



United Nations Climate Conference (COP28) – A View from Dubai

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This year, the United Nations held its 28th Climate Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) in late November/early December. This year's affair was planned like a huge "four-ring circus", with three green-zones (open to the public, with numerous exhibits) and one blue-zone reserved for the delegates (like myself) from different countries and non-governmental organizations. In all, over 80,000 attended this year's conference.

The choice of Dubai for COP28 was itself controversial, since it is a modern hub of a Middle-Eastern petrostate, whose main revenue comes from the export of fossil fuel products. Nevertheless, the conference did not end as an unmitigated disaster, as many critics had earlier forecasted. Two key decisions were made at COP28, whose overall impact will be felt in future years.

The first occurred at the opening day of COP28. Following on the decision made at last year's UN Climate Conference held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt (COP27), the conferees at COP28 announced the formal setting of a Loss and Damage Fund. This Fund will be administered in interim by the World Bank through an independent board. It would financially assist vulnerable communities in low-income countries from the adverse impacts of extreme weather events and other climate-related disasters. Unfortunately, the amounts pledged thus far by many developed countries – in the vicinity of \$700 million – does not begin to match the amount that will be needed, i.e., around \$400 to \$500 billion per year.

The second decision was made in the early morning hours of COP28's last waning day. After intense behind the scene negotiations, the conferees agreed to a compromised declaration, which was stated in the following language: *"Transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science."* (Paragraph 28(d) of the Decision Document).

Although the above statement disappointed many activist representatives – they had wanted a stronger wording of "phasing out of fossil fuels" – it was considered a success by many others, since the term "fossil fuel" itself had never appeared in any earlier COP declarations. Ultimately, urgent actions on the part of many developed countries and petrostates in significantly reducing their carbon emissions will be critical, not how they stated their intentions.

In sum, like other UN-sponsored COP meetings in the past (such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement), this year's conference was a mixture of some solid advancement and many loose ends. For a lot of work will be needed by the world community to meet the 1.5 degree Celsius level by mid-century.