

Mention of 'fossil fuels' cut from videos at UN climate talks

14 December 2018, by Patrick Galey



The COP24 climate talks, which wrap up Friday in Poland, bring together more than 20,000 officials, ministers, activists and business representatives from across the world

Videos produced by environmental groups to be shown to thousands of participants in a major UN climate summit were banned by organisers for mentioning fossil fuels, in a move campaigners say amounts to censorship.

AFP has obtained emails sent by the United Nations to NGOs asking them to remove frames referring to "dirty energy" and "pipelines", claiming that they breached the UN climate convention's rules of participation.

The COP24 climate talks, which wrap up Friday in Poland, bring together more than 20,000 officials, ministers, activists and business representatives from across the world.

Among those accredited to observe the process are a host of pressure groups whose goals vary enormously.

Green campaigners complain that so-called "business-interest NGOs"—known as

BINGOs—representing big energy firms are allowed to participate with very little oversight.

They allege these groups use their industry connections to influence national negotiators in the process of hammering out a global plan to limit temperature rises and avert runaway planetary warming.

Environmental NGOs prepared a series of short films that were destined to be shown on large screens near the entrance to the sprawling COP24 complex in the Polish mining city of Katowice.

But after submitting the films for what they thought would be a pro-forma review, the UN objected to several frames mentioning fossil fuel-related activity.

In one email the UN liaison body asked for a shot containing the words "dirty energy" to be removed.

It also asked that the phrases "prohibit participation of fossil fuel corporations" and "why are politicians still approving pipelines, [coal plants](#) and fracking" be cut.

The climate convention prohibits "activity derisive to the UN, any of their member states, organisations or any individual or criticism that would go against basic rules of decorum".

But campaigners say their videos did not contravene these guidelines, as no specific country or company was named.

"The videos are otherwise of excellent quality and it would be a shame to exclude these high-quality videos on the basis of one or two short frames," the UN emailed.

'We're being silenced'

The COP24 takes place against the backdrop of

the most dire environmental warnings.

In October, a landmark report by a UN body of experts, the IPCC, highlighted for the first time the need to drastically cut fossil fuel use in order to rein in greenhouse gas emissions.

Exponents of coal and oil have long argued the world can continue using carbon-producing fuels as long as the emissions they produce can be sucked back out of the atmosphere.

The IPCC suggested the science showed otherwise.

"While we're being silenced, the same coal, oil and gas companies responsible for the crisis are allowed to plaster the halls with their logos and propaganda," Pascoe Sabido, researcher and campaigner at the Corporate Europe Observatory, told AFP.

"How can these negotiations help us keep [fossil fuels](#) in the ground, like the IPCC recommends, if we're not even allowed to mention dirty energy or gas pipelines?"

A UN spokesman told AFP the organisation had used "our best judgement to ensure that the videos displayed at this particular site are suitable".

COP24 host Poland has come in for criticism for enlisting several state-run coal and energy firms to sponsor the talks.

Another group was last week prevented from handing out fliers listing coal company sponsors.

Eilidh Robb, a volunteer with the UK Youth Climate Coalition said COP24 organisers were cracking down on any mention of fossil fuels.

"There seems to be a real fear coming from the Polish presidency of naming both countries or corporations even though they are accredited to be here," she told AFP.

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APA citation: Mention of 'fossil fuels' cut from videos at UN climate talks (2018, December 14) retrieved 6 October 2022 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-12-mention-fossil-fuels-videos-climate.html>

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