



ISSN: 2395-7852



International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM)

Volume 11, Issue 1, January 2024



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.583

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UNFCCC Cop 28: December 2023 Un Climate Change Conference

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ABSTRACT: COP28 (28th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) was the final key climate moment of 2023.

The global conference needed to move beyond past commitments and deliver bolder action to keep 1.5 degrees in sight, avoid even greater losses and damages and accelerate a just transition to an economy that works for people and the planet.

For decades we have worked together with communities, governments, civil society, and the private sector to take change from a local level to a national scale and to the world stage.

As official observers we aimed to put the people we work at the heart of the negotiations, to demonstrate solutions that bring together the right mix of stakeholders to take these to scale.

KEYWORDS-COP 28, UNFCCC, climate, change, planet, global

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most critical problems facing the world today is the issue of climate change. Scientists have predicted that if drastic measures are not enacted soon, global warming will lead to catastrophic changes in the climate, desertification, and a rise in coastal flooding, which would all but destroy many communities and even small countries located at sea level.

International efforts to address this issue go back more than two decades. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was an international climate treaty finalized at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, which entered into force in March 1994. The text was initially agreed to by an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in New York between April and May 1992. The objective of the Convention was to curb and stabilize greenhouse-causing emissions in the atmosphere. Though there were no binding limits on emissions for individual countries and no enforcement mechanism was introduced, the Convention was seen as a key first step in addressing global climate change. [1,2,3]

The years leading up to the Convention Framework were crucial for finding suitable agreements for all sides. With so many countries and representatives involved, a “master negotiator” of sorts was seen as a necessity for the United States. Enter Robert Reinstein, who was previously involved with the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1987. He worked tirelessly behind the scenes with Stephanie Kinney, and Dan Reifsnnyder, both from the State Department’s Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science (OES), to represent the United States in the negotiations.

To put the UNFCCC in perspective, the landmark agreement made at the Conference of Parties 21 (COP) in Paris in December 2015 on climate change references the work done in 1992 after the 1997 Kyoto Protocol was all but abandoned over loopholes in the language, among other issues.

Reinstein always argued that the convention needed to be framed as a problem or crisis in “energy” and not “the environment” in order to galvanize real change among the countries involved, which were not willing to budge unless money and economic development was at stake. Reinstein’s efforts were influential in achieving the legitimacy the convention holds to this day.



Robert Reinstein was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment, Health, and Resources from 1990-1993, during which he also served as Chairman of IPPC Working Groups II and III from 1991-1993 and the Chief Negotiator of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change in 1993. Stephanie Kinney served with the State Department, Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science from 1989-1993. Stephanie Kinney was interviewed in March 2010. Reinstein and Kinney's joint interview was conducted in October 2010 by ADST's Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Part I of III discusses the lead-up to the first round of negotiations on climate change, which closely followed the successful conclusion of the Montreal Protocol, and how the U.S. found itself isolated against developing countries, which wanted more aid, and Europe, which had less energy-intensive industry and thus did not need to make large-scale sacrifices on reducing emissions.

KINNEY: In 1989, the energetic forces behind climate change were largely environmental and to a lesser degree scientific, neither notable powerhouses in U.S. politics or in the rest of the world, for that matter. This, notwithstanding the fact that Green Parties and politics were beginning to emerge in Europe. [4,5,6]

What very few people in OES seemed to grasp or want to come to terms with was that, although it may have been framed as an environmental issue focused on CO₂ [carbon dioxide], the climate change issue was really all about energy and economics, at least as far as national interests and international politics were concerned. The consequences and economics of energy constitute a much more weighty and consequential factor in the short term than do the more speculative, longer-term, environmental concerns. No country can transform its energy production and consumption habits overnight or with the stroke of a pen.

So you had the environmentalists and EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], the science community, the Department of Energy, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense and a Republican administration beholden to heavy industrial and corporate interests, which was nonetheless advertising [George H.W.] Bush as "the environmental President" for geo-strategic reasons, among other things.

The politics within the U.S. were complex and still new to the issue. Our domestic situation made the politics abroad look simple, by comparison, although no issue involving 180 sovereign countries plus the European Community in Brussels is simple. My personal view is that the fact that climate change got framed as an "environmental issue" rather than an "energy issue" would be an abiding and to this day debilitating and serious problem.

The fact that climate was essentially a UN-driven issue also complicated matters. You had people who hated the UN and didn't like the United States being subject to what they considered to be a bunch of overpaid international bureaucrats who were over practiced in picking other people's pockets. You had not a few scientists even then, who were real scientists rather than politicians in scientist drag, who said, "Wait a minute, there is no proof here. Science is about evidence. Show me the evidence."

At that time, what we mostly had beyond the basic global warming theory was three very hot summers, which, with the help of the media, the NGOs, scientists and other interested parties had managed to convert into a crisis.

Few people do or did dispute the reality that the earth is wrapped in a warm blanket and that in the presence of increased CO₂ there can be warming, but many also remembered that in the mid-70's the impending crisis had been "global cooling." I remembered that panic because my husband had brought one of its foremost exponents to speak at State in the Open Forum.

Hence, one of the first things the Bush administration successfully insisted on was the use of the term "climate change," because no one could dispute that climate does, in fact, change. And what you really saw over the next couple of years was a taste of the world to come: an increasingly mediagenic issue driven by NGOs and other interest groups with no responsibility — or accountability — outpacing the older, more measured and informed governmental modes of dealing with such issues.



“The G-77 basically tried to deny a global solution unless the West paid them to behave better”

From a handful of NGOs involved in the Montreal Protocol, we were suddenly talking about hundreds and then thousands — of all political persuasions—spewing their views to an equally unaccountable media that was just “reporting the news” and trying to sell their product....

Scientists who either had failed at or were tired of the lab, the classroom or the bench had discovered going to meetings around the world and promoting their point of view was really a lot more fun than the anonymity of the lab and the scrutiny of peer reviews.

Europeans had another set of interests, which were well wrapped in green, for political reasons of their own. The evolution of the EU was a process of gathering strength in and for Brussels. Brussels needed to integrate and diminish sovereign authorities within their Union and saw environment as a perfect integrating issue through which to reach for taxing authority, energy authority and other “competencies” to use EU language. If enough Europeans were led to be concerned about the environment, Brussels could get the right to tax and regulate through the back door, authorities that otherwise remained with its sovereign state members.[7,8,9]

Also, the European Community (later Union) had an advantage because of Western Europe’s use of nuclear and, later, the less-developed and carbon-intensive countries of Eastern Europe. Both factors gave a growing Union overall energy consumption patters very different from those of the U.S., Australia and Canada, for example. This made climate an excellent issue for grand-standing and invidious comparison where the U.S. was concerned, something that warmed younger Euros’ hearts.

You had the G-77, the bloc of under-developed countries, as they were called in those days. The G-77 very quickly figured out its role, which was basically to deny a global solution unless the West paid them to behave better.

None of this was understood by the broader public at large or by most in the U.S. government, to be honest. Within the USG, agency representatives tended to see only their more focused and narrow interest and did not really care about anything else.

Given Bush’s desire to be “the environmental President,” the energy with which Mostafa Tolba [Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)] and Maurice Strong [Canadian oil and mineral businessman who became the first Executive Director of UNEP and later Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations] were driving the UN processes, the European Union interests and our own media and environmentalists at home, there was no question but that the United States would be front and center and that the position that we took would be globally public, globally significant, and globally subject to fierce commentary and often criticism....

OES long-timer Dan Reifsnyder became the head of the office, and for the next three years Dan and I and Robert Reinstein, the master negotiator brought in to replace Bill Nitze, became the triumvirate from State that basically ran the show from start to finish.

“It was the mother of all policy issues”

REINSTEIN: My first introduction to climate change was in the spring of 1988. I had been involved fairly deeply in the Montreal Protocol to protect the stratosphere ozone layer. It was adopted in Montreal in September ’87, and the object was to control and ultimately phase out the use of certain chemicals which deplete the stratospheric ozone layer....

I had somebody helping me, and I said, “This climate change (global warming) issue, could you find out what that’s about?” She went out, dug around, and brought in a stack of documents. I looked at them and said, “Well, holy smokes! They’re going at the heart of the economy — fossil fuels! Fossil fuels are more than 80% of our energy supply. They are the heart of every industrialized economy. This isn’t an environment issue, and I better get involved. There was a meeting at the State Department to prepare for a UN meeting to establish the IPCC, the



Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change. I was at the meeting, and it was agreed that the U.S. position was that this was a scientific issue. We will not send in our other people, just mainly only climate (weather) scientists.

They established the IPCC, with three working groups: science, impacts, and response strategies, with the U.S. chairing the third. The U.S. delegation came back, and Joe Friday (not the famous character in the 1950s TV series *Dragnet* but the head of the National Weather Service) said to me, "You got to go to these meetings. The Japanese delegation was 11 people, and 10 of them were from MITI, the Ministry for International Trade and Industry. That was the handwriting on the wall. I suspected when I first read the documents that this was going to go into energy, economics, and trade very quickly...."

It is a political document, where the governments have selected from these 3,000 page documents what they want to tell themselves, not like that in the Montreal Protocol. Unfortunately, it is like that in climate.

I was involved in the Response Strategy Working Group (RSWG) economics and energy subgroups as a person with an energy and trade background....I had an energy background. I was advising indirectly [Vice President George H.W.] Bush on energy questions from the mid-'80s through these two very, very close advisors....

The interagency process, which was kind of a holding action, continued through '89 and '90. In the end of '89 I assumed I'd play a sort of secondary, maybe Number Two-type role as I had in the Montreal Protocol.

In late 1989 the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment, Bill Nitze, the son of Paul (my father and Paul knew each other very well), was at that job, but he would have to leave the State Department. Bill was a very good guy, but being financially independent and all that kind of stuff, was inclined at times to just say what he felt and what he thought publicly. He made a comment about how the U.S. needed a European-style gasoline tax in public. John Sununu, the White House chief of staff, read it in the newspaper and said, "That's it. Last straw. Two weeks. Out." The only political appointee to my knowledge actually canned during the Bush administration.

In the meantime I had been working quietly behind the scenes with people particularly with an energy perspective. People like John Easton (Assistant Secretary of Energy for Policy and later General Counsel of DOE), Bill Ramsay (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Energy), Mike Kelley (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Basic Industries), people in Treasury Charles Schotta (Deputy Assistant Secretary and his people) and others. They were mostly at the deputy assistant secretary and assistant secretary level but as USTR [U.S. Trade Representative] was part of the Executive Office, I organized and brought it together as a meeting of equals. We had been informally preparing how we were going to approach these negotiations.

After Bill Nitze got canned, I called up John Schmitz thinking, "Oh my God, they're using live ammunition. Is it all right for us to keep meeting and discussing certain issues, preparing at fairly senior levels how we're going to approach this, particularly from an energy and trade perspective?"

He said, "Oh, absolutely. Sure. Do it," and, "Would you like the job?"

"Sure!" To me it was the most exciting public policy issue I had ever seen. It was the mother of all policy issues. I had a background in science: Math, physics, and I had taught chemistry and earth science. I had a background in economics and energy and trade, and I had been effectively in the chair of the U.S. delegation for Montreal Protocol. I thought, "If anybody has the background you would need for this issue, it's me, and it's my duty to say yes. Besides, it might be a lot of fun!" I tried to do things that were interesting and fun....

"The issue is energy, not climate"[10,11,12]

KINNEY: Remember the moment in history. Bush had declared himself to be the "environmental president." This had a lot to do with strategy and tactics in Eastern Europe because in 1990, maybe '90 to '91 we're looking at the breakup of the Soviet Union, and one of the grass roots phenomena and dynamics was that nobody thought



environment was really a very dangerous or “political” issue. In Eastern Europe, it proved to be quite “political” because there were horrendous problems left by the Soviet Union.

One of their greatest sins was environmental. Environmental issues provided lots of reasons for people to meet locally, whether it involved a dirty river or a toxic dump or bad water, and the new USSR policy of perestroika [restructuring] permitted such meetings to address local issues. The people who were drawn to addressing local environmental issues were the same kinds of people who were also very anxious to see themselves liberated from this antiquated and failed system.

There were multiple layers and messages, but framing Bush as “the environmental president,” and this coming along at the time that it did, meant that climate was going to have a certain profile. The UN had legitimized the issue in such a way that everybody thought climate was about the environment. It really wasn't. I personally have thought for a long time that the UN focus on the environment was one of the failures of the process longer term; how you frame the issue determines how it gets negotiated. Bob's story is about how the climate issue might have turned out differently if it had been framed as energy, which is what climate was about.

REINSTEIN: I saw this from the beginning, from 1988 when I first looked at it. The issue was not only about energy, but because energy is part of what any industrialized economy was about, climate was also about economic growth. A cap on the use of fossil fuels is indirectly a cap on GDP, and so if you're advocating the right to emit carbon or CO₂, you're also allocating the right or opportunity for economic growth because there's a correlation. It's not a linear correlation, but there is a correlation between GDP and energy, and it's real. It's not decoupled....

I attended the plenary session of the IPCC in Sundsvall, Sweden, where the first assessment report was adopted. It was chaotic to put it mildly, very clear that governments were trying to position themselves. Saudi Arabia was throwing things in to protect its oil interests. Australia was trying to protect its coal interests. The maneuvering and positioning was blatant.

It was a week-long meeting. We got to midnight on Friday night, and we did not have an assessment report. We adjourned the meeting for half an hour. About a half a dozen of us went up on the stage with Burt Bolin, the first chairman of the IPCC, and said, “How do we put together an assessment report?” We figured the strategy for cobbling the pieces together, resumed the meeting at 12:30, and by 3:00 or 3:30 in the morning, the first assessment report was done.

I was there as a State Department official at that point but still being paid by USTR. Fred Bernthal, the former Assistant Secretary for OES, was still chairman of the Working Group on Response Strategies and told the rest of the leadership of IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] that I was going to be the U.S. chair of Working Group III, so we were there sort of as the outgoing and incoming. KINNEY: President Bush had committed to hosting and coming to the IPCC plenary in January 1990.

REINSTEIN: The President made a welcoming speech at the January 1990 meeting, but it was unusually warm. Every time we hosted an international meeting on climate change, it was exceptionally warm, record warmth for the day....

As an indication of the White House approach, the leaders of the Energy Department and EPA had collaborated to produce a text for the President for this meeting, and they proudly brought it to the White House and gave it to [pictured, White House Chief of Staff] John Sununu saying, “We have got a statement here that both of us can agree on: Energy and environment.”

Sununu's response was to tear up the document and throw it in the trash and say, “Thank you but no thank you. Don't do this again unless I ask you to.” Sununu and I got along for whatever reason....

In his view, he was protecting his boss from being manipulated by the much more knowledgeable career people, and he didn't want to put that particular issue in the hands of technocrats. This policy was so sensitive. Sununu was obsessed with the issue. He apparently had a 180 or something IQ, was an engineer, and he had a climate model on



his own personal computer and every new theory that came out, he tested on his model. That's how interested, almost obsessed, he was....

Most of the cabinet was afraid of him. He was not a kind of warm and friendly type. He just told it like it was, and he was smart....He was Bush's tough guy. Bush could then play the nice guy, the classic bad-cop and good-cop roles.

“Europe is energy poor. Energy intensive manufacturing is not economic in Europe.“

REINSTEIN: We were basically against the whole world. The developing world wasn't going to be bound by the targets, so they said, “Targets for you, nothing for us.” Europe and Japan and Canada never say no to developing countries about money. They all say, “Yes, we'll talk about how later, or how much,” so everyone else in the world was against us on the money and on the targets.

For the [Europeans] targets were ultimately negotiable. They were able to set a target and then, like California which had a zero-emission vehicle target — obviously it wasn't going to be met — they could just somehow either roll it over or adapt it....

An additional difference regarding a CO2 target is because Europe is energy poor. Basically they've got some uneconomic coal in the UK, in Germany, and a few other places. Poland wasn't in the EU then. North Sea oil and gas is mature and already heading into decline. Energy intensive manufacturing is not economic in Europe. These are global markets for steel, for chemicals, for products that are energy intensive, and Europe was on its way out. The German coal subsidies, which were enormous, are being phased out, but only slowly.

Margaret Thatcher had basically eliminated coal or most coal in the UK. The coal production in the UK was government owned, and the utilities were government owned. She privatized them both and said, “Pick what's economic, what makes sense, what is economically attractive and supply secure, to generate electricity.” What resulted was a massive switching to North Sea gas, and a consequent huge drop in the UK emissions, not only for carbon dioxide but also methane....

France, Sweden is half nuclear, half hydro and so on, so they had that, but those were stable. They weren't changing. The other thing that changed was German reunification.

The Germans went in and basically closed the electric generation and basic manufacturing that was old, inefficient, and dirty in East Germany. They didn't close everything. They couldn't because they had to keep the lights on. They got a 20% reduction in CO2 emissions up front from taking over East Germany. The UK got a smaller but similar major double digit reduction from restructuring the energy sector....

The other thing is Europe has long been jealous of the United States because of our incredible energy and other natural resources, and so they wanted to shackle us and hobble us in terms of our competitive advantage on energy. There was a little hidden agenda that no one has ever spoken about, but having been a trade negotiator and former energy official, I understood very well....

KINNEY: Montreal Protocol was originally opposed tooth and nail by Europe, and so there was a very interesting flip in the '90s when Europe becomes the standard bearer for environment. It's a very interesting wrinkle in history and sociology and economics.

III. DISCUSSION

COP 28 refers to the United Nations Climate Change Conference taking place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 30 November until 12 December 2023.



UN Climate Change conferences (or COPs) take place every year, and are the world's only multilateral decision-making forum on climate change with almost complete membership of every country in the world. [13,14,15]

To put it simply, the COP is where the world comes together to agree on ways to address the climate crisis, such as limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, helping vulnerable communities adapt to the effects of climate change, and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

More than 70,000 delegates are expected to attend COP28, including the member states (or Parties) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Business leaders, young people, climate scientists, Indigenous Peoples, journalists, and various other experts and stakeholders are also among the participants.

Officially, COP 28 stands for the 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC. In a demonstration of global cooperation, negotiators from nearly 200 countries for the first time recognized the need to transition away from fossil fuels. "Whilst we didn't turn the page on the fossil fuel era in Dubai, this outcome is the beginning of the end," said UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell in his closing speech. UN chief António Guterres emphasized that the era of fossil fuels must end with justice and equity. "Developing countries must be supported every step of the way," he said in his statement on the closing of COP28. COP 28 concluded with a decision on the outcome of the first 'global stocktake' of the world's efforts to address climate change under the Paris Agreement.

An inter-ministerial delegation from India attended the 28th Session of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 28) held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from 30th November'2023 to 13th December'2023. The major outcome from COP 28 included the decision on Outcome of the First Global Stocktake, ratcheting up global climate ambition before the end of the decade. These global efforts will be taken up by the countries in a nationally determined manner taking into account the Paris Agreement and their different national circumstances. Another major outcome of COP 28 is the agreement on the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund and its funding arrangements.

The decision on Loss and Damage Fund adopted at COP 28 approved the Governing instrument of the Loss and Damage Fund and decided that the Fund will be serviced by new, dedicated and independent secretariat. It was also decided that the Fund will be supervised and governed by the Board. The Fund is accountable to and functions under the guidance of the Conference of Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA). Since the decision, an amount of around USD 700 million to date has been pledged by several countries, including United Arab Emirates, Germany, United Kingdom, European Union, Japan. The purpose of the Fund is to assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in responding to economic and non-economic loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events.

Another major outcome related to Loss and Damage is the decision on Santiago network for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage to catalyse the technical assistance of relevant organizations, bodies, networks and experts for the implementation of relevant approaches associated with climate change impacts. The host of the Secretariat for the Santiago Network was finalized at COP 28. The joint consortium of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the United Nations Office for Project Services have been selected as the host of the Santiago network secretariat for an initial term of five years, with five-year renewal periods.

Countries including Canada, Japan, Spain, Switzerland and the United States of America have announced their financial contributions to the work of the Santiago network.

IV. RESULTS

The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more commonly known as COP28, was the 28th United Nations Climate Change conference, held from 30 November to 13 December at Expo City, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The COP conference has been held annually (except 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic)^[1] since the first UN climate agreement in 1992. The event is intended for governments to agree on policies to limit global temperature rises and adapt to impacts associated with climate change.^[2]

The conference was originally scheduled to end on 12 December, but had to be extended following Saudi objections on the final agreement.^[3] On 13 December, the conference president, Sultan Al Jaber announced that a final compromise agreement between the countries involved had been reached. The deal commits all signatory countries to move away from carbon energy sources "in a just, orderly and equitable manner" to mitigate the worst effects of climate change, and reach net zero by 2050.^[4] The global pact, referred to as the UAE Consensus, was the first in the history of COP



summits to explicitly mention the need to shift away from every type of fossil fuels, but it still received widespread criticism due to the lack of a clear commitment to either fossil fuel phase-out or phase-down.^[4] China and India did not sign the pledge to triple their output of renewable energy and committed to coal power instead.^{[5][6]}

The conference was widely criticised for its controversial president Sultan Al Jaber, as well as its host country, the UAE, which is known for its opaque environmental record and role as a major producer of fossil fuels.^[7] Al Jaber is the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), leading to concerns over conflict of interest.^[8] Claims of greenwashing of Al Jaber on Wikipedia, Twitter and Medium;^[9] the legal inability to criticise Emirati corporations in the UAE;^[10] alleged covert access to conference emails by ADNOC;^[11] and the invitation of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad have all raised concerns regarding the integrity of the conference.^[12] Al Jaber stated before the beginning of the conference that there was "no science" behind fossil fuel phase-out in achieving 1.5 °C;^[13] and leaked documents appeared to show the UAE planned to use the conference to strike new fossil fuel deals with other nations.^[14] Al Jaber claimed that his comments on the phase-out of fossil fuels were "misinterpreted" and denied the latter allegation, asserting that the UAE does not need the COP presidency to establish business deals

In September 2023, in advance of the opening of COP28, the United Nations published the first two-year assessment of global progress in slowing down climate change, called the "global stocktake".^[49] This type of overview was established during COP26 in Glasgow and is scheduled to be repeated every five years.^{[50][51]} The report says that a phase-out of fossil fuels is needed. Previously the United Nations avoided making similar statements.^[52] Among the 17 key findings of the report are:^[53]

- The Paris Agreement and the resulting climate action significantly helped in reducing emissions. In 2011 the projected warming by 2100 was 3.7–4.8 °C. After COP27 it was 2.4–2.6 °C and in the best case, if all pledges are accomplished, 1.7–2.1 °C.^[16,17]
- As of September 2023, the world is not on track to reach the targets of the Paris Agreement. For having a more than 50% chance of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 °C and more than 67% chance of limiting it to 2 °C, global emissions must peak by the year 2025.
- Trillions of dollars are needed for limiting warming to 1.5 °C. Financial flows need to significantly change.
- More effective international cooperation and collaboration are crucial for reaching the targets of the Paris Agreement.

As the host country, the UAE named Sultan Al Jaber as president-designate of COP28 in January 2023.^[54] His appointment was criticised by Western lawmakers due to him being the CEO of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC).^[55] Ninety-nine members of the European Parliament and 34 US senators and representatives wrote an open letter, addressed to US President Joe Biden and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, to call the UAE to withdraw Al Jaber's appointment.^[56] Signatory US lawmakers included Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. European signatories mostly hailed from the Greens and Left groups.^[57] The letter claimed that "the private sector polluters were exercising undue influence over the climate summit's process."^{[55][56]} ADNOC is a UAE state-owned corporation.^[58] The UAE government did not respond to the open letter, neither did the US president nor the European Commission president.^[59] US climate envoy John Kerry expressed his support for Al Jaber's appointment.^[60]

Al Jaber's presidency of the COP28 climate change conference contradicted his company's decision to expand fossil fuel production in ADNOC drilling company. The human rights organisation Amnesty International raised concerns, stating, "Sultan al-Jaber cannot be an honest broker for climate talks when the company he leads is planning to cause more climate damage."^[61]

In January 2023, Dubai Cares became the Education partner for COP28. It had already participated in COP27 held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.^[62]

In April 2023, the Emirati organisers of COP28 told the speakers at the climate and health conference to not protest or "criticise corporations" in the Emirates. The warning cited the Gulf state's laws, under which the panel members were warned: "Do not criticise Islam, UAE government, corporations or individuals". Climate activists raised concerns about how the UAE would host COP28 without freedom of speech.^[10] The UAE invited the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, to COP28. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the UAE was assisting Assad to improve his image and HRW stated it was outrageous that COP28 was being used to reintroduce Assad into the international community.^[12]



In June 2023, governments gathered in Bonn to prepare for COP28. HRW highlighted that the UAE does not allow freedom of expression and had been aggressively silencing critics. The organisation said the governments in Bonn should use the opportunity to push the Emirati authorities to ease the "grip on civic space and uphold rights". It said the UN and other governments must demand the UAE end the persecution of rights defenders like Ahmed Mansoor, and it expressed concern that COP28 participants may stay silent fearing retaliation.^[63]

On 7 June 2023, a report based on technical analysis by The Guardian revealed that Sultan Al Jaber's ADNOC was able to read the emails to and from the COP28 climate summit office. ADNOC was also consulted over how to reply to media inquiries by the consultancy firm, Gulstan Advisory. The report also stated that the COP28 office shared its email servers with ADNOC. The COP28 office shifted to a different server after the The Guardian's inquiry.^[64]

In August 2023, John Kerry urged the oil and gas industry leaders to bring strategies at COP28 to cut their scope 1 (directly caused) and scope 2 (indirectly caused) emissions by 2030. He also asked them to initiate capital allocation commitments for renewable energy during the same timeline. On the other hand, climate experts and campaigners were raising concerns that the COP28 event would become an "oil COP", as it was taking place in a petrostate. Central to this criticism was the inclusion of the oil and gas industry in a crucial role in the discussions to combat climate change.^[65]

Pope Francis was scheduled to attend the COP28 for three days, but cancelled his trip after a flu-related lung inflammation.^[66]

Over 70,000 people were accredited for the summit, with 400,000 more granted access to the surrounding "blue zone".^{[67][68][69]}

On the starting day of the summit on 30 November 2023, a "loss and damage" fund to compensate poor states for the effects of climate change was agreed on. The fund aims to distribute funds to poor states harmed by climate change and is to be administered by the World Bank. Initial promises were made by the host (UAE) to donate \$100 million to the fund, and by the United Kingdom (\$75 million), United States (\$24.5 million), Japan (\$10 million) and Germany (\$100 million).^{[70][71]}

In his opening speech of the conference, Charles III expressed alarm at rising levels of pollution, saying that the world was "dreadfully far off track" its climate targets.^[72] The British monarch warned that "we are carrying out a vast, frightening experiment of changing every ecological condition, all at once, at a pace that far outstrips nature's ability to cope".^[73]

On 1 December 2023 activists protested outside the venue, calling for ecocide—mass environmental destruction—to be made a crime at the International Criminal Court.^[74]

The head of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, expressed satisfaction from the beginning of the conference because the loss and damage fund was created, but said that for further decarbonisation carbon pricing should be advanced and fossil fuel subsidies eliminated. Fossil fuel subsidies reached a record level of 7.1 trillion dollars in the year 2022, due to high fuel prices and inflation.^[75] There are propositions for a creation of a global carbon market managed by the United Nations in the conference. Some steps are already done.^{[76][77][78]}

On 2 December 2023, COP28 participants launched a declaration to triple nuclear energy capacity from 2020 to 2050.^[79] The declaration was unveiled by US climate envoy John Kerry, and signed by 25 countries: Armenia, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ghana, Hungary, Jamaica, Japan, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Sweden, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and the United States. The signing countries pledged to implement policies to extend their nuclear capacities, stating that nuclear power played a key role in cutting carbon emissions to net zero.^{[80][81][82]}

On 3 December 2023, The Guardian revealed that COP28 President Sultan Al-Jaber had dismissed demands for a fossil fuel phase-out, denying its basis in science and claiming it would prevent economic development.^[83] The following day, Al-Jaber held a press conference in which he stated he "respects science", thinks a phaseout of fossil fuel use is inevitable and claimed his comments were taken out of context.^[84]

On 6 December 2023, Haitham al-Ghais, the current OPEC Secretary-General, urged member nations to focus negotiations on reducing carbon emissions, rather than prohibiting the extraction and sale of fossil fuels.^[85] As a reaction, Greenpeace published a press release calling for Arab countries to phase out fossil fuels by 2050, ensuring a just transition. Greenpeace said that "The latest research from Christian Aid and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Vienna shows that both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia face a GDP growth reduction of -72% by 2100 if the global temperature rise is allowed to reach 3°C."^[86] The study called Mercury Rising: the economic impact of climate change on the Arabian Peninsula predicts a 69% drop in GDP growth for countries at the Persian Gulf in average, with the highest impact on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE if temperatures will

reach this level. If temperature rise will be limited to 1.5 degrees, the reduction in economic growth will be limited to 8.2% by 2050 and 36% by 2100.^[87]

The COP28 draft agreement, published on 11 December, avoided calling for a fossil fuel phaseout. It was subsequently rejected by the Umbrella Group and the Alliance of Small Island States, which described the draft as a "death certificate" for small island nations.^[88]

On the morning of 13 December, shortly after the start of the COP28's final plenary assembly, Al-Jaber announced that the participating countries had agreed to a compromise deal that encouraged all signatory states to end their dependence on fossil fuels "in a just, orderly and equitable manner", in order to prevent the worst outcome of climate change, while also working to achieve net zero by 2050.^{[4][89]} The agreement, which had been released to countries for consideration only four hours before being passed^[4]—although this aspect did not lead to any formal objections^[4]—also called for a tripling of global renewable energy capacity by 2030,^{[4][89]} the development of numerous "zero- and low-emission technologies",^[4] further efforts "towards the phase-down of unabated coal power"^[4] and a cut in methane emissions.^[89] China and India did not sign the pledge to triple their output of renewable energy, and committed to coal power instead.^{[5][6]}

For the first time in the history of COP summits, the global pact explicitly mentioned the necessity to shift away from all kinds of fossil fuels;^{[4][89]} however, the deal was widely criticised for not including a clear commitment to "phase out" or "phase down" fossil fuels—as requested by many participating countries, civil society groups and scientists^[4]—as well as a clear financial plan to help developing countries reach the goal of transitioning away from fossil fuels.^{[4][90]} Moreover, the choice to include carbon capture and storage in the list of "zero- and low-emission technologies" was questioned due to their relative expensiveness and lack of effectiveness in comparison to other methods.^{[4][91][92]}

The participants of the conference pledged 85 billion dollars to different climate issues and made ten pledges:^[93]

- COALITION FOR HIGH-AMBITION MULTILEVEL PARTNERSHIPS (CHAMP) FOR CLIMATE ACTION PLEDGE was signed by 71 countries including United States, Brazil, France, Germany. It includes commitments to promote international and subnational climate action, made new, more ambitious Nationally determined contributions by 2025, increase efforts for climate change adaptation, preserving biodiversity for limit warming to 1.5 degrees.^[94]
- UAE LEADERS' DECLARATION ON A GLOBAL CLIMATE FINANCE FRAMEWORK was signed by 13 countries including United States, India, United Kingdom, Germany. Includes targets of mobilising 100 billion dollars by 2025 and 5–7 trillion dollars by 2030 to climate action, make a debt reform, put in place an emissions pricing mechanism, mobilise concession and private capital.^[95]
- COP28 UAE DECLARATION ON CLIMATE AND HEALTH was endorsed by 143 countries including the European Union, China, United States. Includes commitments to reduce negative health impacts from climate change in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, women, local communities and health workers, prevent zoonotic spillover.^[96]
- COP28 DECLARATION ON CLIMATE, RELIEF, RECOVERY AND PEACE was adopted by 82 countries, including Canada, China, Ukraine, United States, Rwanda. The declaration includes commitments to promote peace, environmental policies that support peace, prevent climate change from increasing conflict, help and empower people affected by environmental degradation and conflict.^[97]
- GLOBAL RENEWABLES AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY PLEDGE was signed by 130 countries, including Bhutan, Brazil, European Union, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad. The countries pledge to refer to energy efficiency as "first fuel" and double the rate of energy efficiency increase "from around 2% to over 4% every year until 2030". They also pledged to triple the capacity of renewable energy by 2030, ensuring a just transition, increase renewable energy use and energy efficiency in an "environmentally responsible manner".^[98]
- COP28 UAE DECLARATION ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS, AND CLIMATE ACTION was adopted by 159 countries including Australia, Belarus, Brazil, China, United States. It includes commitments to make the global food system more sustainable and climate resilient, promote food security by helping vulnerable people, pass to sustainable water management, include food systems into climate action strategies, protect and restore nature.^[99]
- COP28 GENDER-RESPONSIVE JUST TRANSITIONS AND CLIMATE ACTION PARTNERSHIP includes 76 countries, among others Canada, China, Sweden, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel, United Arab Emirates. Its declaration includes a pledge to ensure a just transition, considering the effects on women especially indigenous, rural and with disabilities^[18,19]
- GLOBAL COOLING PLEDGE FOR COP28 was endorsed by 61 countries including Denmark, Japan, Canada, United States, Spain. The declaration mentions the effects of increasing heat

waves on health and economy (including food waste) and the contribution of the cooling industry to climate change. The signers pledged among others to cut GHG emissions from the cooling industry by 68% by 2050, increase the efficiency rate of air conditioning equipment by half by the year 2030, make a national plan for cooling, increase green spaces and blue spaces in cities and promote passive cooling (that can "reduce a building's cooling load by more than 25%").^[101]

- COP28 DECLARATION OF INTENT was endorsed by 37 countries and includes different pledges to advance hydrogen engines (including derivatives of hydrogen) as a climate solution.^[102]
- COP28 JOINT STATEMENT ON CLIMATE, NATURE AND PEOPLE was endorsed by 18 countries including China, United States, Canada, France, Germany, United Kingdom. The statement recognises that the problems of climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation ocean degradation and social inequality are interconnected and cannot be solved separately. Therefore, the signers pledge to unify the plans to solve the problems into one integrated strategy.

IV. CONCLUSION

Public health considerations

COP28 is the first COP to discuss the impact of climate change on public health.^[104] In a letter addressed to Sultan Al Jaber, "organisations representing more than 46 million health professionals" said a complete phase-out of fossil fuels was the only decisive way to deliver health for all.^[105] The World Health Organisation called on ministers of health to raise their voices for health as the driving force behind climate action, leading by example with climate-friendly healthcare systems, and advocating for climate finance that safeguards human well-being.^[104] It has been estimated that climate change is set to cost up to \$580 billion by 2030 in climate related damages to vulnerable countries.^[106]

Previously, experts such as Edmond Fernandes urged UNFCCC to make public health an essential part of all climate meetings and policies, calling human health integral to sustainable climate futures.^[107]

Food systems

COP28 is the first COP where food systems were discussed. During the event, the UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action was adopted by 159 countries.^[99] Two-thirds of the estimated 250,000 meals served at the event were plant-based. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization issued a roadmap report at the event outlining how to reduce agricultural emissions from methane. Food journalist Avery Yale Kamila said the roadmap "would require Americans to cut food waste and to move to flexitarian diets with far fewer animal products."^[108] The Plant Based Treaty released its Safe and Just report at COP28. Scientist and treaty proponent Peter Kalmus said "Rapidly reducing animal agriculture and shifting humanity to a plant-based diet is one of the best, easiest and fastest things we can do to save the planet."^[109]

Global Faith Leaders Summit

Ahead of the COP28 summit between political leaders of the world, the Muslim Council of Elders, in partnership with the COP28 Presidency, the UN Environment Programme and the Catholic Church, and under the patronage of the UAE's president Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, organised a Global Faith Leaders Summit convening 28 faith leaders to address climate change.^[110]

Controversies

Greenwashing accusations

Prior to the conference, the UAE attempted to greenwash its international reputation. The country hired PR and lobbying agencies, including Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, Gulstan Advisory and FleishmanHillard, to promote itself as the host of COP28.^[111] The appointment of the UAE as host of the conference was controversial due to the country's track record on fossil fuel production. The president of COP28 is Sultan Al Jaber, who as head of ADNOC has overseen a substantial expansion of gas and oil production at the same time that fossil fuel industries are under pressure to reduce output in order to mitigate climate change.^{[8][112]} In May 2015, COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber was accused of attempting to greenwash his image by paying users to clean his Wikipedia page. A Wikipedia user revealed that they were paid by ADNOC, while another was paid by Masdar to control the narrative on Wikipedia.^[113] Another report revealed that fake user accounts were being used to run promotional campaigns and defend controversies around COP28 on social media platforms. Hundreds of such pseudo-accounts were operating on Twitter and Medium. The campaign aimed at promoting and greenwashing COP28, while also defending criticism against the conference and Al Jaber.^[9] Leading into the summit, users on social media noted a large number of fake social media accounts being used to defend UAE's presidency of the climate summit. The social media accounts were tracked by Marc Owen Jones of Hamad Bin Khalifa University.^[114]



Campaigning journalist Amy Westervelt has been critical of lead-up efforts by the UN organisers to improve the transparency of COP28 by requiring industry lobbyists to identify and argued this measure is entirely inadequate to control influence.^[115]

During the past decade, the UAE has spent more than \$1 million on direct climate-focused advocacy and paid millions more to advisory firms like Gulstan Advisory and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld and think tanks helping to polish its green credentials. No other host nation has invested as much time and money to shape its image ahead of the annual climate negotiations.^[116]

A report by The Guardian based on leaked documents revealed that the UAE prepared an all-inclusive list mentioning the "touchy and sensitive issues", ranging from the UAE's climate issues to human rights violations, such as the war in Yemen and human trafficking. The document included "strategic messages" approved by the Emirati government, which were to be used as a reply to the media. The document highlighted that the country would defend ADNOC's failure to disclose its emissions since 2016 by saying that "ADNOC is currently conducting necessary studies". Besides, the document also mentioned that questions on Sultan Al Jaber's presidency will be answered with, "Dr. Sultan's full circle career [in energy, climate and diplomacy] gives him the expertise needed to constructively engage, disrupt and unite the very sectors needed to achieve meaningful action."^[117]

The UAE hired a US-based PR firm, First International Resources, to "counteract all negative press and media reports" around the Gulf state as a COP28 host. The agreement followed the negative criticism of the UAE's decision to assign Sultan Al Jaber as the COP28 president. On 4 August 2023, the company registered under the United States Foreign Agents Registration Act to represent Masdar. According to the filings, the PR firm was supposed to seek to "reinforce attitudes among decision-makers in Washington, D.C., and across Europe regarding the strategic value of the UAE in the global fight to address climate change". The UAE was to pay First International Resources a monthly retainer fee of \$100,000. Fossil Free Media founder and director Jamie Henn said such an amount is not paid to a PR firm "when you're confident about your public image". He said that much is spent "when you want to spin the public to believe the impossible", such as the claim that the UAE and Al Jaber had been "really committed to transitioning away from fossil fuels".^[118]

In August 2023, The Guardian revealed that the UAE failed to report its methane emissions to the UN for nearly a decade. Meanwhile, Sultan Al Jaber's ADNOC set a much higher methane leak target than the level it claimed to have already reached. Cutting methane emissions is believed to be a fast and low-cost method to slow the temperature rise because methane causes almost a quarter of global heating.^[119] In November of the same year, the Centre for Research on Energy reported that the UAE regularly flared methane gas, breaking its own regulations.^[7] Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan commissioned a survey of over 20,000 from 20 countries, which was used by the officials to discuss the public attitude towards the Arab nation. The major concerns were all about human rights. One of the participants, Sconaid McGeachin said COPs have become a platform for activism, and reportedly said: "We need to preserve the reputation of the UAE ... and try to minimise those attacks as much as possible". A spokesperson for COP28, called the leaked recording "unverified", but stated that COP28 would "engage all stakeholders".^[120]

Treatment of migrant workers

The UAE has been adapting its conference facility, the prior site for Expo 2020, to host the COP28 climate conference. FairSquare, a UK-based human rights group, released a report based on testimonies and photographs, stating that the migrant workers were being exposed to dangerously hot weather and humidity to prepare for the climate summit. According to the rights group, in September 2023, a dozen migrant workers from Asia and Africa were working outdoors in temperatures hitting 42 °C (108 °F) despite a midday ban. COP28 denied the allegations and claimed that no evidence of the midday ban's breach was found. A worksite supervisor said most of the work is done at night, but some has to be done whenever possible. A COP28 spokesperson said contractors were required to have worker heat safety plans and weather stations that monitor the Thermal Work Limit, as well as taking into account heat and humidity metrics including wet and dry bulb temperature and wind speed.^[121]

Digital surveillance

Ahead of COP28, Amnesty International raised concerns that the UAE might continue to use digital surveillance to spy on human rights defenders and civil society members in the UAE, including the COP28 participants. According to Amnesty International's Disrupting Surveillance Team, the UAE had a record of using digital surveillance to "crush dissents and stifle freedom of expression". Amnesty's view of the UAE's promise to offer a "platform for activists' voices" would be unachievable without respect for the human rights of privacy and the right of peaceful assembly. Amnesty opposed the "unlawful electronic surveillance of conference participants [and of] Emirati nationals and residents". It said that the COP28 attendees should be allowed to download "privacy-respecting international communications applications" in the UAE that would ensure safe and encrypted means of communication.^{[122][123]}



Alleged fossil fuel deals

On 7 November 2023, an AFP investigation revealed in multiple leaked documents that McKinsey was using its position as the primary advisor to COP28 hosts, the United Arab Emirates, to push the interest of its oil and gas clients (ExxonMobil and Aramco). McKinsey has been accused of putting its own interests ahead of the climate by sources involved in preparatory meetings for COP28. McKinsey's energy scenario for the COP28 presidency would allow for continued investment in fossil fuels, which would undermine the goals of the Paris Agreement; an "energy transition narrative" recommends oil use to be reduced by only 50% by 2050, and that trillions of dollars should continue to be invested in high-emission assets each year to at least 2050.^[124]

On 27 November 2023, the Centre for Climate Reporting and BBC News reported that based on leaked documents, the UAE intended to use COP28 as a platform to discuss fossil fuel deals with fifteen countries, including a deal with China to "jointly evaluate international LNG opportunities" in Mozambique, Canada and Australia. The report stated that fossil fuel talks between ADNOC and 15 countries were planned, in addition to talks between Masdar and 20 countries including the United Kingdom, France, Germany and others ahead of the summit.^{[125][126][127]} Al Jaber denied reports that the UAE wanted to seek oil deals at the summit, calling the allegations an attempt to undermine his work.^{[128][129][130]}

An analysis found that at least 2,456 COP28 attendees were fossil fuel lobbyists, receiving more passes than the ten countries most vulnerable to climate change.^[131] Analysis by Oxfam found that 34 billionaires—together worth roughly \$495 billion—attended COP28 as delegates; a quarter of them had made their money in "highly polluting industries".^[132]

Sultan Al Jaber, the president of COP28, has drawn criticism for asserting there is no scientific basis for phasing out fossil fuels to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a claim revealed by The Guardian and the Centre for Climate Reporting. Described as "incredibly concerning" and bordering on climate denial, his comments contradict the stance of UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The remarks were made during a confrontational exchange with Mary Robinson, chair of the Elders group, at a live online event on 21 November. The Times noted widespread condemnation of Al Jaber's statements at COP28, where numerous countries, including the UK and EU members, advocated for the phased reduction of unabated fossil fuels. In contrast, former US vice president Al Gore emphasised the historical significance of a potential COP28 agreement to phase out fossil fuels, considering it one of the most crucial events in human history. Simultaneously, BBC News reported a substantial increase in the United Arab Emirates' oil production, with ADNOC, the state oil firm, projected to drill 42% more by 2030. Despite this, ADNOC claims it aims to enhance climate-friendliness, including venturing into renewable energy, amid the global call for fossil fuel reduction.^[133]

Carbon footprint

Several commentators criticised the fact that COP28 had over 70,000 accredited attendees,^{[67][68][69]} as well as the use of private jets by many figures to attend.^{[134][135][136]} The meeting is estimated to have the largest carbon footprint of any climate summit.^[137]

Suppression of protests

On 11 December 2023, Licypriya Kangujam, a climate activist from India, walked onto the main stage of the conference, held up a sign, "End fossil fuels. Save our planet and our future.", and gave a brief speech. She was given a round of applause by the audience and removed from the session by security personnel. According to Kangujam, she was banned from further participation in COP28.^[138] Other activists criticised the UAE's heavy restrictions on protests, which Human Rights Watch called "shocking".^{[139][140]} Protests at the summit were largely confined to the "blue zone", an area under UN control where local laws do not apply.^[141] In the blue zone, local activists used COP28 as a platform for human rights demonstrations that are rare and generally not permitted in the UAE.^[20,21]

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