

Ending the fossil fuel era

Why we need a fossil fuel treaty

June 2023

The call for fossil fuel companies such as Shell and BP to pay reparations for the damage they've done to the climate and the losses they've caused, particularly in the global south, is getting louder.

It's absolutely right to make the polluters pay, but it's now also time to end the fossil fuel era completely

and to take away the power of those corporations who have made vast profits while fuelling the climate emergency.

That's where an international treaty to end fossil fuels and to plan a global and fair transition to a zero carbon world comes in.

The need for a Fossil Fuel Treaty

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (also known as the Fossil Fuel Treaty) would be an international agreement to plan the end of fossil fuel exploration and extraction in line with commitments to keep within the 1.5°C threshold in the UN Paris Agreement.

The current UN climate process focusses only on the global reduction of the use of fossil fuels in order to tackle climate change – that is, demand reduction. There is no mention of the words 'fossil fuels' in the Paris Agreement. What's needed is an international treaty that commits countries to end the extraction of fossil fuels too – i.e the supply end.

“For 30 years we have been making emissions reductions targets but the fossil fuel industry has been continuously expanding production... We are trying to reduce the demand for fossil fuels without reducing the supply, which is like trying to cut with one half of the scissors.”

Tzeporah Berman, Chair of the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty initiative ¹

Heavily influenced by industry lobbying, governments around the world continue to plan fossil fuel production that will result in more than double the greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 than is consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C and averting catastrophic climate disruption.²

The fossil fuel corporate lobby also spends more than £150 million annually in order to delay, control or block policies to tackle climate change.³ It's obvious that we can't rely on the fossil fuel industry itself to plan its own demise – there is little will and far too little time.

The proposed Fossil Fuel Treaty would be complementary to the UN process of emissions reductions contained in the Paris Agreement. It would ensure international coordination of the



phasing out of fossil fuels. And it would ensure this was done equitably and in line with a globally just transition.

The proposal

The treaty would set a global framework with three pillars which would:

- 1. End new exploration and production of fossil fuels.** A world-wide moratorium on the development of all new oil, gas and coal reserves.
- 2. Phase out existing stockpiles and production of fossil fuels.** Phasing out fossil fuel production in line with 1.5°C will require limits on extraction, removal of production subsidies, dismantling unnecessary infrastructure and shifting support to safer and more sustainable alternatives.
- 3. Accelerate a just and equitable transition.** This would include support for countries in the global south to help workers and communities, transition towards 100% renewable energy, and diversify their economies. This includes countries dependent on imports and exports of fossil fuels.

Who is supporting the proposal?

The Pacific Island states have been the first to support the treaty, and are leading the call for action. In a speech at the UN in 2022, President Vurobaravu of Vanuatu said:

“Every day we are experiencing more debilitating consequences of the climate crisis. Fundamental human rights are being violated, and we are not measuring climate change in degrees of celsius or tons of carbon but in human lives. This emergency is of our own making. Our youth are terrified of the future... We call for the development of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to phase down coal, oil and gas production in line with 1.5 degrees celsius and enable a global just transition for every worker, community and nation with fossil fuel dependence.” ⁴

The proposed treaty was also supported by a vote in the European parliament in 2022. Seventy nine cities and local councils across the world, including the cities of London, Edinburgh, Brighton and Birmingham have endorsed the treaty. In May 2023, California became the first subnational state to endorse the treaty.

Calling for Scottish government support

Scotland should join California and become the second subnational state to endorse the Fossil Fuel Treaty. The Scottish government has been praised in the past for its leadership on climate change, setting into law some of the strongest greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets of any industrialised country.

Ahead of the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, the Scottish government was the first global north country to pledge finance for loss and damage, and was praised for having broken the taboo around this among rich countries. They then pledged further money for loss and damage ahead of COP27. Despite these positive moves, the Scottish government still stops short of publicly backing the need for fossil fuel exploration and

Why a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty?

In considering how an International Fossil Fuel Treaty might work, campaigners looked to previous international agreements that had worked well. One possible model was the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was developed between 1965 and 1968, in the midst of the cold war when mistrust between the US, its allies and the USSR was at its peak. At the time, nuclear war was seen as the biggest and most imminent threat to humanity, in the same way that the urgency of tackling the climate emergency is understood now. The speed in which the treaty was negotiated at a time when diplomacy between countries had reached stalemate, and its near universal sign up by 191 countries around the world, gives hope for what might be achieved by a similar treaty focussed on fossil fuels. It was not perfect, but it was initially able to achieve a lot in a short timeframe.⁵

The Fossil Fuel Treaty would not necessarily be part of a UN process. With a good number of ‘first mover’ countries showing willingness to phase out fossil fuels, negotiations could begin between them initially, as other countries slowly warmed to the concept. The treaty could then gradually gain more member states as support increased.

extraction to end. By endorsing the treaty, the Scottish government would signal its serious commitment to ending fossil fuel extraction off Scotland’s shores, and internationally.

What can you do?

Local campaigning across Scotland will really help raise awareness of the need for a Fossil Fuel Treaty and put pressure on the Scottish government to endorse it. There’s lots that you can do and we’ll be providing a campaign pack very soon.

- 1 What is the fossil fuel on-proliferation treaty? The Guardian, Nov 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/11/what-is-the-fossil-fuel-non-proliferation-treaty>
- 2 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Briefing: Aligning fossil fuel production with 1.5 degrees and the Paris Agreement <https://bit.ly/42Di9az>

- 3 Big Oil is wringing humanity dry. Tzeporah Berman, The Guardian, Aug 2022 <https://bit.ly/3MwPRJE>
- 4 <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/vanuatu>
- 5 Towards a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. Peter Newell and Andrew Simms. Climate Policy 2020, Vol. 20, No.8