

On COP 27 outcomes
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Since the Paris Agreement in 2015 and based on Laudato Si' encyclical, the key Catholic Climate Justice demands at the recent Climate Summits are related to four pillars: “mitigation; adaptation; finance; and loss and damage. These four pillars are interconnected and are a marker of fairness, justice, and equity”¹ based on faith values, and should be delivered by all Nations as soon as possible. Though admitting the road to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement is complex, actions on its four pillars are every day more urgent since the warning of climate science is unambiguous.²

Financing concerns creating new funds for Loss and Damage (L&D) policies and strategies in vulnerable countries, as well as, the financing of just transition in terms of alternative energies. Mitigation also includes the urgent need to phase out fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas).

In line with the latter, the Vatican Dicastery for Human Development has adopted the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty on July 5, 2022, calling for ending all new exploration and production of coal, oil and gas; a phase-out of

¹ Pietro Cardinal Parolini, Intervento del Cardinale Segretario di Stato alla Conferenza delle Nazioni Unite sui Cambiamenti Climatici COP 27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, 6-18 novembre 2022), 08.11.2022. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2022/11/08/0835/01734.html>

² We can simply say that “every bit of warming matters”, according to Climate Science. The report on Climate Change Mitigation by the United Nations Panel of Experts (IPCC-WGIII) recently confirmed that the world must cut its greenhouse gas emissions - including carbon dioxide - by half by 2030 in order to stay within the 1.5°C global warming limit set by the Paris Agreement at the 2015 Climate Summit. Cf. IPCC-WGIII, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, R. Slade, A. Al Khourdajie, R. van Diemen, D. McCollum, M. Pathak, S. Some, P. Vyas, R. Fradera, M. Belkacemi, A. Hasija, G. Lisboa, S. Luz, J. Malley, (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. doi: 10.1017/9781009157926. https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FinalDraft_FullReport.pdf

existing production of fossil fuels in line with the 1.5°C global climate goal and a fast track in real solutions and a just and fair transition for everyone.

Having said that, gathered in Sharm El Sheikh at COP 27 venue, Nations have achieved some important points on the Climate Change L&D agenda. Countries have decided “to establish new funding arrangements for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable” to the impacts of climate change, including a fund and the mobilisation of new and additional resources, “recognising the need for support from a wide variety of sources, including innovative sources”.

In this sense, for instance, the European Union during the negotiations floated the idea of contributions from oil and gas companies, as well as levies on air tickets and shipping containers, to go towards a loss and damage fund.

The creation of the fund is to be established by a transitional committee over the course of the present year.

Another not minor positive aspect of COP27 was the launch of a new work program that includes an annual meeting of ministers to discuss the just transition to alternative energies, providing a forum for the talks that have already begun on the issue of fossil fuels, as we will see below.

All the above is indeed a great progress in the Climate Justice Agenda.

However, on the other hand, little progress or nothing has been done in mitigation of climate change, which means to tackle the main driver of it, that is to say, fossil fuels as the first and foremost cause of global warming.

Note that it was only at COP 26 in Glasgow, in November 2021, that something about the problem of fossil fuels was included for the first time in an official

text governing the climate commitments of the Paris Agreement. It was a major achievement, albeit with loopholes.

That COP 26 cover document offered the intention to “phase down unabated” and “phase out inefficient oil subsidies”, without any specification of terms.

For example, what does “unabated coal” mean? The term is not specifically defined and lends itself to abuse by the fossil fuel industry and producing countries to justify continued coal production. Nor does the term mention oil and gas. Also, the term “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies” was used 13 years ago at a G20 meeting in 2009, but it was never made clear what makes a fossil fuel subsidy “efficient”. Since then, the term has been misused to cover up the continued public financing of coal, oil and gas.

For this reason, the Holy See expressed its concern at the time about the existence of “several gaps” in the COP 26 document in the areas of mitigation, adaptation and financing”, elements that are “fundamental to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement”. The Church understands that mitigation of climate change unfailingly passes through the phasing out of fossil fuels, as climate science indicates (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 165).

In this COP 27, the final document ended up being a hopeless copy and paste from COP 26 cover paper on this key issue of fossil fuels. The same words and the same loopholes and inaccuracies that leave room for any interpretation, such as greenwashing and reliance on as yet unproven technology. There is an inclusion of a transition to low-emission energy, which is essentially gas, that is a source of GreenHouse Gases.

Could this procrastination mean that there are some countries that think of climate geo-engineering as a solution to the problem? Let us hope this is not the case.

In this sense, the outcome of COP 27 is deeply disappointing for the Catholic community who hoped and worked for an advanced agreement on fossil fuel phase-out.

With nearly 25% more delegates from fossil fuels-related companies at COP 27 than at COP 26, some national delegates were fond of watering down the Glasgow agreement.

There were several proposals regarding the elimination of fossil fuels, such as that of India, which in the days prior to the closing of the COP, proposed the phase-down not only of unabated coal but of all fossil fuels. Any attempt to move forward with respect to what was agreed at COP 26 did not succeed.

What was clear, nonetheless, is that some countries are stubbornly refusing to heed the warnings of climate science, which clearly stated in the latest report of the Panel of Experts (IPCC) that it is urgent to halve carbon dioxide emissions by 2030.

The important thing to note is that these are about twenty countries with strong oil interests that until the last moment monopolized the discussion to water down the language of the document (they said: “the convention should address emissions and not the origin of emissions”). On the contrary, more than 80 countries, including the Holy See, requested that the elimination of fossil fuels be formally included. This growing critical mass of countries is a sign of hope for next COP 28 in the Arabian Emirates. We are now working to make this critical mass of countries grow in the present year in order to make a profound difference in climate change mitigation.

Our priorities concerning Climate Justice are: Fossil Fuels Divestment by our Catholic Institutions worldwide, and to achieve that a majority of National Governments support and call for a Fossil Fuels Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Note:

Both COP 26 and 27 speak of “phasing down unabated coal”. Coal power abatement is generally understood to mean the use of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) or Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) technology which does not technically work. So in converse, ‘unabated coal’ means coal power plant without CC(U)S technology equipment. The lack of technical functionality to achieve unabated coal, allows the fossil fuel industry and producing countries to abuse and justify continued coal production. Likewise, the term “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies” was first included thirteen years ago at a G20 meeting in 2009, but it was never made clear what makes a fossil fuel subsidy “efficient”. Since then, the term has been misused to cover up the continued public financing of coal, oil and gas. Therefore, the expressions used in both COP 26 and 27 documents are insufficient to seriously address the drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.