

# The Fossil Fuel Treaty: A global plan for a fossil-free future

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Protesters demand an end to fossil fuels at COP27 held in Egypt in November 2023.

The climate crisis is being increasingly felt around the world. But in the global south, people who have done little to cause the crisis are already seeing their homes and communities regularly destroyed.

Fossil fuels are undeniably to blame. Despite this certainty, and the abundance of clean energy available around the world, fossil fuel expansion is being approved and funded, and countries' emissions reductions are falling woefully short of what is needed to halt the climate crisis.

At the UN's 2023 annual climate conference (COP28) world leaders committed for the first time to a transition away from coal, oil and gas. But the agreement they made was full of gaping loopholes.

CEOs and shareholders of polluting fossil fuel companies will profit most from climate chaos. When Rishi Sunak approved the Rosebank oilfield, he committed roughly £3 billion of UK public money to subsidise it,<sup>1</sup> despite knowing most of the profits would go to Norwegian oil giant Equinor.<sup>2</sup>

Corporate power is out of control: big oil is driving the climate crisis, with the UK government along for the ride, and UN conferences seemingly unable to hit the brakes. We need a solution that complements the COP process, creating a global mandate for a fast and fair fossil fuel phase out; dismantling the climate-wrecking business models of polluting corporations in the process. That solution is the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty – a global exit plan from fossil fuels.

## What would a global exit plan involve?

A much-needed Fossil Fuel Treaty would provide a framework for keeping global heating within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the target world leaders agreed in 2015 as necessary for preventing runaway climate change. It would create a fast path to a fair global phase out of fossil fuels that would stop new fossil fuel expansion in its tracks and ensure a globally just transition to clean energy.

The Fossil Fuel Treaty would set a global framework with three pillars. Signatories would agree to:



### NON-PROLIFERATION

#### End new exploration and production of fossil fuels.

A world-wide moratorium on the development of all new oil, gas and coal reserves



### A FAIR PHASE-OUT

#### 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.



### JUST TRANSITION

#### 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. It would include countries dependent on imports and exports of fossil fuels.

## Why is this important?

Heavily influenced by industry lobbying, many governments around the world continue to plan fossil fuel production and expansion. The levels planned will result in more than double the greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 that are consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C and averting catastrophic climate disruption. Emissions from existing fossil fuel production capacity alone would make it impossible to stay within that threshold.<sup>3</sup>

At a time of climate emergency, and during a cost-of-living crisis, the big oil companies continue to make eye-watering profits. The fossil fuel corporate lobby also spends more than £150 million annually to delay, control or block policies to tackle climate change.<sup>4</sup> 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 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, and 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.

***“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

UN climate processes have previously focused only on the global reduction of the use of fossil fuels to tackle climate change – that is, *demand* reduction. There is no mention of the words ‘fossil fuels’ in the Paris Agreement, and a commitment to the full, fast, and fair fossil fuel phase out the world needs was resisted by polluting governments at COP28. What's needed is an international treaty that commits countries to end the *extraction* of fossil fuels too – i.e the *supply* end.



Given the scale of the challenge ahead, international cooperation will be required to ensure a fair and fast exit from fossil fuels. The Fossil Fuel Treaty campaign is the only global movement to force this kind of international cooperation.

## Who supports the Fossil Fuel Treaty?

The best way to ensure the exit from fossil fuels is effective and serves climate justice is for it to be spearheaded by the global south. Pacific Island states including Vanuatu, Tuvalu, and Fiji were the first to call for a Fossil Fuel Treaty. At COP28, Colombia took the historic step of being the first oil producing country to endorse it.

In 2023, the oil producing state of California also endorsed the proposed treaty. The endorsement by fossil fuel producing states and national governments is an exciting indicator of the treaty's potential to significantly impact emissions. The proposed treaty was also supported by a vote in the European Parliament ahead of the COP27 negotiations in 2022. Seventy-nine cities and local councils across the world, including the cities of London, Edinburgh, Brighton and Birmingham have endorsed the treaty.



© Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

Gustav Petro advocating for a Fossil Fuel Treaty at COP28.

***“Today we face an immense confrontation between fossil capital and human life. And we must choose a side. Any human being knows that we must choose life. I have no doubt which position to take: between fossil capital and life, we choose the side of life.”***

**Gustav Petro**, President of Colombia, endorsing the Fossil Fuel Treaty at COP28

## The global south country facing extinction: Tuvalu

By 2021, the Pacific Island State of Tuvalu had produced just over 286,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, compared to UK's almost 80 billion.<sup>5</sup> Rising sea levels are already such a concern there, that “Tuvalu is sinking” has become a local catchphrase. Science shows Tuvalu could become uninhabitable by 2050, and the government is already drawing up plans to exist as an online state for its peoples who will be displaced by the climate crisis.<sup>6</sup>

The climate crisis is also disrupting Tuvalu's food and water supply: items that used to be staples must now be imported, and contamination of water supplies due to rising sea levels means the increasingly drought prone islands are completely dependent on rainwater for drinking water.<sup>7</sup>

The Tuvaluan government knows that climate action is not a choice. That's why they are

endorsing the Fossil Fuel Treaty. During his formal address at the UN Climate Talks in Sharm El-Sheikh, Prime Minister Kausea Natano stated:

***“We all know that the leading cause of the climate crisis is fossil fuels. Tuvalu has joined Vanuatu and other nations in calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to steer our development model to pursue renewables and a just transition away from fossil fuels.”<sup>8</sup>***

In doing this, they were listening to the voices of their own people. As one Tuvaluan resident told the Guardian in 2019: “All I want is for the bigger countries to respect us, and think of our lives.”<sup>9</sup>

The Fossil Fuel Treaty's commitment to no new fossil fuels, as well as a fair and fast phase out would ensure that rich countries make the transition from fossil fuels quickly, dramatically reducing their emissions and potentially saving small island states like Tuvalu from extinction.

## The fossil fuelled giant: The UK

92% of historic carbon emissions that exceed safe planetary limits have come from wealthy countries in the global north. As the world's fourth biggest polluter historically, the UK is a member of this shameful club.<sup>10</sup> The UK is also the fifth least vulnerable country to climate change.<sup>11</sup> This is partly due to its huge economy, which will be increasingly used to adapt to the impacts of climate change like extreme flooding.

History is important here. The UK's economy grew exponentially when it colonised huge swathes of the world – including many of the countries now most vulnerable to climate change – using indentured and slave labour and extracting natural resources that allowed Britain to industrialise at speed. Many of these countries have the British Empire to thank for their position in the global economic order today, where their smaller economies leave them with fewer resources to adapt to climate change and protect local environments from loss and damage.

The UK is the second largest producer of oil and gas in Europe.<sup>12</sup> It is also home to super-polluters Shell and BP, which between them more than an estimated \$100 billion in climate reparations to the global south. To make matters worse, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak seems determined to be the fossil fuel prime minister and in 2023 laid out plans to award new licences for fossil fuel drilling in the North Sea every year. This is not just a promise: he plans to write it into law. Perhaps the biggest jewel in his oily crown currently is Rosebank Oilfield, which is projected to produce more combined annual emissions than all the 28 countries in the world classed as 'low income'.<sup>13</sup>

To agree to end fossil fuels, countries need to know that other states will not keep profiting from them. The UK is no different. An international treaty would enable the UK to work towards a common goal with the global south and end competition for fossil fuel profits between rich nations.



Protesters against Rosebank Oilfield rally in Parliament Square, September 2023.

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People from the Cofán indigenous community demonstrate outside the constitutional court in Quito, Ecuador in September 2022 to demand that the government protect the jungle from mining and oil extraction in compliance with court rulings.

## Fighting fossil fuels: Ecuador

Ecuadorian people made history in 2023 by voting to ban oil drilling in the Amazon's Yasuní National Park. This was the culmination of a long battle to protect this precious piece of the Amazon rainforest, which is home to two uncontacted tribes and more species in a single hectare than exist in the whole of north America.

In 2007, then President Rafael Correa opened the Yasuní-ITT initiative. He put a call out to the international community: compensate Ecuador for half of the money they could make from oil drilling in Yasuní, and the government would leave this oil in the ground. As a lower-income country with its own history of European colonisation, this ask was entirely just. If wealthy countries had paid up, it could have been a groundbreaking step in international cooperation to phase out fossil fuels. Just 0.37% of the requested funds were donated by the

international community<sup>14</sup> and eventually the initiative was ended by Correa, who said, "It was not charity that we sought from the international community, but co-responsibility in the face of climate change."

Oil drilling in Yasuní posed a huge local threat, as well as adding to global emissions. Construction of oil infrastructure, for example, has destroyed ecosystems which uncontacted tribes in the Amazon depended on for survival.<sup>15</sup> A coalition of activists fought for a referendum on drilling, which they won with a decisive majority in 2023.

The Fossil Fuel Treaty would be an extension of democratic movements against big oil. It would honour the fight of the Ecuadorian people by mandating a fair phase out of fossil fuels, and ensure low-income countries are not left to foot the bill for leaving oil in the soil whilst the global north lives off its oil profits.

## What can you do?

We need to get as many decision-makers as possible on board with this global exit plan from fossil fuels. The more that local and national leaders are hearing about it from their constituents, the more likely it is that they will endorse it.

Individually, or as part of a group you can:

- **Lobby your MP:** tell them about the Fossil Fuel Treaty and why you support it. You could write to them first, and then arrange to meet them to talk about it.
- **Lobby your local councillors** to endorse the treaty as a Council. We have materials to help you do this. Go to [globaljustice.org.uk/resources](https://globaljustice.org.uk/resources)
- **Get involved** with your local Global Justice Now group or contact us at [activism@globaljustice.org.uk](mailto:activism@globaljustice.org.uk) for help with running the campaign for a Fossil Fuel Treaty in your area. You can also order more copies of this briefing, and of leaflets and other materials free of charge.
- **Find out more** about our campaigns for climate justice at [globaljustice.org.uk/climate](https://globaljustice.org.uk/climate)

*“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”*

President Nikenike Vurobaravu of Vanuatu, speaking at the 2022 UN General Assembly

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## Take action

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