



Frustration at Bonn COP 28 Preparatory Talks

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Ahead of COP28, the preparatory talks in Bonn (5-15 June 2023) were a “chance” for the UAE to prove its critics wrong.¹ However, there are still major roadblocks in the way of COP28 after two weeks of negotiations. It was only on the penultimate day of the conference that governments were able to reach an agreement on the meeting's agenda. Negotiations stalled due to disagreements about measures for mitigation, finances including loss and damage, and the Global Stocktake (GST). The head of the UNFCCC, Simon Stiell, expressed his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the conference for the insufficiency of progress given the urgency of climate change.²

¹ Zia Weise, "COP28: Divisions Deepen at Bonn Climate Talks Amid Leadership Vacuum," Politico, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/cop28-un-united-arab-emirates-divisions-deepen-at-bonn-climate-talks-amid-leadership-vacuum/>

² Alkousaa, Riham, "UN climate body head dissatisfied with Bonn climate talks outcome," Reuters, June 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/bonn-climate-talks-prepare-cop28-summit-end-with-little-show-2023-06-16/>

The negotiations revealed a lack of trust between nations and were marked by a power struggle over the conference agenda, especially between developed and developing countries. The EU and other Western countries, some Latin American countries, and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) aimed to prioritize the mitigation of climate change through emissions reductions.³ This, in turn, led activists to suggest that the EU, United States, and Britain, in particular, were intent to divert attention away from their legal and financial accountability for climate change.⁴ On the other hand, the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs) consisting of China, India, and Saudi Arabia among others, pushed for the prioritization of climate finance.⁵

The power struggle became the centerpiece of negotiations, though the “Global Stocktake” was expected to be a central part of the COP28 negotiations. The GST emerged as a flagship project of the 2015 Paris Agreement, in which governments review their progress against climate action.⁶ This is particularly necessary, as the targets themselves are not sufficient to limit global warming to 1.5, let alone actual results. How finances should be positioned in the GST became another point of contention, and eventually, the negotiations ended without an agreed-upon wording and instead included several options.⁷

Because an agreement could not be made on the agenda, naturally, the implementation of the “Mitigation Ambition and Implementation Work Programme” (MWP) could not be developed. This was regardless of the fact that the MWP had been agreed upon in the previous COP negotiations.⁸

The MWP was contended for the lack of a financial support item. Mitigation can be economically tolling to many developing countries, which must already allocate resources to climate change adaptation and loss and damage. Bolivia on behalf of the LMDCs, the Arab Group, and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America are among the countries that advocated for the inclusion of financial support. Ultimately, the MWP was dropped from the agenda.⁹

³ Zia Weise, "COP28: Divisions Deepen at Bonn Climate Talks Amid Leadership Vacuum," Politico, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/cop28-un-united-arab-emirates-divisions-deepen-at-bonn-climate-talks-amid-leadership-vacuum/>

⁴ Alkousaa, Riham, "UN climate body head dissatisfied with Bonn climate talks outcome," Reuters, June 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/bonn-climate-talks-prepare-cop28-summit-end-with-little-show-2023-06-16/>

⁵ Zia Weise, "COP28: Divisions Deepen at Bonn Climate Talks Amid Leadership Vacuum," Politico, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/cop28-un-united-arab-emirates-divisions-deepen-at-bonn-climate-talks-amid-leadership-vacuum/>

⁶ Alkousaa, Riham, "UN climate body head dissatisfied with Bonn climate talks outcome," Reuters, June 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/bonn-climate-talks-prepare-cop28-summit-end-with-little-show-2023-06-16/>

⁷ Carbon Brief Authors, "Key outcomes from the June 2023 UN climate conference," Carbon Brief, June 16, 2023. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/bonn-climate-talks-key-outcomes-from-the-june-2023-un-climate-conference/>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Amidst the power struggle, vulnerable countries and activists showed frustration with the slow progress of international cooperation. The reality is that climate impacts have already affected regions such as the Marshall Islands. The COP27 negotiations included the acceptance of the “loss-and-damage fund” for people affected by climate disasters, but skeptics are unsure whether this fund will actually be provided at scale, given the historical negligence of developing and vulnerable countries.¹⁰

Climate finance was of particular interest because the landmark pledge by developing countries of \$100 billion in climate finances by 2020 has not been delivered. In COP15 in 2009, developed countries collectively pledged to mobilize \$100 billion per year in climate finances. The pledge was formalized the next year in COP16 and extended to 2025 in COP25. However, according to the OECD, which has been tracking progress since 2015, \$100 billion was never reached (See

Table 1).¹¹ Wael Abdoulmagd, Egypt’s COP27 President, suggested that this undermined trust and was “so, so regrettable.”¹²

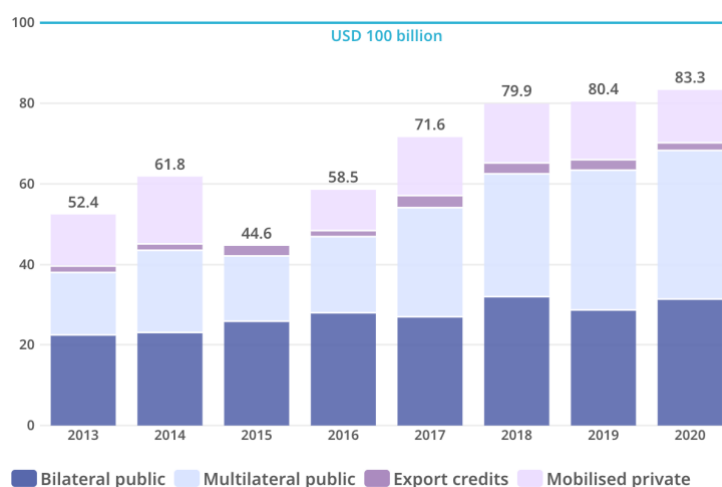


Figure 1: Climate Finance for Developing Countries (in billions USD) (Source: OECD)¹³

Another disagreement was on the need to phase out fossil fuels. The IPCC’s sixth assessment report had already clarified that fossil fuels contribute to climate change. The Environment Integrity Group (Switzerland, South Korea, Mexico, etc.), Canada, Norway, the EU, the US, New

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¹¹ OECD, “Climate Finance and the USD 100 Billion Goal,” OECD, n.d., <https://www.oecd.org/climate-change/finance-usd-100-billion-goal/>

¹² Zia Weise, "COP28: Divisions Deepen at Bonn Climate Talks Amid Leadership Vacuum," Politico, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/cop28-un-united-arab-emirates-divisions-deepen-at-bonn-climate-talks-amid-leadership-vacuum/>

¹³ OECD, “Climate Finance and the USD 100 Billion Goal,” OECD, n.d., <https://www.oecd.org/climate-change/finance-usd-100-billion-goal/>

Zealand, the UK, Australia, and Senegal showed concerns that the IPCC's statement was not reflected in the negotiations. The way fossil fuels are considered in the COP27 negotiations is particularly interesting, considering that the host country has been considerably reliant on fossil fuels.

Expectations for COP28 and the UAE

The incoming COP28 President, Sultan Al Jaber of the UAE previously faced substantial backlash for suggesting the phasing out of fossil fuel *emissions*, rather than the production of fossil fuels itself. This remark caused concerns because many interpreted it as the continued production of fossil fuels and reliance on carbon capture technology, which has yet to be proven at scale. However, he recently stated the phasedown of fossil fuels is "inevitable."¹⁴ Additionally, he mentioned to youth groups the potential to triple renewable energy generation by 2030.¹⁵ Other developments that were welcomed by environmentalists include the new process to disclose affiliation to minimize the influence of industrial lobbyists.¹⁶

What continues to exist is substantial criticism for the lack of an action plan to reduce emissions or mitigate climate change. The global policy director at 350.org stated that "talk alone is cheap," and that a solid plan must be presented. In addition, there is still a suspicion that countries reliant on income from fossil fuels focus on developed countries' obligations to mask the fight against fossil fuel emissions. The argument put forward in this regard is that if more countries focused on the financial and historical aspects of climate change, the crackdown on current emitters will be less vigorous.¹⁷

With the focus on financing at COP28, Sultan Al Jaber's experience financing extensive renewable energy projects could prove to be beneficial in the continuing differences on this issue. Going forward, one could therefore expect discussions to include private industries that have expertise in large energy and infrastructural projects. Whether this will be sufficient to overcome the current impasse is, however, highly questionable.

¹⁴ Zia Weise, "COP28: Divisions Deepen at Bonn Climate Talks Amid Leadership Vacuum," Politico, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/cop28-un-united-arab-emirates-divisions-deepen-at-bonn-climate-talks-amid-leadership-vacuum/>

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¹⁶ Alkousaa, Riham, "UN climate body head dissatisfied with Bonn climate talks outcome," Reuters, June 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/bonn-climate-talks-prepare-cop28-summit-end-with-little-show-2023-06-16/>

¹⁷ Carbon Brief Authors, "Key outcomes from the June 2023 UN climate conference," Carbon Brief, June 16, 2023. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/bonn-climate-talks-key-outcomes-from-the-june-2023-un-climate-conference/>