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An oily aftertaste

At COP28, countries reached an agreement on moving away from fossil fuels. Whether this will be enough remains to be seen

For the first time ever, participants at the United Nations COP28 climate summit in Dubai have agreed to bring about the end of fossil fuels. The resolution text, released on Wednesday morning, includes formulations on 'transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner' so as to reach 'net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science'.

Years of advocacy and climate research have led countries to accept the need to divest from fossil fuels. This marks the first time during COP that parties have actually recognised and agreed to address the root cause of the climate crisis and sent a signal that the fossil fuel era is over.

One of the expected, and therefore equally positive, outcomes was the agreement by more than 120 countries to triple the global use of renewable energy and double the rate of energy efficiency improvements.

Rich countries collectively pledged to contribute just over $700 million to the Fund, less than 0.2 per cent of the estimated irreversible economic and non-economic losses already facing developing countries due to global warming.

The agreement also confirms that curbing global temperatures to 1.5 degrees requires emissions reductions of 43 per cent by 2030 and 60 per cent by 2035, compared to 2019 levels. This means that countries will be expected to make significantly more ambitious, nationally determined contributions in 2025.

The final text also contains wording that favours the fossil fuel industry, in particular the term 'transitional fuels'. Fossil gas and carbon capture, as well as storage technologies will thus have an additional argument to gain investment.

Rather little progress was made on climate change adaptation and finance, although the agreement notes that vulnerable countries will need trillions of dollars in support.

On the first day of the conference, a decision was reached to create a Loss and Damage Fund. Rich countries collectively pledged to contribute just over $700 million to the Fund, less than 0.2 per cent of the estimated irreversible economic and non-economic losses already facing developing countries due to global warming.

Reactions from the post-Soviet space

A high-level summit was held on 1–2 December, where presidents and other world leaders made pledges to tackle the climate crisis. Leaders from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia also announced their commitments and positions. In particular, Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced that his country would join the Global Methane Pledge. This means reducing methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030. Ukraine and Georgia joined the initiative back in 2021 during COP26.

During the event in the Central Asia pavilion, representatives of Kyrgyzstan proposed the establishment of a negotiating group on mining partnerships. Representatives from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Andorra, Armenia, Zimbabwe and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) took part in the discussion. The members of ICIMOD include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

The speech of the self-proclaimed president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was rather unexpected. 'All the dirt in our region is from wars', he stated and also called for sanctions to be eased against his country, as it provides unique ecosystem services by preserving swamps and forests.

Interestingly, Vladimir Putin also visited Dubai during the conference but did not attend the event itself. It is likely that one of the purposes of his meeting with the United Arab Emirates' leader Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan was to reach agreements on fossil fuel extraction and trade.

War, the climate and potential solutions

Russia's war against Ukraine was raised predominantly in the Ukrainian pavilion or at climate movement rallies. Support for Palestine, which is at

war with Israel, was much louder this year. In general, the issue of the connection between armed conflicts and the climate is becoming more and more universal. In particular, experts are interested in climate damage as well as the settlement of emissions from military aggression within the framework of climate accountability.

At a press conference during COP28, Ruslan Strilets, Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, made a proposal to work with the international community to develop a mechanism for Aggressor Refunds. This initiative would be aimed at compensating for environmental and climate damage caused by armed conflicts. He emphasised that greenhouse gas emissions during war should be the responsibility of those who started the conflict.

It is worth highlighting the main declarations and proposals that were supported by the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). For example, Ukraine and Moldova, together with 20 other countries, signed an agreement to triple the use of nuclear energy. This step was openly criticised by the public because of the risks, high price, and lengthy commissioning and decommissioning times of nuclear reactors.

In addition, 123 countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Moldova and Uzbekistan, signed the Global Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Commitment. The agreement calls for tripling the world's renewable energy generation capacity to at least 11 000 GW by 2030, taking into account different starting points and national situations. In addition, the declaration commits to collectively doubling the average annual rate of global energy efficiency improvements from about two per cent to more than four per cent per year by 2030.

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One hundred thirty-four states, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine, adopted the Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Food Systems and Climate Action. Key objectives include scaling up adaptation and resilience-building activities for farmers and food producers, with a focus on sustainable practices and nature conservation. There is also a need to strengthen food security and nutrition, manage water resources in an integrated manner, maximise climate and environmental benefits, and move towards

more sustainable approaches to production and consumption in agriculture and food systems.

Also 123 countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan, signed the Declaration on Climate and Health, which aims to improve public health and prepare societies for the impacts of climate change. The declaration also emphasises improving the ability of health systems to anticipate and respond to health risks associated with climate change, the broader impacts of climate change on mental health, traditional knowledge, livelihoods and displacement. It also calls for tackling inequalities, promoting sustainability in the health sector, and encouraging interdisciplinary research and collaboration to make progress on the climate-health nexus.

Finally, 74 countries made a voluntary commitment, the Declaration on Climate Change Relief, Recovery and Peace, to scale up climate adaptation efforts and access to finance for communities and countries threatened by instability or conflict, or facing high humanitarian needs and insecurity; to strengthen knowledge and programme solutions for climate action in such places; and to strengthen cooperation among humanitarian, development, climate and peaceful development actors.

As every year, this Conference of the Parties was not a resounding success. The most sensitive issues continue to be loss and damage financing, adaptation, a just transition to clean energy and energy efficiency. But rather unexpectedly, it was in the UAE that countries managed to agree on a formulation on moving away from fossil fuels. Whether this will be enough for the parties to achieve better results at COP29 in Baku will depend on the work of all stakeholders over the next year.



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