

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

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- Scientific consensus is clear: fossil fuels are the number one cause of global heating.
- We can transition in an orderly manner, creating a fairer world in the process, but we must act fast.
- A Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty could bring countries together to act quickly and improve the lives of people in the UK and around the world, for generations to come.

What is the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty?

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (Fossil Fuel Treaty) is a bold, workable proposal for an international treaty to carve out the path to a fast, fair and properly financed global just transition away from coal, oil and gas and to clean energy for all.

Other impactful international treaties have helped manage threats posed by nuclear weapons, landmines and ozone-depleting chemicals and were negotiated quickly in the face of a crisis. The same could apply to the Fossil Fuel Treaty.

The Fossil Fuel Treaty is an opportunity for the UK to show true climate leadership, and play its part in achieving a more sustainable, prosperous and equal future for people around the world.

What are the benefits of the treaty for people in the UK, and around the world?

The proposed Fossil Fuel Treaty could deliver many benefits for ordinary people in the UK and worldwide, including:

- Energy security via affordable, publicly-owned renewable energy.
- Protection from the social, economic, and emotional damage of runaway climate change.
- A more equal society, in a more stable world.

Why do we need a Fossil Fuel Treaty?

Much of what we need to make the above promises a reality, for people in the UK and worldwide, already exists. International Energy Agency has said that: “all the technologies needed to achieve the necessary deep cuts in global emissions by 2030 already exist, and the policies that can drive their deployment are already

proven.”¹ The transition from fossil fuels is possible, and can be efficiently and fairly managed, protecting the most vulnerable in society from a painful economic transition, and the impacts of runaway climate change. Fast and effective international cooperation is required, however, and the longer countries take to act, the harder this will be to achieve.

The Paris Agreement set a crucial global climate target, but it fails to mention fossil fuels. Many governments, including the UK, have thus continued to approve new coal, oil and gas projects unchallenged by the international community. This is even though emissions from existing fossil fuel production capacity will be incompatible with meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.²

The Fossil Fuel Treaty is an effort to foster the international cooperation we know is required to work more quickly and effectively than the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) can. The proposed treaty would complement the COP process, as well as global efforts to reduce emissions from fossil fuel demand.

What would the treaty include?

To date, governments have focussed mainly on reducing demand for fossil fuels. But it is not possible to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement with this focus alone; a multi-pronged strategy is required. The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty would work towards the Paris Agreement, and efforts to reduce fossil fuel demand globally, in three areas:

1. End new exploration and production. A worldwide moratorium on the development of all new oil, gas and coal reserves is needed to prevent expansion of unburnable fossil fuel inventories; to protect workers, communities and assets from becoming stranded; and avoid locking in catastrophic and irreversible global

heating. The International Energy Agency confirmed a “narrow but achievable” pathway to 1.5°C in 2021, but this pathway “includes, from today, no investment in new fossil fuel supply projects, and no further final investment decisions for new unabated coal plants.”³

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. Global oil and gas production must reduce by a combined 75% between 2020 and 2050, if we are to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.⁴

3. Accelerate a just and equitable transition. The scale of the challenge demands urgent collective action that addresses the needs of fossil fuel dependent workers, communities and countries. In particular, this requires support for poorer and more dependent countries 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.

Building blocks for a treaty could include:

- Improved accountability and transparency on fossil fuel supplies: for example, a global registry of fossil fuels.
- Systems of financial support: this could include a global transition fund.
- New legal mandates and arrangements: a process that will deliver a negotiated legal instrument.

Who is supporting the campaign for a treaty?

Significant momentum is building for this new treaty, and the proposal is gaining traction around the world, with

twelve nation states from the Global South spearheading the call. This includes Colombia, which took the historic step at COP28 of being the first fossil fuel producing country to endorse the treaty. Supporting these national governments are thousands of scientists and academics, parliamentarians from the UK and around the world, major UK cities including London, Edinburgh and Birmingham, and US states including California. Thousands of civil society organisations have also endorsed the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. The proposal has also been formally backed by the European parliament and the World Health Organisation.

What can the UK do?

The UK is the birthplace of the industrial revolution, and as such has a long history with the fossil fuel economy. To secure a safe, liveable environment for people in the UK and around the world, that history must end. Joining the Fossil Fuel Treaty could make the UK a central part of a new revolution: one that leads to a sustainable, fairer global future. A treaty does not need to be universal to be effective. If it is to make an impact on the global economy, however, and shift the foreign policy space on energy, then commitment from big economies like the UK could be transformative. It could help enhance the treaty’s power to achieve the phase out we know is necessary in a way that is well managed and fair.

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is not an organisation, it’s an idea — one backed by a growing global network of governments, civil society organisations, academics, scientists, youth activists, health professionals, faith institutions, indigenous peoples and hundreds of thousands of citizens globally. All are joining together as a global initiative building momentum and diplomatic support behind this big, bold idea commensurate with the scale of the crisis we face.

1 ‘Net Zero by 2050’, 2021, the International Energy Agency, <https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>.

2 ‘The Production Gap’, United Nations Environment Programme, 2021, <https://productiongap.org/2021report/#2021downloads>.

3 ‘Net Zero by 2050’, 2021, the International Energy Agency, <https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>.

4 ‘The Production Gap’, 2023, United Nations Environment Programme, <https://www.unep.org/resources/production-gap-report-2023>.

For more information about the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, or how you can further support the campaign, please contact Izzie McIntosh: izzie.mcintosh@globaljustice.org.uk.