

COP28: Where Fossil Fuel Industries Go to Gloat

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The sequence of COP meetings, ostensibly a United Nations forum to discuss dramatic climate change measures in the face of galloping emissions, has now been shown for what it is: a luxurious, pampered bazaar for the very industries that fear a dip in their profits and ultimate obsolescence. Call it a drugs summit for narcotics distributors promoting clean-living; a convention for casino moguls promising to aid problem gamblers. The list of wicked analogies is endless.

Reading the material from the gathering that is known in its longer form as the United Nations Climate Change Conference, one could be forgiven for falling for the sweetened agitprop. We find, on the [UN website](#) explaining the role of COP28, that the forum is "where the world comes together to agree on ways to address the climate crisis, such as limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, helping vulnerable communities adapt to the effects of climate change, and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050."

Then comes the boggling figure: 70,000 delegates will be mingling and haggling, including the parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "Business leaders, young people, climate scientists, Indigenous Peoples, journalists, and various other experts and stakeholders are also among the participants."

The view from outside the conference is a matter of night and day. Fernando Racimo, evolutionary biologist and member of the activist group Scientist Rebellion, sums up the progress of ever bloating summitry in this field since 1995:

"Almost 30 years of promises, of pledges," he [told Nature](#), "and yet carbon emissions continue to go up to even higher levels. As scientists, we're recognizing this failure."

In Dubai, where COP28 is being held, representatives from the coal, oil and gas industries have come out in numbers to talk about climate change. They, it would seem, are the business leaders and stakeholders who matter. And such representatives have every

reason to be encouraged by the rich mockery of it all: the United Arab Emirates is a top oil producer and member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

According to an [analysis](#) from the environmental Kick Big Polluters Out (KBPO) coalition, 2,456 fossil fuel lobbyists were granted access to the summit.

“In a year when global temperatures and greenhouse gas emissions shattered records, there has been an explosion of fossil fuel lobbyists heading to UN talks, with nearly four times more than were granted last year.”

The breakdown of the attendee figures makes for grim reading. In the first place, fossil fuel lobbyists have outdone the number delegates from climate vulnerable nations: the number there comes to a mere 1,509. In terms of country delegations, the fossil fuel group of participants is only outdone by Brazil, with 3,081 people.

In contrast, the numbers of scientist presents are minimal to the point of being invisible. Climate change activists, the young, and journalists serve in decorative and performative roles, the moralising priests who give the last rites before the execution.

Image: Dr. Sultan Al Jaber (Licensed under CC BY 2.0)



The theme of the conference had already been set by COP president Sultan al-Jaber, who felt, in his vast wisdom, that he could simultaneously host the conference with high principle and still conduct his duties as CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc).

This, after all, presented a wonderful chance to gossip about climate goals in hazy terms while striking genuine fossil fuel deals with participating countries. This much was shown by [leaked briefing documents](#) to the BBC and the Centre for Climate Reporting (CCR).

The documents in question involve over 150 pages of briefings prepared by the COP28 team for meetings with Jaber and various interested parties held between July and October this year. They point to plans to raise matters of commercial interest with as many as 30

countries. The CCR [confirms](#)

“that on at least one occasion a nation followed up on commercial discussions brought up in a meeting with Al Jaber; a source with knowledge of discussions also told CCR that Adnoc’s business interests were allegedly raised during a meeting with another country.”

The COP28 team did not deny using bilateral meetings related to the summit to discuss business matters. A spokesperson for the team was mightily indifferent in [remarking](#) that Jaber “holds a number of positions alongside his role as COP28 President-Designate. That is public knowledge. Private meetings are private, and we do not comment on them.”

The Sultan proved to be more direct, [telling a news conference](#) that such “allegations are false, not true, incorrect, are not accurate. And it’s an attempt to undermine the work of the COP28 presidency.” Jaber went on to promise that he had never seen “these talking points that they refer to or that I ever even used such talking points in my discussions.” No need for notes, then, when advancing the fossil fuel interests of country and industry.

Concerned parties are attempting to find various ways of protesting against a summit that has all the hallmarks of gross failure. Scientists and environmentalists are choosing to voice their disagreement in their respective countries, thereby avoiding any addition to the increasingly vast carbon footprint being left by COP28. As well they should: Dubai is, essentially, hosting an event that could be best described as a museum piece of human failings.

Currently, delegates are pouring over a [draft of the final agreement](#) that proposes “an orderly and just phase-out of fossil fuels”. What is just here is a fascinating question, given the lobbying by the fossil fuel advocates who have a rather eccentric notion of fairness. As Jean Paul Prates, CEO of Brazil’s state-run oil company Petrobras [declared](#), “The energy transition will only be valid if it’s a fair transition.” The prospects for an even more grandiose, stage-managed failure, helped along by oil and gas, is in the offing.

With the figures of science essentially excluded from these hot air gatherings in favour of industries that see them as troubling nuisances best ignored, the prospect for local and domestic reform through informed activism becomes the only sensible approach. There are even heartening [studies](#) suggesting that climate protest can warm frigid public opinion, the only measure that really interests the vote getting politician. Unfortunate that this seems like a last throw for much of humanity and the earth’s ecosystem.

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