

Conferences of the Parties (COP) 28

The Fossil Fuel Lobby and the Carbon Footprint

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

COP28, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 30 Nov. to 12 Dec. 2023, marked a historic gathering as the largest climate conference ever, drawing an unprecedented attendance of approximately 97,000 participants. This included politicians, diplomats, journalists, campaigners, and, notably, 2,456 coal, oil, and gas representatives, highlighting a significant presence of the fossil fuel sector.

The Conference's carbon footprint emerged as a critical point of contention, particularly given the significant number of attendees and their associated travels, accommodations, and on-site activities. The predominant sources of carbon emissions linked to such an extensive gathering stem from air travel, local transportation, and the operational demands of hosting the event. These elements, notably air travel, represent a paradox to the conference's objectives to reduce global carbon emissions.

The operational facets of the conference, including energy consumption for lighting, heating, or cooling the venue, alongside catering services, further contributed to the event's carbon footprint. This situation mirrors past COP events, where the participation of delegates with ties to the fossil fuel industry, has sparked debate. For instance, COP26 in Glasgow saw about 500 delegates from fossil fuel backgrounds, which increased to more than 600 at COP27 in Egypt. **The primary objective of an organisation should be evident in its operations and activities. As climate change inflicts hardships on populations, it is inappropriate for Conferences of the Parties (COP) meetings to resemble lavish celebrations that expend funds and exacerbate carbon emissions. Critics, like Joseph Sikulu from 350.org, have voiced concerns over the growing influence of these industries, arguing that it compromises the integrity of the negotiations and dilutes the voices of those most impacted by climate change.** As climate change inflicts hardships on populations, it is inappropriate



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The Conference also faced criticism for its perceived lack of ambition in decisively phasing out fossil fuels. While COP28 achieved a milestone by agreeing to transition away from fossil fuels, the first agreement of its kind in 28 years of climate negotiations, critics pointed out the agreement's loopholes and ambiguous language, which they feared could enable continued reliance on fossil fuels.

Furthermore, developing countries expressed disappointment over the financial commitments to transition from fossil fuels and adapt to climate impacts. Despite establishing a fund for "loss and damage" from climate change, the overall financial pledges were viewed as insufficient and not significantly beyond previous commitments, raising questions about the adequacy and novelty of the support provided.

Another area of contention



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was COP 28's leadership. Dr. Sultan Al Jaber, an oil executive, was at the helm, sparking debates over potential conflicts of interest and the commitment to genuine climate action. This leadership choice and the UAE's significant role in the oil industry led to concerns about greenwashing and the Conference's ability to steer global climate policy away from fossil fuel dependency effectively.

Despite these challenges, COP28 is part of a broader effort under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to combat climate change through international cooperation and negotiation. The COP serves as the supreme decision-making

body of the UNFCCC, tasked with reviewing the Convention's implementation, developing international policy frameworks, and supporting Parties in implementing the Convention and its protocols. Its role includes facilitating discussions on mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development, and capacity building to achieve the Convention's ultimate objective: preventing dangerous human interference with the climate system.

Through agreements like the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, the COP has significantly contributed to global efforts to reduce carbon footprints. These agreements have introduced legally binding emission reduction targets, promoted sustainable development, and set ambitious goals for limiting global temperature rise, underscoring the COP's pivotal role in the international climate change dialogue.

As the primary international forum for negotiating and implementing climate action, the COP's ability to effect real and substantial reductions in global carbon emissions is paramount. Moreover, its role in harmonising the often-divergent interests of its stakeholders— from nation-states and private sector actors to non-governmental organisations and indigenous

communities—underscores the complex diplomacy and negotiation required to advance the global climate agenda.

The effectiveness of the COP meetings is measured not just by the agreements reached or the commitments made by countries but also by their implementation and the tangible impact on global carbon emissions and climate resilience. **The current situation regarding climate change is so critical that the necessity for COP meetings to produce concrete and impactful outcomes is more important now than ever before.** This entails fostering agreement among the world's nations on ambitious climate action and ensuring that these commitments translate into concrete steps that significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions and bolster global resilience to climate change's adverse effects.

The primary challenge for the Conferences of the Parties (COP) lies in harmonising the varied interests of stakeholders, from nations reliant on fossil fuels to small island countries at risk due to rising sea levels. The effectiveness of COP in managing these differences, building agreements, and promoting actionable measures will be crucial in defining the global community's success in lessening the severe impacts of the climate crisis and moving towards a sustainable, low-carbon future. Furthermore, COP meetings must be conducted with a minimal carbon footprint and without undue influence from the fossil fuel industry. ●

59th Session of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA - WCC)

Christian witness and prophetic voices are direly needed

>>> **Contd. from Page 2 Col. 4** the world does not pay any serious attention to resolve the crisis. The world has not paid much attention to the reports about the genocidal-like killings in Sudan which went on for three days in a refugee camp, murdering people who had been living there. Since fighting first broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April last year, nearly 4,000 events of political violence and more than 13,000 fatalities have been reported in

Sudan. A zone of impunity is growing where neither global powers nor global institutions including the U.N venture to tread. An example pointed out for this trend is the situation where one can walk 6000 km from the Red Sea to the Atlantic through six African countries that have faced coups in the past three years. Azerbaijan has just fought a war against Armenia involving ethnic cleansing, without much blowback. Iran's proxies are thriving in failing states across the Middle East. It is predicted that all possibilities are there for

this zone of impunity to further expand across Africa and Asia as well as to Russia's borders.

The conflict in Myanmar entered its third year, but the world has not really paid attention to the horrific situation related to this under-reported war marked by a sharp rise in the use of explosive weapons. The escalating tensions between the military, the People's Defense Forces, and Ethnic Armed Organisations seeking autonomy have resulted in increasing civilian casualties. The horrific situation in Palestine

is perhaps the ongoing trend's starkest illustration. The Hamas-led attack and Israel's retribution in Gaza – an assault that has razed much of the strip and could plausibly expel many of its inhabitants – may well erase hope for peace for a generation. Although we cannot justify the murderous rampage orchestrated by the Hamas in October last year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict started long ago. It has been allowed to be severely painful due to the lethargic approach of the world leaders; peacemaking efforts petered off long ago.

Several Arab governments struck U.S.-brokered deals with Israel that mostly ignored Palestinians' plight. Israel has been expanding its occupation in the territory and captured more Palestinian land by deploying the Israeli army, and the occupation has become ever crueler. The credibility of Palestinian leaders who had banked on cooperation with Israel has eroded and Palestinians' hopes of statehood stand shattered. ●

To be continued