



COP28 in Dubai: What was achieved and what are its main outcomes?

By Marija Pujo Tadić

Introduction

Average global temperatures this year will be by a significant margin the hottest ever recorded, at about a 1.4°C rise, so the 1.5°C buffer is all but used up, while the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at concentrations never previously recorded and still rising rapidly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says current NDCs are insufficient to keep temperatures within 1.5°C, even if fully implemented. Carrying on as usual, without

change, is forecasted to lead to a catastrophic 2.9°C rise this century. Multilateral diplomacy includes diplomatic relations between more than two states, and after the World War I, the frequency of this type of diplomacy increased considerably. Multilateral diplomacy is often subject-centered, bringing states together in order to reach an agreement on a certain issue. When it comes to climate change, the primary forum for multilateral diplomacy is the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Negotiations, formally defined, are conversations between official state representatives designed to reach a formal agreement between their governments (herein referred to as Parties).

The UNFCCC is the first and fundamental document aimed at resolving the issue of climate change on a global scale. It was adopted in New York in May 1992 and signed at the summit in Rio de Janeiro in June that same year. It entered into force on 21 March 1994, and to date it has been ratified by 198 countries (parties). When talking about the Convention, we have to keep in mind what is the basic goal set by the Convention: "To achieve the stabilization of concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic impact on the climate system. This level should be achieved within a time frame long enough to allow the ecosystem to adapt to climate change, not to endanger food production and to enable the continuation of economic development in a sustainable manner."

Today's state of play speaks in favor of the success of climate diplomacy, because 198 countries of the world have acceded to the Convention. The Republic of Croatia joined the UNFCCC in 1996, with the Croatian Parliament adopting the Law on its confirmation (Official

Gazette - International Treaties, No. 2/96). The negotiations on climate change under the auspices of the UN represent a type of negotiations at the highest state level, where an individual state's size or GDP have no impact. The specificity, therefore, lies in the fact that the UNFCCC is one of the last remaining forums in the world where all countries, regardless of their size, are represented on equal footing and have equal voting rights to the largest economies and the largest countries of the world. Otherwise, most modern diplomacy takes place in small, only selected groups dominated by richer countries – G7, G20, OECD, OPEC – but the specificity of climate diplomacy is that all 198 countries have an equal representation in the UNFCCC. Moreover, an agreement can only be accepted by consensus.

Consequently, the entire negotiation process is very complex and requires diplomats' great expertise and qualifications for complex negotiations, which include a global mix of members of different peoples and different cultures of the world. Even the poorest countries of the world, often left out of international negotiations while contributing the least to the problem due to emitting the least amount of greenhouse gases, most faithfully participate in negotiations and contribute the most.

What is COP and why is it so important?

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the annual meeting of member countries that are parties to the Convention. COP meets annually, unless the parties decide otherwise. COP held its first meeting in March 1995 in Berlin, Germany. The COP is the highest decision-making body of the UNFCCC, bringing together representatives of member countries to discuss climate change progress and decide on future actions. COP decisions can have global authority: within the UN system, powerful countries like the United States and China have the same voting rights as small island states. Again, decisions can only be made by consensus.

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It is important to underline that the main goal of the COP is to facilitate cooperation among countries in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. This Conference plays a key role in negotiations on the amendments to existing agreements and in generating new agreements on climate-

related issues. With a steady growth of the number of participants over the past two decades, the Conferences have now become the largest annual meeting convened by the United Nations. This is the reason why observer organizations also send delegates, why industry representatives and lobbyists also attend, and why COP meetings attract significant media and public attention. Each COP has a specific Agenda and can focus on different topics, including emissions reduction, adaptation, technology transfer, and transparency in the implementation of measures. Of course, this refers to the formal part of the UNFCCC negotiation process that usually takes place in the so-called Blue Zone with limited access, where plenary rooms and bilateral meetings are reserved only for authorized state delegates. Each COP conference also hosts experts and influencers, NGO's and CEO's representatives and lobbyists who come together to share their stories and solutions in panel discussions, exhibitions, cultural events, and hundreds of side events held in the Green Zone.

Every year a different country presiding over the COP hosts the conference.

Usually, the UN guidelines state that the host country should rotate between the five global

regions, and countries in that region need to agree about who takes it on. The Presidency of the COP rotates between the five recognized regions of the UN – Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe and others. This rotation ensures that different parts of the world have the opportunity to be the hosts and demonstrate their commitment to addressing climate challenges. The regional group members of the host region hold consultations to agree on a country representative who will be nominated for election as President-designate. One of the member countries of the UNFCCC proposes to host the COP, and every year a different country presiding over the COP hosts the conference, which is decided during the running Conference. However, if there is no hosting offer, the COP can be held at the headquarters of the UNFCCC Secretariat in Bonn, Germany.

What did COP28 achieve and what are the main outcomes of COP28?

In the three decades since the Rio Summit and the launch of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP) convened member countries every year to determine their ambitions and responsibilities and to identify and evaluate

climate measures. The 21st session of the COP (COP21) brought about the Paris Agreement, which mobilized global collective action to limit the global temperature rise by 2100 to 1.5°C above the pre-industrial levels and to work on the adaptation to the already existing effects of climate change. The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC - COP28, was held from 30 November to 13 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and was the biggest of its kind with more than 90 thousand participants including more than 150 heads of state and government.

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If we want to briefly explain what was achieved at the COP28 in Dubai, we can say that it was agreed on the three most important points: the launch of the Loss and Damage Fund, the transition of the world from fossil fuels, and the establishment of a framework for the Global Adaptation Goal. In addition, this COP included the first ever Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement – to set out how far we have come since 2015 and to agree on the way forward. The outcome rightly recognizes that countries will follow different paths to move away from

fossil fuels, but the message is quite clear - that no nation can wait for energy transition. The transition from fossil fuels must be fair and swift — and no one must be left behind.

Let's take a closer look:

1. Loss and Damage Fund

In 2022 at COP27, it was finally agreed to create the Loss and Damage Fund, and whole year was used to negotiate its running and financing. After months of intense talks throughout the year, the Loss and Damage Fund was fully operationalized on the first day of the Dubai Summit. The fund is designed to help climate-vulnerable countries to deal with climate impacts that go beyond what people can adapt to. Getting the fund set into motion was a hard-fought journey where developing nations were forced to make significant concessions in order to reach a deal.

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A number of countries like the US and Germany as well as the EU also stepped in with roughly \$700 million. As welcome as this was, it is a drop in the ocean compared to the amount of \$580 billion in climate-related damage that

vulnerable countries may face by 2030. What does that mean for individual countries? They need to make much larger pledges to meet the needs of climate-vulnerable communities, but also mobilize innovative funding sources such as taxation of fossil fuels and shipping. Furthermore, nations should also include detailed sections on loss and damage in their next round of NDCs, providing cost estimates possible to drive predictable and adequate finance.

2. COP28 marks the beginning of the end of fossil fuels - A Rapid Shift from Fossil Fuels to Clean Energy - the world has agreed to set in motion an irreversible, accelerated transition away from fossil fuels.

COP28 sent a clear message and call to the world to transition from fossil fuels in energy systems to renewable sources in order to speed up action in this critical decade and achieve net zero by 2050 in a fair, orderly and equal manner. This marks both a rapid departure from fossil fuels and a long-term direction of movement towards a carbon-free future.

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Also very important is the agreement to triple the world's renewable energy capacity and double its energy efficiency by 2030. In addition, countries are urged to accelerate the reduction of road transport emissions through various pathways — not only through zero-emission vehicles, but also through the transition to public transport and safe cycling infrastructures, taking into account national circumstances. This serves as an essential basis for national policy making as countries decide how to contribute to the global energy transition and to ensure that no one in their country is left behind, while every nation must be part of the transition.

3. Global Stocktake

The main stage for much of COP28 2023 went to the first-ever Global Stocktake, the Paris Agreement's process to assess global progress every five years and mobilize stronger climate action. In more detail, the Global Stocktake evaluates the world's progress on slashing greenhouse gas emissions, building resilience to climate impacts, and securing finance and support to address the climate crisis. It underscores that if we do not take stronger action before the second Global Stocktake in 2028, we may witness a devastating reality of the global temperature soaring beyond 1.5°C.

Global Stocktake evaluates the world's progress on slashing greenhouse gas emissions.

It pinpoints key areas where immediate action must happen and provides a roadmap for the system transformations required to dramatically reduce emissions, build resilience and safeguard our future. It also illuminates a path forward that governments will need to take to combat the climate crisis. The Global Stocktake is intended to evaluate the progress on climate action at the global level — not the national level — and identify overall gaps to achieve the Paris Agreement as well as the opportunities to bridge them. Conducting the Global Stocktake every five years is meant to ensure that countries and other actors are increasingly ambitious with their actions to keep the Paris Agreement's goals in reach.

From these most important decisions, a number of other equally important conclusions arise:

1. **Technological Innovations:** Technological advancements play a pivotal role in the fight against climate change. COP28 highlighted breakthroughs in carbon capture and storage, sustainable agriculture practices and electric transportation.
2. **International Cooperation:** Recognizing the

interconnected nature of climate change, COP28 has reinforced the importance of global collaboration. The next steps involve strengthening international partnerships, providing financial support to developing nations and facilitating the transfer of green technologies.

3. Policy and Regulation: COP28 is expected to result in the formulation and adoption of stringent policies and regulations to curb CO2 emissions. Countries may introduce carbon pricing mechanisms, impose emissions caps on industries and incentivize sustainable practices.

4. Public Awareness and Education: A crucial aspect of addressing climate change is fostering public awareness and education. COP28 emphasized the importance of educating communities on sustainable practices and the consequences of climate change.

5. Adaptation and Resilience Building: In addition to mitigation measures, COP28 prioritized adaptation strategies and resilience-building efforts. Nations will likely outline plans to cope with the impacts of climate change, including sea-level rise, extreme weather events and disruptions to ecosystems.

6. Renewable Energy Transition: COP28 witnessed a collective commitment to accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Nations will likely pledge to increase the share of renewable energy in their energy mix, with specific targets for solar, wind and other clean energy sources.

7. COP28's flagship youth day hosted the first ever Youth Stocktake, bringing together thousands of young people from across the globe under the banner of climate action. This youth day represents a critical moment to engage youth in climate policymaking, ensuring the meaningful inclusion of children and young people in the process of climate policy-making.

Conclusion

COP28 represents a pivotal moment in the global fight against climate change. The decisions and commitments made during this conference have the potential to reshape our collective future and pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient world. The transition to renewable energy, adoption of innovative technologies and international collaboration are expected to be key drivers in achieving the ambitious climate goals set forth at COP28. As nations embark on the next steps outlined

at COP28, it is imperative that the momentum gained from this conference is sustained.

Continuous monitoring, evaluation and adjustment of strategies will be essential to ensure that the world stays on track to meet its climate targets. By working together and implementing the outlined actions, we can strive towards a future where the impacts of climate change are mitigated and our planet thrives in harmony with nature. Indeed, the COP28 in Dubai marks a significant turning point. After COP27, it represents an inflection point and a small step forward in the journey towards global sustainability and environmental protection. It sets the stage for more concrete actions and collaborative efforts in the future, laying the groundwork for impactful change.

The next COP29 will take place in Baku, Azerbaijan.

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