



NGO SUSTAINABILITY

GLOBAL WARNING ^{+1.2°C}

Special Edition: The Road to COP28

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND RENEWABLE ENERGY FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR PLANET

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Consultative Status, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Observer Status, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

“We are hurtling towards disaster, eyes wide open- with far too many willing to bet it all on wishful thinking, unproven technologies, and silver bullet solutions.”

UN Secretary General -António Guterres

Editor's Note

Climate change has the potential to reshape life for every organism on the planet, yet it is still framed as a trade off between the environment and economy or even worse, a debate over its very existence. As a result, global surface temperatures have risen 1.2°C since pre-industrial times and are still increasing, threatening humanity, biodiversity, and pushing us closer to the edge of several climatic tipping points, all with catastrophic consequences. After years of lethargic progress the world has now reached a tipping point in international negotiations. The economy-environment trade off grows in popularity among major emitters, the president of the next international climate talks is the CEO of an oil conglomerate, and a petrostate is set to host the negotiations. What happens at the upcoming 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will decide the fate of our climate for generations to come. The battle lines have been drawn; activists are calling for an end to fossil fuel production and use while industrialized countries and corporations are hedging their bets on untested technology to maintain the status quo. What happens at COP28 will not only frame future climate debates, but determine the fate of our climate for generations to come.

-Andrew Miller

Manager, NGO Sustainability

The State of Our Climate

The Science

No discussion of our climate can begin before we address the underlying science. The politicization of an issue that at its core is basic physics, has distorted our climate into a topic with multiple narratives that muddle progress at all levels. However, in March of 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's leading scientific authority on climate, [finished](#) its 6th assessment report (AR6). The separate components of the reports were released in three parts, beginning in 2021, and continued over the next two years. Over the course of several thousand pages, AR6 paints a damning picture of the state of our climate and our response to climate impacts.

AR6 leaves [no question](#) as to the source of modern climate changes; human activity. Temperature rise is accelerating at a rate unseen in the past 2,000 years. Global mean surface temperatures have increased an average of 1.2°C and many greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations have reached record levels in modern times.

But GHGs are not the only climate altering substance humans have released into the atmosphere. Aerosols are [microscopic particles](#) released by a variety of human activities, including the burning of coal and other dirty fossil fuels, that reflect sunlight and provide a short term cooling effect. But as we create stricter air pollution regulations and decrease aerosol emissions, that temporary cooling effect is vanishing.

The rise in GHGs from anthropogenic activity has fueled dramatic changes throughout various Earth systems. Glaciers and sea ice are rapidly melting, contributing to sea level rise and further accelerating climate change by decreasing the amount of solar radiation reflected away from the Earth's surface. Warmer temperatures have led to a higher concentration of atmospheric water vapor, which fuels more erratic and intense storm patterns. Higher temperatures also increase the frequency and severity of droughts, storms, and other extreme weather events.

What We Need to Do

But despite the clear and credible warnings from scientists, the international community has failed to respond to our growing climate crisis. Humanity is still [well off track](#) from the goals of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C or even 1.5°C set out in the Paris Agreement (PA). While some countries have managed to reduce emissions intensity (GHG emissions/GDP), [the increase](#) in cumulative emissions negates any progress.

So far, humans have emitted roughly [2400 gigatonnes](#) of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂) since pre-industrial times. We can only emit 300 GtCO₂ to have the best chance at limiting global temperature rise to below 1.5°C and 900 GtCO₂ to stay under 2°C of warming, according to the IPCC. But a [new report](#) published

this June claims that we may only have 250 GtCO₂ left in our carbon budget before we overshoot the 1.5°C goal, as a result of aerosol reductions.

Current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), or required annual emissions report under the PA, [will breach](#) the 1.5°C limit and likely the 2°C limit by the end of the century. GHG emissions would have to peak by 2025 to have the best chance of limiting global warming to below 1.5°C. But the situation might be more dire than first thought.

If we want to reach the 1.5°C goal, humanity needs to reach net-zero CO₂ emissions by 2050 and by 2070 for 2°C, alongside deep reductions in all other GHGs. Net-negative CO₂ emissions are necessary to reduce global temperatures over time and maybe even reverse some climate impacts. If we fail to rein in warming to below these thresholds, then we face tripping irreversible tipping points in the climate system.

Those goals are not out of reach yet. There has been some progress as the costs of [renewable energy](#) have fallen rapidly since 2000, and at least 18 countries have sustained GHG emissions reductions for longer than a decade. Net zero emissions pledges have been [declared](#) by 140 countries by COP27 and more ambitious climate policies in the world's [largest emitters](#) are projected to make [significant](#) progress towards their national goals.

But, the watering down of national regulations, a reliance on untested technologies, and backtracking on commitments are threatening to undermine the world's ability to reach the PA's goals.

NOVEMBER 6th-18th 2022: COP27



Photo: IISD/ENB Mike Muzurakis

The 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held from November 6th-18th 2022 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

The main victory from COP27 was the establishment of a “[loss and damages](#)” fund. The purpose of the fund is to compensate developing countries for damages from now unavoidable climate impacts such as sea level rise, glacial loss, or extreme weather events. While there was no final agreement on who should contribute to the fund, it is widely believed that wealthy nations from the Global North should contribute the vast majority for their role as the world’s largest current and historical emitters.

No new commitments on ending the use of fossil fuels were made in the [final document](#) of the conference. The weak “phase-down of unabated coal” language from the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) was repeated verbatim amid resistance from countries that rely on coal power, including India and China. Natural gas was also promoted in the final text as “low-emissions technology,” alongside renewable energy sources.

Carbon offsets were another topic that created controversy at the conference. The U.S. announced the [Energy Transition Accelerator](#) (ETA), a carbon offset strategy where large corporations are able to offset their emissions if they fund renewable energy or climate adaptation projects in developing countries.

The scheme came under fire at the conference as greenwashing because carbon offsets are often fraudulent or miscounted, and the U.S. has a fraught history with carbon offsets at international talks. A wide variety of groups are [opposed](#) to the plan from environmental activists, to other countries, and the United Nations.

Other financial deals to transition industrializing countries away from fossil fuels were announced. The EU, Britain, and U.S. announced an expansion of the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) created at COP26 by giving to [Indonesia](#) \$10 billion to eliminate domestic coal power. The JETP first only targeted South Africa by providing \$8.5 billion to reduce its reliance on coal. But the financial pledges made at the COPs are fractions of the costs needed for a just energy transition in either recipient.

Progress at COP27 was limited, especially on reducing emissions and phasing out fossil fuels. There was also a [record number](#) of fossil fuel lobbyists at the conference and fossil fuel producing countries successfully pushed to limit the ambition of the final text. While language about the need to limit global warming to below 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels, there is no way to achieve that goal with current climate commitments.

There were [concerns](#) surrounding the Egyptian COP presidency because of the government's human rights track record and its continued support of fossil fuels. Egyptian officials harassed and intimidated activists, and strictly curtailed where peaceful protests could take place at the COP. Those concerns have been raised and [amplified](#) in the run up to this year's COP28, hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Dubai, and overseen by the CEO, Sultan Ahmed al Jaber, of the state run oil corporation, Andoc. History appears to be ready to repeat itself at COP28, where fossil fuel interests, decades long political tensions, and a precedent of inaction threaten to derail the talks.

January 12th, 2023: COP28 President Appointed



Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber (right) entering the Bonn Climate Conference.

Photo: IISD/ENB Kiara Worth

Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber is the [president designate](#) of the upcoming COP28. Before he was appointed to the post by the UAE in January 2023, Al Jaber was the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), one of the world's largest oil companies that is also planning a major oil and gas expansion. But Al-Jaber is also chairman of the Dubai based renewable energy company Masdar and the UAE's minister for industry and advanced technology.

The UAE is a petrostate and one of the world's largest fossil fuel producers and exporters. [Almost all](#) of its energy comes from natural gas and oil. However, the UAE recently pledged to [triple](#) its renewable energy capacity by 2030 and has pledged to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. But like many other oil-producing nations, the UAE is supporting the development of untested [carbon capture and storage](#) (CCS) technology, which will allow them to keep producing fossil fuels.

In accordance with the UAE's stance on climate, al-Jaber has called for the elimination of emissions from fossil fuels but not the end of fossil fuel production. He also supports the continued use of fossil fuels as a "bridge" in the transition to renewables, and has propped up hydrogen power and CCS technology to meet global climate goals. Most controversially, he has invited fossil fuel companies to participate in the upcoming talks to help negotiate a new climate agreement with the very industry that has caused our current crisis. Despite the controversy, al-Jaber cites his [business experience](#) as an asset that will be crucial to corralling the fossil fuel industry into reducing their emissions. Al-Jaber has also

called on developed countries to meet their climate finance goal of providing \$100 billion every year to developing countries, an essential first step if the world is to meet its climate goals.

But al-Jaber's appointment and comments on emissions have drawn furious backlash from environmental activists and some [Western lawmakers](#). They claim that his role as a fossil fuel executive is a major conflict of interest and renders him unqualified to chair international climate talks. A coalition of 130 U.S. and European Union lawmakers have even petitioned UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for his removal. Amid the firestorm of criticism, al-Jaber has flown all over the world to hear from his critics and their criticisms, and incorporate their thoughts into his COP presidency.

Opposition to al-Jaber remains, especially after the record number of fossil fuel lobbyists at COP27 in 2022. Recent reports further fueled concerns about al-Jaber's position after the Guardian revealed that the COP28 [email server](#) was tied to Adnoc's, allowing the oil company to read the climate office's emails. There are also more insidious campaigns to protect the UAE and its interests from criticism. A whole network of [fake social media accounts](#) that defend the UAE's approach to COP28 were discovered, and al-Jaber's employees removed references on his [Wikipedia](#) page to his role in the UAE's fossil fuel expansion. More recently the UAE [hired](#) the strategic communications firm, First International Resources, in an attempt to reframe the debate over al-Jaber's presidency and praise the UAE as a global leader in the transition to renewable energy, despite its plans to increase oil production to [5 million barrels](#) per day by 2027.

May 2-3rd, 2023: Petersberg Climate Dialogue



The conference hall at COP15 in Copenhagen, Denmark, the fateful conference that inspired the PCD.

Photo: Flickr

The 14th Petersberg Climate Dialogue (PCD) was held in Berlin to create a “[roadmap](#)” to keep the world from warming 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The dialogue is one of the last large conferences among nations to prepare for the upcoming COP28.

German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, raised the idea of creating an international renewable energy [target](#) at the upcoming COP, as the Group of 7 (G7) has already done. Another positive development included rich nations finally meeting their goal of providing [\\$100 billion](#) annually in climate finance to developing countries later in 2023. The goal was created in 2009 and was supposed to have been met in 2020. The funding is still inadequate to properly help developing countries mitigate and adapt to climate change. More recent estimates say that \$1 trillion annually by 2030, will be needed for developing countries.

COP28 President, Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber, called for the phase out of [fossil fuel emissions](#) and called for a threefold expansion of renewable energy. However, unlike some activists and countries, Al-Jaber did not call out for a phase-out of fossil fuel use, nor say how the UAE is expanding its renewable energy capacity.

The PCD has been held annually since 2010 and was [created](#) by the then German chancellor, Angela Merkel. The dialogues are co-hosted by Germany and whichever country has the rotating COP presidency. The talks were created after negotiations at COP15 collapsed in 2009, to improve communication among nations before the next COPs.

June 5-15th, 2023: Bonn Climate Change Conference



Photo: IISD/ENB Kiara Worth

The last round of negotiations before COP28 are being held in Bonn, Germany this June. The main attendees are the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Subsidiary Bodies. The negotiations got off to a rough start with an immediate fight over the agenda of the conference that was not resolved until the [second to last day](#) of the meetings. The agenda fight threatened the viability of the talks at COP28 and prevented the Subsidiary Bodies from [formally adopting](#) the conclusions of the session.

Tensions were caused over a fight to include mitigation ambition or providing climate finance to developing countries in the agenda. Vulnerable nations and developed countries oppose including climate finance as a separate agenda item because it is already included in the mitigation section. But a handful of developing countries are refusing to agree to an agenda without an [explicit climate finance](#) section added before mitigation. However, developed countries did include a measure on climate adaptation brought forward by developing countries. Eventually, to [solve](#) the agenda dispute, the mitigation ambition section and the climate finance negotiations were dropped from the agenda. There

was also a record number of [mandated events](#) throughout the ten day conference, spreading delegates thin as they had to rush between events.

While last year's COP27 was focused mostly on adaptation and loss and damages, this year mitigation is taking center stage with the upcoming Global Stocktake (GST). A [range](#) of issues were discussed at the meeting including emissions from international shipping and aviation, support for developing countries' emissions reporting,

Creating sufficient climate financial flows to developing countries as laid out in the Paris Agreement was a topic of major contention. Countries in the Global North have repeatedly [failed](#) to meet funding goals, but the creation of a new loss and damages fund and growing calls to reform international financial institutions have given the slightest hint of optimism that attitudes in the Global North might be changing on climate finance. Delegates had even reached an agreement over the draft of the Nairobi Work Programme, which deals with climate vulnerability, impacts, and adaptation.

Civil society groups were present throughout the negotiations, often [protesting outside](#) of meeting venues. However, many observers were denied access to official meetings to make space for delegates as meeting rooms reached or exceeded capacity, drawing ire from activists. Most protests were about filling the loss and damage fund established at COP27 or in favor of holding fossil fuel companies responsible for climate damages. Issues of climate finance disrupted a dialogue on the first GST as delegates brought laundry lists with every concern they had on climate finance, not just on mitigation.

For the first time the UNFCCC acknowledged concerns about the [influence](#) of the fossil fuel industry in climate talks, including the COP28 president; Sultan Al Jaber. In response to the influence of the fossil fuel industry in the upcoming COP28, delegates discussed strengthening restrictions on corporate sponsors and conflict of interest rules for non-state actor participation. Fossil fuel lobbyists, who [totaled more](#) than any national delegation at COP26, will now have to [identify themselves](#) in order to enter the conference. However, activists want the UN to go further and mandate fossil fuel corporations to disclose any PR efforts related to COPs, and ban their representatives entirely.

The main issues to be resolved at COP28 for the GST are how to support "financial flows" from developed to developing countries, if at all, and define "means of implementation and support," as stipulated under the Paris Agreement.

In the end, several conclusions were adopted quickly by the subsidiary bodies, but crucial information from the latest IPCC report was [barely incorporated](#). Going forward countries need to increase their mitigation ambition and implementation and do so in accordance with the Global Stocktake. Nations also need to keep working on climate adaptation and loss and damage targets.

June 22-23rd, 2023: Summit for a New Global Financing Pact



Photo: IISD/ENB|Sean Wu

40 heads of state and even more government representatives gathered in Paris, France, to discuss the future of the global public financing structure. The last time such large reforms were [discussed](#) were during its inception in 1944 with the Bretton-Woods Agreement. Bretton-Woods established the modern international public financial structures we know today, including the World Bank (WB) and its sister organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Both organizations had faced growing pressure from environmental activists and developing countries to reform their practices to help countries mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Previous reform packages had been proposed but were never taken seriously until last year's COP27. Chief amongst the proposed reform packages was the Bridgetown Initiative, [created by](#) Mia Mottley, the prime minister of Barbados. Mottley called for reforms at [COP27](#) and was met with overwhelming, if unexpected, support from industrialized nations who have benefited greatly from the current system.

The reforms on debt repayments are urgent as there are currently 62 countries paying more to their debtors than on domestic healthcare for their people. The 50 most [climate vulnerable](#) countries are close to default and as inaction continues, more are likely to join them.

The WB will now allow developing countries to suspend [debt repayments](#) if they are struck by a natural disaster, many of which are increasing in frequency and intensity because of climate change. However the suspension of debt repayments will only be allowed on new loans, not existing ones. The WB also urged rich countries and the private sector to provide at least another \$100 billion in funding, as well as to establish [new taxes](#) on international shipping. The conference also aimed to create a plan to finance the loss and damages fund created at COP27. Participants agreed that climate change and biodiversity loss should both be considered when making future financial decisions.

The [main document](#) from the negotiations was a roadmap that would use upcoming major international events, including the G20 and SDG Summits, to take stock of their progress on reforming the global public finance system and reducing poverty.

2022-December 12th, 2023: First Global Stocktake



Photo: IISD/ENB- Kiara Worth

The Global Stocktake (GST) is a global accounting of international progress on climate change. The stocktake is the first of its kind and happens every five years. The stocktake [assesses](#) countries' efforts on climate mitigation, adaptation, and finance. The GST also includes progress on loss and damage, and emphasizes the need for equitable climate solutions. The current stocktake began in 2022, after COP27, and its findings will be released at COP28. The GST is mandated by the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement's Article 14 and its operational details were finalized in 2018 at COP24, Katowice. The findings of the GST are designed to increase the [ambition](#) of countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by 2025, when they are required to be updated. The GST is the primary, and only, [formal tool](#) to hold its member states accountable to their commitments.

The GST process is composed of [three parts](#): information collection and preparation, technical assessment, and consideration of outputs. Information collection [began](#) in 2021 at COP26, and ended in March 2023, synthesizes information from NDCs, scientific reports, and the state of global climate efforts. Civil society organizations were also allowed to submit information to the GST. The bulk of [submitted documents](#) include finance reports, NDCs, and national adaptation plans (NAPs).

The technical assessment is the most important part of the process. It's where member states meet to discuss climate solutions, implementation barriers, and the best available climate science. So far two technical dialogues have been held: at the annual Bonn climate conference in 2021, COP27 in 2022, and the Bonn climate conference in 2023. A [synthesis report](#) of all three technical dialogues is expected to be released in September 2023.

The results of these technical dialogues will be [presented](#) (consideration of outputs) at COP28, raising the stakes for an already contentious conference and will determine the global response to the GST. No one is expecting any new information to be revealed, [the message](#) has been clear for years: the world is falling far short of its climate goals. But the GST will still frame the discussion during COP28 and lay the groundwork for future climate commitments.

As in previous [emissions gap reports](#), it's expected that there will be a major gap between countries' pledges under the Paris Agreement and current emissions. While the results of the GST do not mandate any legally binding actions, it is still seen as an influential driver of potential climate action. The UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Simon Stiell, hopes that a global roadmap with "solutions pathways" will be the result of the GST.

The GST and requirements to update NDCs are designed to continually increase countries' climate ambitions until they can meet or exceed the goals of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C or even 1.5°C.

November 30-December 12th, 2023: COP28

COP28 will be held towards the end of this year at Expo City Dubai. The desire for a breakthrough such as an agreement pledging to phase out **all** fossil fuels is strong among some groups, but there is just as strong a bloc of resistance.

More money needs to go towards climate adaptation, to limit the damage of future climate impacts. But developed countries [were late](#) in meeting their \$100 billion annually by 2020 goal, and are slow to provide additional funds. But any talk on adaptation will be overshadowed by negotiating the payment structure of the loss and damages fund created at COP27. The fund is a priority among developing countries, as they seek to have developed nations provide all of the funding. Some European countries have donated relatively small amounts of money into the fund, but there is resistance from larger economies, [particularly the US](#). The US, despite being the largest historical emitter, is conditioning their contributions to the fund on making China, the world's current largest GHG emitter, pay. Beyond that, the US is very wary of any payments resembling climate "reparations" or any other gesture that gives the appearance of responsibility for our climate crisis.

"To complain about your difficult politics is insulting to every other country. Everybody's politics is difficult."

-Nigel Topping, UN High Level Climate Champion, on the US at COP27.

Other oil producing nations have [repeatedly](#) watered down commitments to phase out fossil fuels at other international forums, including the G20, and from the past two COPs. Oil industry leaders have also [fought against](#) stringent UN commitments and regulations for decades, falsely claiming that industries were already reducing emissions voluntarily. This year, while some activists and nations [hope](#) to reach a deal on phasing out fossil fuels, others see the UAE presidency as an insurmountable impediment to progress.

As the world prepares to descend on Dubai in late November, it is crucial to recognize the tipping point we find ourselves on. 2023 is on track to be the warmest year since record keeping began, and already disastrous climate impacts have been exacerbated by the onset of a strong El Niño event. Temperature records are falling around the world on land and at sea, driving all life on Earth to the brink.

Despite this near apocalyptic backdrop, international climate negotiations have taken place almost the same as they have since their [inception](#) in 1995. But now we no longer have the luxury of time to deal with climate change as a future threat, it is here today. With luck the world will be able to agree to at least phase out all "unabated" fossil fuels and place more significant sums of money into the loss and damages fund. But if we continue the precedent of minimal progress set by the prior two COPs, we will have no chance of reach the 1.5°C target and in the future look back at the summer of 2023 as a time of climatic stability.

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