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Fire Erupts at COP30 Summit Venue in Belém, Forces Complete Evacuation



A fire broke out Thursday afternoon at the COP30 climate summit venue in Belém, Brazil, forcing the immediate evacuation of thousands of delegates and disrupting the critical final phase of global climate negotiations.

The Incident

The fire erupted shortly after 2 p.m. local time in the Blue Zone's Pavilion of Countries at the conference center. Security footage captured flames breaking out at an exhibition pavilion, specifically at the India Pavilion, and rapidly spreading up an internal fabric shell lining the walls and ceiling.

The local fire service brought the blaze under control within six minutes, deploying 244 fire extinguishers, hoses, and 56 firefighters to combat the flames.

Casualties and Response

Thirteen people were treated on-site for smoke inhalation. Their conditions are being monitored with appropriate medical support provided. No serious injuries were reported. UN security officers and Brazil's fire department responded swiftly to evacuate the premises safely. Security staff formed human barriers across hallways as thousands of delegates were moved to safety.

Suspected Cause

Investigators believe the fire was likely caused by electrical equipment, probably a microwave that experienced a short circuit, according to the Pará state government and local fire department.

Brazilian Tourism Minister Celso Sabino noted that the conference structures were built with flame-retardant materials. Some participants had reportedly noticed electrical problems earlier in the day, with lights flickering before smoke appeared.

Official UNFCCC Communications

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) issued a series of updates throughout the afternoon and evening. In its initial statement, the UNFCCC reported: "Earlier today, a fire broke out in the blue zone of the COP30 venue in Belém. The fire department and UN security officers responded swiftly, and the fire was controlled in approximately six minutes. People were evacuated safely. Thirteen individuals were treated on site for smoke inhalation."

Following the Host Country Fire Chief's order for complete evacuation and comprehensive safety checks, the UNFCCC announced that "the premises are now under the authority of the Host Country and are no longer considered a Blue Zone" until the investigation was complete. Delegates were initially advised that the venue would not reopen before 8 p.m., with the organization stating: "Thank you delegates for the swift evacuation of the venue. The fire has been contained with limited damage."

At 8:40 p.m. local time, the UNFCCC announced the venue's reopening: "Following a comprehensive safety assessment, we confirm that the venue has been thoroughly inspected and deemed fully safe. Brazilian authorities have restored all working conditions on the conference premises, secured the post-fire operating permit from the Fire Department, and formally returned the area to the UNFCCC. The Blue Zone has now been reinstated to full operational status and has been reopened as of 8:40 pm today. All accredited COP participants are now able to access the COP30 venue, in the usual ways."

The organization noted that the Pavilions area (Zone B) directly affected by the fire will remain inaccessible for the remainder of the conference. There would be no plenary activity Thursday evening, with all plenary sessions on Friday to be open to all Parties and Observers and fully live-streamed. "We continue to monitor the condition of all individuals who require medical attention and remain in close coordination with health services. We sincerely appreciate the cooperation, patience, and understanding of all participants as we prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone on site."

Historic Disruption

Climate observers noted the unprecedented nature of the incident. Claudio Angelo, coordinator of Brazil's Climate Observatory, stated that in 30 years of UN climate conferences, a Blue Zone fire had never occurred before.

Brazilian officials have defended the venue's safety standards. "The city of Belém received many criticisms, practically all unjust. A possible cell phone that caught fire in an outlet will not tarnish this COP. This could have happened anywhere on the planet," Minister Sabino said.

The approximately six-and-a-half-hour closure has complicated an already challenging negotiation timeline, with talks now expected to extend well beyond the scheduled Friday evening conclusion as delegates work to finalize a comprehensive climate agreement.



COP30 Resumes Night Negotiations After Fire Disruption, Pushes for Friday Breakthrough

After a dramatic fire evacuation halted proceedings for several hours Thursday, COP30 delegates returned to the venue late in the evening to resume high-stakes negotiations, working through the night to salvage hopes for a landmark climate agreement.

Venue Reopens After Safety Assessment

The UNFCCC announced at 8:40 p.m. local time that the Blue Zone had been fully reopened following a comprehensive safety assessment and restoration of working conditions by Brazilian authorities.

"Following a comprehensive safety assessment, we confirm that the venue has been thoroughly inspected and deemed fully safe," the UNFCCC stated. "Brazilian authorities have restored all working conditions on the conference premises, secured the post-fire operating permit from the Fire Department, and formally returned the area to the UNFCCC."

All accredited COP participants were granted access to resume negotiations, with one notable exception: the Pavilions area (Zone B) directly affected by the fire will remain inaccessible for the remainder of the conference.

The UNFCCC confirmed it continues to monitor the condition of all individuals who required medical attention and remains in close coordination with health services.

Evening Resumption and Night Sessions

With the venue cleared for use approximately six and a half hours after the initial evacuation, delegates returned to resume high-stakes negotiations. The UNFCCC announced there would be no plenary activity Thursday evening, with all plenary sessions Friday to be open to all Parties and Observers and fully live-streamed.

The lost hours have added urgency to an already tight timeline, with negotiators now working overnight in closed-door consultations to make up for the disruption and resolve remaining political obstacles before final plenary sessions.

Key Issues Under Discussion

- **Fossil Fuel Phaseout:** The critical question of whether the final Belém package will include a clear roadmap for transitioning away from fossil fuels remains unresolved. Brazil had been preparing draft text on this issue when the fire broke out.
- **Climate Finance:** Negotiators are working to finalize commitments on tripling adaptation finance by 2030, with developing countries demanding clarity on whether funding will come directly from wealthy governments or through other mechanisms like development banks.

- **Just Transition Mechanisms:** Discussions continue on ensuring equitable pathways for countries and communities dependent on fossil fuel industries.
- **Global Goal on Adaptation:** Technical teams are negotiating specific targets and implementation frameworks for helping vulnerable nations adapt to climate impacts.

Some Progress Achieved

Despite the chaos, some technical-level negotiators found consensus in the very early morning hours of Thursday, including those working on ex ante climate finance reporting. The room debating enhanced engagement of local communities in the UNFCCC process also settled on a way forward. However, most consultations held throughout the day were less successful, including long-stalled discussions on rules of procedure and decision-making in the UNFCCC process, and debates on transferring funds from largely defunct Kyoto Protocol institutions.

Guterres Appeals for Compromise

Earlier Thursday, before the fire disruption, UN Secretary-General António Guterres held a press conference appealing to all delegations to show willingness to compromise and ensure the process delivers results.

He emphasized the need to act now to keep the temporary overshoot past 1.5°C "as small and short as possible," noting that large emitters especially must do more. Guterres urged addressing market distortions and disinformation campaigns aimed at derailing the transition away from fossil fuels, and highlighted the need to reduce methane emissions, reverse deforestation, and make progress on grid development—including addressing electricity surges driven by artificial intelligence.



Friday's Critical Push

As negotiations extend into the early hours of Friday, November 21, expectations include:

- **Intensive Final Negotiations:** A concentrated push to reach final agreement on major outstanding issues, including a credible finance pathway, clearer fossil fuel roadmap, and concrete adaptation targets.
- **High-Level Pressure:** Brazil's COP30 presidency, UN Secretary-General Guterres, and key country coalitions are expected to mount a strong push for consensus on the Belém package before final plenary votes.
- **Last-Minute Amendments:** Focused high-level sessions with possible final amendments as negotiators seek to resolve justice, equity, and implementation challenges.
- **Continued Safety Monitoring:** The UNFCCC emphasized its commitment to prioritizing "the safety and well-being of everyone on site," with continued coordination with health services.

A Day to Remember

The day will remain in the climate community's collective memory—not for progress achieved in the negotiations, but for the unprecedented fire that broke out in the pavilions and led to a full evacuation of the venue. A plenary session scheduled for the evening never materialized as chaos erupted during the lunch break, with participants rushing to exits as smoke filled the hallways.

"We sincerely appreciate the cooperation, patience, and understanding of all participants as we prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone on site," the UNFCCC stated in its reopening announcement.

The dramatic disruption has made it nearly impossible to meet the summit's scheduled Friday evening conclusion, with talks now expected to extend well into overtime as delegates race to deliver what many hope will be a landmark package that ramps up ambition, finance, and implementation for the Paris Agreement.

Final outcomes depend on overnight and morning progress, with the global climate community watching closely to see whether negotiators can overcome both the physical disruption and political divisions to achieve a breakthrough in Belém.



When the Network of Catholic Climate and Environmental Actors (NCCCEA) began its meeting with the Holy See Delegation, a fire broke out in the pavilion area and everyone was asked to evacuate. This memorable picture was taken only moments after the incident, as all participants gathered outside the venue.