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COP 28

# U.S Makes Big Promises at COP28—Will They Be Fulfilled?

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### **Vice-President Kamala Harris attempted at the COP28 summit to put the United States forward as the leader in dealing with the climate crisis, but critics felt that both the U.S. and COP28 failed to address the existential climate crisis.**

The meeting of leaders from 197 nations was from the beginning ambiguous. Though its goal is to reduced fossil fuels and their carbon emissions, it was held in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), an oil-producing nation. The president of COP28, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber is the head of both Masdar, the government sponsored renewable energy corporation, and of Andoc, the UAE's national oil company. Participants in the conference were warned beforehand by the authoritarian state not to "criticize Islam, the government, corporations or individuals" nor to protest.

Advising Al Jaber was McKinsey & Company, a U.S. consultant to America's ExxonMobil and Saudi Arabia's Aramco. McKinsey's draft for COP28 called for \$2.7 trillion a year in new oil and gas investment until 2050 in complete contradiction of environmentalists' goals of ending fossil fuels.

Harris led the U.S. delegation that also included special climate envoy John Kerry. Harris told the assembly, "This is a pivotal moment – our action collectively, or worse our inaction, will impact billions of people for decades to come."

The U.S. put forward some important proposals. First, Harris announced that the U.S would contribute \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund for renewable energy and climate resiliency worldwide. But the U.S. Congress has yet to pass such a contribution and the Republicans who control the House oppose virtually any action on climate. So, the contribution might never be made.

The U.S. also supported COP28's principal resolution, Oil and Gas Decarbonization Charter, which involved pledges by 50 of the world's oil and gas companies to tighten up their methane systems to prevent leaks. Methane is more powerful than carbon dioxide in the production of the greenhouse gasses that raise global temperatures. As Kerry said, "It's mostly plumbing, simple, tightening the screws, shutting off leaks, stopping the flaring, stopping the venting, which is just wasting gas, burning it off in the atmosphere and doing damage." The question is, can the oil companies be counted on to do this voluntarily?

At the same time, Harris announced the United States would adopt new regulations to reduce methane by 80% from levels that would be expected without the new rules. Oil companies will no doubt challenge any new regulations in court. So, this is another promise that might not be fulfilled.

The U.S.'s role in the COP28 decisions has had the qualified backing of the Environmental Defense Fund, the most powerful U.S. environmental group. But some climate activists are not so satisfied. They have criticized Biden for failing to attend and ridiculed America's puny contribution of only \$17.5 million to the Loss and Damage Fund. Through this fund wealthy and high greenhouse gas producing nations help developing countries, that produce little greenhouse gas but are harmed by climate change, with the rebuilding of communities and economies, ecological restoration, and even relocation.

Others criticized the Biden administration for signing more leases permitting companies to drill for oil, for example at Willow, Alaska. Even Gore, who praised Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, involving progressive environmental legislation and the U.S. and COP methane accords, noted, "Of course the continued leasing of oil and gas drilling

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rights on public lands is a concern.”

According to Climate Action Tracker, since signing of the Paris Climate Accord in 2015, not one of the 194 signing nations has been in compliance. And the latest U.N. report says the world is failing to meet its climate goals. The COP28 conference may represent some progress, but we face a global catastrophe, and it will take more powerful social movements and political action to stop the use of fossil fuels and end the climate crisis.

*3 December 2023*

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