reduction, resilient health systems, ocean protection clean energy infrastructure and land rights for indigenous people. The trend for the world's forests is in the right direction: Worldwide deforestation is down 20% compared to last decade, and deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon fell by 11% just in the past year.

The political outcome in Belém may look fragile, but the economic reality is moving at speed, quietly reshaping markets and bending the emissions curve. Outrage & Optimism's final message is clear: if the world paid more attention to this story, the path ahead might feel less daunting, and far more hopeful.

Details of the Outrage and Optimism Podcast can be found at www.outrageandoptimism.org

Christiana Figueres was from 2010 to 2016 the Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, leading the process that secured the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Tom Rivett-Carnac is a political strategist, author and podcaster. From 2013 to 2016 he was Senior Advisor to the Executive Secretary of the UN Climate Convention, a position from which he contributed to major parts of the strategy leading to the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015.

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