



Key Issues on the Negotiating Table for COP28 in the UAE Presidency

Dr. Mohamed Abdelraouf

Director of the Environmental Security and Sustainability Research Program Gulf Research
Center

Asuka Nagasawa

Master's Candidate at Geneva Graduate Institute



Dr. Sultan Al-Jaber, COP 28 President-designate <https://www.oilandgasmiddleeast.com/news/al-jaber-cop28-adnoc>

COP28 will be held between November 30 and December 12, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Since the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015, this year's COP serves as a midway



point until 2030, by which signatories agreed to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees.¹ Governments will conduct a Global Stocktake (GST) to assess countries' progress on emissions reduction commitments, and all countries will be required to submit updated plans of action that are sufficiently robust to meet the 1.5°C goal to limit global warming to 1.5° above pre-industrial levels.

The UAE has presented a comprehensive plan of action based on four themes: fast-tracking the transition to a low-CO2 world through technology and innovation, fixing climate finance, focusing on people's lives and livelihoods, and promoting full inclusivity. The plan emphasizes the "phase down" of fossil fuels, and ambitious targets for clean energy, such as doubling energy efficiency, tripling renewable energy capacity, and doubling hydrogen production by 2030.

The "phase down" rather than a "phase out" has disappointed some campaigners calling for a complete fossil fuel phase-out. Sultan Al-Jaber, in his role as both President of COP 28 and as CEO of ADNOC, the UAE's national oil and gas company, has announced plans to involve fossil fuel executives in formulating a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the 1.5°C goal. The plan has received broad support but awaits more detailed implementation.²

Key Negotiating Points for COP28

As COP28 approaches, the global community has made critical negotiations on climate action and the pressing challenges it entails. These discussions have set out the key negotiating points that will shape COP28. President-Designate Sultan Al-Jaber's plan of action, which does not directly address the phasing out of carbon emissions, has raised questions about the viability of relying on carbon capture and storage technology. Additionally, the call for wealthy countries to commit more to climate change has encountered hurdles, particularly regarding funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. Disagreements between developed and developing nations over financial support have resulted in a deadlock in discussions, creating challenges in evaluating progress and setting new climate finance targets. Furthermore, the recent G20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Ministerial Meeting concluded without reaching an agreement on key points, underscoring the complexities ahead.

On the point of climate change mitigation, Al-Jaber has called for the phase-out of "fossil fuel emissions" rather than fossil fuels themselves. This includes a reliance on the use of technologies such as carbon capture and storage technology to mitigate consequences despite the fact that these technologies are currently not yet scalable and therefore not a viable means of removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Al-Jaber noted in June 2023 that the phasedown of

¹ COP28 UAE. "Pathway to COP28 UAE." COP28 UAE. n.d. <https://www.cop28.com/en/>

² Fiona Harvey and Ajit Niranjana. "What is the UAE COP28 plan of climate action?" *The Guardian*. July 13, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/13/what-is-the-uae-cop28-plan-of-climate-action?ref=upstract.com>.



fossil fuel is “inevitable.”³ That said, he has still avoided calling for a complete phase-out of fossil fuels, which scientific organizations such as the IPCC have suggested essential to addressing climate change.⁴

Additionally, there is a push for wealthy countries to commit more to financing climate change. However, negotiations that focus on *who* should fund climate change mitigation and adaptation measures have not shown much development. In the preliminary talks held in Bonn, many countries shared concerns regarding the failure of developed countries to meet the \$100 billion annual funding goal for developing nations, as outlined in the Paris Agreement. This funding was meant to assist developing countries in tackling climate change and transitioning to sustainable, low-carbon development.

Developing countries have been focusing on Article 4.5 of the Paris Agreement, which requires developed countries to provide financial and technological support to help them reduce their emissions and cope with climate challenges. They argue that developed nations have not fulfilled this obligation, leading to mistrust and frustration. On the other hand, developed countries are emphasizing Article 2.1c of the Paris Agreement, which centers on directing financial flows towards projects promoting low emissions and climate-resilient development. They believe their efforts should be focused on supporting sustainable initiatives.

This disagreement has created a deadlock in discussions, particularly in two important areas. First is the Global Stocktake (GST), which is a mechanism to assess collective progress toward meeting the Paris Agreement's goals and course correct wherever change is needed. However, differing interpretations of financial commitments and priorities have made it challenging to reach a consensus on how to evaluate progress. The second is the Post-2025 Climate Finance Target. As part of the Paris Agreement, discussions are underway to set a new climate finance target to replace the \$100 billion goal beyond 2025. However, due to the differing views on climate finance, disputes have arisen over what the new target should be. Developing countries are advocating for more substantial financial support, as the current proposals fall short of the significant funding they require to tackle climate change effectively.

In a pivotal moment for climate action, the G20's climate and environment ministers, representing 80% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, convened in Chennai, India, from July 26-28, 2023 for their fourth and final meeting.⁵ Despite the high stakes, the gathering concluded without an agreement or joint statement on climate change. Critical points of contention, such as aiming to

³ Florence Jones. “Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber concedes that fossil fuel phasedown is inevitable.” Offshore Technology. June 9, 2023. <https://www.offshore-technology.com/news/sultan-ahmed-al-jaber-conceeds-that-fossil-fuel-phasedown-inevitable/>

⁴ Ivana Kottasova. “Fake Twitter profiles, Wikipedia editing and PR battles: Inside the push to greenwash the COP28 climate summit.” CNN. July 18, 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/18/middleeast/cop-28-dubai-greenwashing-climate/index.html>

⁵ G20. “4th Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG) and Environment and Climate Ministers meeting under India’s G20 Presidency to be held in Chennai on July 26-28, 2023.” G20 Press Release. n.d. <https://www.g20.org/en/media-resources/press-releases/july-2023/ecswg-july/>



peak emissions by 2025, transitioning to clean energy, and implementing a carbon tax for emissions reduction, remain unresolved.⁶

In response to the G20 meeting's outcome, Al Jaber issued a resolute call to action, urging G20 nations to take the lead in addressing the climate crisis. He expressed concern that his call for tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030 had not been adequately reflected in the G20's outcomes. Emphasizing the importance of unity and commitment to the UN Secretary General's Climate Solidarity Pact, Al Jaber underscored the pressing need for progress on adaptation measures. As COP28 approaches, priorities such as conserving 30% of habitats by 2030 ('30x30') and transforming food systems will be at the forefront of discussions. Notably, COP28 will be the first edition to explicitly link climate impacts to global health. With a firm focus on increasing adaptation finance, President-Designate Al Jaber has already begun engaging in bilateral meetings with key ministers from Brazil, Germany, India, Japan, and the US, seeking to build consensus for the summit. As we navigate these challenges, bridging gaps and finding common ground among G20 nations will be crucial to driving meaningful progress in the fight against the global climate crisis.⁷

As COP28 approaches, the world stands at a critical juncture in the fight against climate change. Sultan Al-Jaber's plan of action, focusing on the phase-out of "fossil fuel emissions," and the challenges in negotiations over climate finance have brought to the forefront the complexities and urgent need for collaborative solutions. The recent G20 ministerial meeting's inconclusive outcome further emphasizes the importance of finding common ground and united action. With COP28's priorities centered on conserving habitats, transforming food systems, and linking climate impacts to global health, the global community must seize this pivotal moment to bridge divides and work together toward a sustainable and resilient future. As we confront the vast gap between the resources needed and the current level of financial commitments, meaningful progress can only be achieved through unity, shared responsibility, and decisive action to combat the existential threat of climate change.⁸

The Potential Outcome of COP28

The UAE has made substantial investments in renewable energy and clean technology on a global scale. With \$40 billion invested in renewable energy over the past 15 years and a recent

⁶ Sibi Arasu. "G20 ministers reach agreement on most, but not all, climate issues." *The Associated Press*. July 28, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/india-climate-change-g20-geopolitics-15-degrees-cop28-6fcd8d5144b7950e80fbbe55ccc41b54>

⁷ Gulf Today. "UAE urges G20 nations to lead the way and demonstrate solidarity on climate action." *Gulf Today*. July 28, 2023. <https://www.gulftoday.ae/news/2023/07/28/uae-urges-g20-nations-to-lead-the-way-and-demonstrate-solidarity-on-climate-action>

⁸ Carbon Brief Authors. "Bonn climate talks: 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/>; Nina Seega. "This is how COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber could fix climate finance." *EuroNews*. July 27, 2023. <https://www.euronews.com/2023/07/27/this-is-how-cop28-president-sultan-al-jaber-could-fix-climate-finance>



partnership with the US to invest an additional \$100 billion in clean energy, the UAE has demonstrated its intent to take meaningful action in combating climate change.

Al-Jaber's unique background in both fossil fuels and renewable energy positions him as a potential bridge-builder between the two sectors. His experience and knowledge could facilitate collaboration and cooperation between the oil and gas industry and the renewable energy sector, enabling a more inclusive approach to addressing climate change. This collaboration is crucial for achieving common climate goals and driving transformative results that may have been challenging to achieve through isolated efforts.

Moreover, Al Jaber's appointment comes at a critical juncture when the world faces global turmoil in energy supplies due to geopolitical conflicts. This urgency underscores the need for collaboration between climate activists and energy producers to address the energy trilemma of sustainability, energy security, and affordability. With his background in both renewables and fossil fuels, Al Jaber could be in a position to navigate these complex challenges.⁹ Whether this, however, is sufficient to ensure meaningful action and results during COP28 is questionable.

step forward for climate action. However, differing views on financial commitments and priorities

In conclusion, COP28 in the UAE holds great significance as it marks the midway point toward the 2030 deadline for limiting global warming. Sultan Al-Jaber's comprehensive plan of action demonstrates the UAE's commitment to addressing climate change. While the emphasis on a "phase down" of fossil fuels has disappointed some campaigners, Al-Jaber's efforts to involve fossil fuel executives in formulating emission reduction plans potentially represent a significant step forward. However, the involvement of fossil fuel executives has created gridlock in discussions, leading to challenges in assessing progress and setting new climate finance targets.

Ultimately, the success of COP28 will depend on collective global efforts and commitments from all participating nations. The international community must seize this crucial moment to take decisive action and forge a path toward a sustainable, low-carbon future. Only through ambitious and inclusive negotiations can COP28 pave the way for a greener, more resilient planet and a safer climate for future generations.

⁹ Faiza Rizvi. "Opinion: Why Al Jaber's COP28 appointment isn't a 'recipe for controversy'." *Oil & Gas*. January 17, 2023. <https://www.oilandgasmiddleeast.com/news/opinion-why-al-jabers-cop28-appointment-isnt-a-recipe-for-controversy>; Navin S. Khadka. "COP28: Why has an oil boss been chosen to head climate summit?" *BBC*. January 13, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64269436>

