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COP28: the annual reiteration of a premeditated fiasco



Sources: The climate tide [Image: Some of the world's top leaders gather at COP28 in Dubai. Photo: COP28 / Neville Hopwood copy]

Miguel Pajares affirms that a drastic reduction of fossil fuels and a transformation of the production system are necessary to combat climate change. "That will not be done by the market, it must be done through public policies," he says.

In the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in 1992 Governments around the world took on board what science had established, that climate change was taking place that was dangerous to the human species, and that, unlike all the

previous ones that happened on the planet, this one we were It was caused by the greenhouse gases that We have been broadcasting since the beginning of industrialization.

The commitment made by governments was to reduce those emissions, and since then they have been meeting at the annual COPs to revalidate this purpose. Emissions, however, However, they have done nothing but grow globally. Only the Union The European Union has reduced them, but this has been largely due to **offshoring**: if we were to count the emissions involved in everything we consume in Europe, but If it is produced in other parts of the world, our balance would not be the same.

The non-compliance with that Convention is flagrant, especially on the part of **Countries They generate the most emissions per capita**. Year Year after year (with the exception of 2020) emissions have been growing and marking records: the last year analysed by UNEP (United Nations Programme for the Environment), in 2022, reached their [value maximum](#) to date, 57.4 Gt CO₂and, it is more than likely that UNEP will Say next year that in 2023 we have surpassed it again.

Thus it has It's been so far, but what can we expect for the next few years? Might Assume that things are changing, since since 2019 governments have been making much stronger pledges and resources for a green transition are finally substantial (EU Next Generation funds, etc.). However, the reality is quite different from such expectations, as I am going to show you. continuation.

In the Fight against climate change, the concrete objective for the coming years it was marked by the IPCC (UN agency) [at the warn us](#) that, **in order to maintain the climate in an area Surely, greenhouse gas emissions should have been reduced by by 2030, 43% compared to 2019**. Such a goal was assumed by the governments of the countries that produce the most emitters (European, ...), and, between 2019 and 2021, promises of reduction of emissions by 2030.

But declarations are one thing, but concrete measures and commitments that lead to their effective reduction are quite another. If we look for concrete commitments, we can look at the so-called **Nationally Determined Contributions** (NDCs) that governments periodically submit to the UN. UNEP has [analysed](#) those submitted before COP28 and what it has told us is that, even if governments fulfilled their commitments (which has not been the case), emissions in 2030 would only have decreased by 2% compared to 2019. A far cry from the 43% needed.

"If fossil fuel production and consumption increase, it's because governments facilitate it"

The Truth is that, at the annual COPs, **governments make speeches But the concrete measures they put in place do not lead to the Decrease in emissions.** What has been happening From 1992 until now, it will continue to happen in the coming years: They are not going down, nor do they have any prospect of doing so in the medium term.

What is it that What's wrong? Why are rich countries so incapable of achieving a reduction in the of emissions that allows us to be confident that we are really fighting against the climate threat? To answer this, we necessarily have to speak the origin of emissions and thus the consumption of fossil fuels, who is primarily responsible for them. **It'ssurprising how little is talks about petroleum and other fuels** (coal and at the annual COPs, because if governments talk about reducing emissions, They should also talk about reducing what causes them.

The Truth is that the consumption of fossil fuels continues to increase and there is no government that has made any concrete commitment to reverse that tendency. At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, a weak commitment to reduce the use of coal, but, following the start of the war in Ukraine, all Governments, including European ones, immediately forgot about it.

It has been There was a lot of pressure to finally talk about the fossil fuels, including oil, but production plans submitted by governments have been analysed by UNEP and it has told us that **"the Government Plans Will Lead to Worldwide Increases in Production coal production by 2030, and oil and gas production by 2050, at least."**

What if increases the production and consumption of fossil fuels, is because fossil fuels governments facilitate this, including those who say they are most committed with the weather. The proof of this is that [subsidies fossil fuels continue to](#) grow. In In 2022, those subsidies more than doubled: according to the [report](#) by the IMF in August 2023, went from 500,000 million dollars in 2021 to 1.3 trillion in 2022.

But those they are only what are called "explicit subsidies"; If we also count the impacts of fossil fuels on global warming and climate change. air pollution (which no one forces them to pay for), subsidies in in 2022 they amount to 7 trillion dollars, as the IMF itself points out. The Truth is that, since the Paris Agreement, fossil fuel subsidies have from \$4.2 trillion (in 2015) to the aforementioned \$7 trillion in the 2022.

This is something in which the European Union is also involved. According to the report on the 2023 State of Energy, Energy Sector Subsidies Passed from €216,000 million in 2021 to €390,000 million in 2022, something that the European Commission blames the energy crisis caused by the war on Ukraine. But of such subsidies, fossil fuels were the

most beneficiaries: more than 123,000 million euros were subsidized, while Subsidies for renewables were 87,000 million.

All of this It is a terrible handicap in the fight against climate change. They are assumed to be climate commitments without calling into question what is the main cause emissions, which is nothing more than the consumption of fossil fuels. COPs tiptoe around this issue, and in order for this to be the case, **the Oil companies are the ones with the most delegates.**

This year, moreover, the problem is aggravated, as COP28 is chaired by [Sultan Al Jaber](#), who is also president of the Emirati state oil company Adnoc. In addition, the main representative of the European Union is the recently appointed European Commissioner for Climate Action, the Dutchman [Wopke Hoekstra](#), who previously worked for the oil company Shell, one of the largest in the world.

"Tripling renewable energies is not enough to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels if energy expenditure continues to increase"

On view Out of all that, there will be people who wonder what it is, then, that is discusses at the COPs, what kind of commitments are assumed. **In COP28 the main topics to be discussed are the energy transition, the loss and damage finance and carbon trading rules,** But in this article I only focus on the energy transition, which is the more related to emissions (the other two issues are also very important). important, but would deserve other articles).

What I know is that, by 2030, **triple the** world's renewable energy, which increase **energy efficiency** and increase **electrification**. All three things are essential to tackle the climate emergency: We need a big development of renewables, we need to improve the energy efficiency to save energy, and we need to electrify (electrify heating, electrify transportation—by pouring it over the electrify industry, electrify everything you can).

All of that is part of the fight against climate change, but it also encompasses the trap that is preventing such a struggle from being **successful: It assumes that a broad development of renewable energy will lead to a itself to go without fossil fuels.** And this It is, unfortunately, the greatest fallacy that dominates government policies; a sophistry that is making the fight against climate change a complete fiasco.

Them renewable energies are having an extraordinary development, and yet UNEP has told us, as we saw earlier, that the production of fuels Fossils will continue to grow in the coming decades. What is the reason for this apparent contradiction? Basically, **because**

economic growth demands all the energy provided by fossil fuels and all that can be added by fossil fuels. renewables.

This is It understands better if we see where the energy we are consuming comes from. According to The [latest data](#) given According to the Energy Institute, oil contributes 31.6% of the energy that coal 26.7%, gas 23.5%, hydroelectric 6.7%, 4.0% and, finally, renewables together with agrofuels 7.5%, but, if we only take into account solar and wind renewables, their percentage is 2.5%. (Much higher percentages are often given for renewables, but it is not said that they refer only to electricity, and not to We must forget that this is 17.4% of the primary energy consumed. The rest is direct fuel consumption.)

We therefore assume that the three fossil fuels provide 81.8% of primary energy, while solar and wind only contribute 2.5%. Trolling renewable energies, as intended, is not enough to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, if energy expenditure continues to increase. And, in fact, energy expenditure continues to grow despite all the energy efficiency improvements that are being made. The data amply confirm this: according to the Statistical Review of World Energy, in 1990, the world used about 340 exajoules of energy per year; in 2000, it spent \$380; in 2010, it spent \$480; and at the beginning of this decade there were already 595. Three decades in which energy efficiency has not ceased to grow.

"A profound transformation of the production and consumption system is required"

The The reality is that **the capitalist economy**, as it really works, forced to maintain economic growth does **not allow us to make the energy transition**, or, In other words, it **does not allow us to face the emergency climate**. We can continue to deceive ourselves as long as we want. governments may continue to exhibit their impostures at the COPs, but the truth is that that we're not fighting climate change.

This fight requires immediate reductions in fossil fuel consumption (6% yearly, [he told us](#) nations United States at the beginning of this decade, to achieve a reduction in emissions of the 7% per annum), and that's not possible if all the most emitting businesses (the oil companies, automobiles, airlines, goods by sea and roads, agribusiness, [fashion](#), tourism, technology, etc.) they continue to grow.

Herself It requires a profound transformation of the production and consumption system. We have to change what we produce, how we produce it, how we do it. we transport it and how we consume it. **Much of the production** that was moved to remote locations, you have to develop **local consumption**, We have to drastically reduce the transport of goods, we have to produce that which serves to satisfy real human needs and cease to exist.

produce what is only good for the luxury consumption of the richest (Oxfam It has just published a report in which it says that the richest 1% of the population generates more emissions than the poorest 66%). **All That will not be done by the market, it must be done through public policies.**

The change we have to make is of colossal dimensions, it is a difficult change, it is true, but it is the one that corresponds to an emergency situation. Many governments and parliaments have declared a state of climate emergency, now they must be consistent with it. **A government that truly confronts the climate crisis as an emergency will be one that sets in motion the appropriate transformations in all its ministries, in all its policies;** A government that applies emergency criteria to industrial, agrarian, commercial, labor, social, fiscal and all other policies. It's not something that can be done overnight, but you have to start doing it.

Miguel Pajares is a member of Ecologists in Action and author of '[Bla-bla-blah. The Myth of Ecological Capitalism](#)' (Editorial Rayo Verde)

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