

# 'Race against time': Climate talks in last push to end fossil fuels

December 11 2023, by Shaun TANDON, Laurent THOMET

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COP28 is due to end on Tuesday but could go into overtime in nations fail to agree on a deal on time.

UN leaders on Monday urged an end to obstruction hours before a deadline for a deal at a climate summit in Dubai, as oil producers

resisted historic calls for the world to wind down fossil fuels.

Flying back to Dubai after a sleepless night for negotiators, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for "maximum ambition and maximum flexibility" to reach an agreement that can find consensus among the nearly 200 countries.

"We are in a race against time," Guterres told reporters. "It's time to go into overdrive to negotiate in good faith."

Spurred by pleas by low-lying island nations that fear for their very existence, the conference in the glitzy metropolis built by oil money is considering the first-ever call to exit oil, gas and coal, the main culprit in the planet's climate crisis.

Neighboring Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, has led opposition, with the OPEC cartel urging its members to vote against a phase-out of [fossil fuels](#).

Without naming countries, Simon Stiell, the head of the UN climate body, called on all sides to remove "unnecessary tactical blockades" holding up a deal.

Guterres called on negotiators to have a "single-minded focus on tackling the root cause of the climate crisis—fossil [fuel](#) production and consumption".

But offering flexibility, he said that the call for action ""doesn't mean that all countries must phase out fossil fuels at the same time".

But any agreement, he said, must preserve the ambition of checking warming at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—the increasingly elusive goal blessed by the 2015 Paris accord to

avoid the worst ravages of climate change including worsening storms and droughts and rising sea levels.

## Fossil fuel production leading to dangerous climate change

Forecast production far above levels consistent with limiting global average temperature rise to safe levels

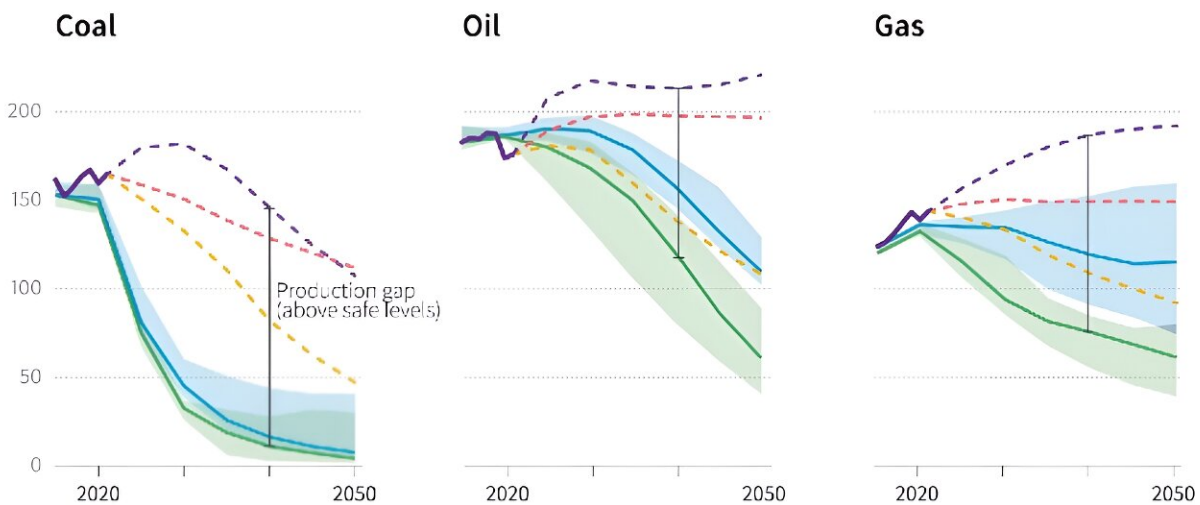
--- Production based on government plans and projections

--- Production modelled by IEA\* from policies already in place

--- Production if all climate commitments are kept

Global warming scenario — 2°C — 1.5°C

In exajoules per year



Source: Production Gap Report 2023 from SEI, Climate Analytics, E3G, IISD and UNEP \*International Energy Agency



Comparison of projected global fossil fuel production up to 2050 and the levels needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C and 2°C, according to the Production Gap report 2023.

## Down to two issues

Stiell said that the summit disagreements had narrowed down to two issues—fossil fuels and speeding up climate finance by the wealthy

nations to worst-hit developing countries.

The summit leadership is expected to release a new draft text on Monday.

The annual Conference of the Parties, or COP, has rarely finished on schedule in its 28-year history, but COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber has called on countries to wrap things up on time on Tuesday.

Jaber, the head of the national oil company of the United Arab Emirates, has repeatedly promised to deliver a historic deal and urged countries to find a "consensus and common ground" on fossil fuel.

"Failure is not an option," he said on Sunday.

Saudi Arabia has called for COP28 to take into account its "perspectives and concerns" and fellow OPEC member Iraq has also publicly rejected an exit from fossil fuels.

But veteran climate campaigners and negotiators say the world has never been so close to a deal on winding down oil, gas and coal.

The pressure is now on Jaber—whose role as oil executive has caused angst among climate campaigners—to make the final edits to a deal that would bring a consensus.



Sultan Al Jaber said that 'failure is not an option' at COP28.

## **China-US cooperation**

The last draft agreement released on Friday includes four different paths out of fossil fuels, but it also has a fifth option: leaving the issue out of the final deal.

China, the world's biggest emitter, was also initially seen as hostile to a phase-out but has since been working to find a compromise.

China and the United States, the largest historic emitter, last month in pre-COP28 talks in California agreed to speed up the deployment of

renewable energy to gradually replace oil, gas and coal.

Friday's draft deal includes similar language on the need to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030, to "displace fossil fuel-based energy".

The United States, whose [climate](#) envoy John Kerry was celebrating his 80th birthday on Monday during the Dubai negotiations, has surprised some observers by also throwing its weight behind a phase-out.

But the United States also is the world's largest oil producer, and the rival Republican Party includes staunch opponents of curbing fossil fuels.

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Citation: 'Race against time': Climate talks in last push to end fossil fuels (2023, December 11) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-12-climate-fossil-fuels.html>

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