

UAE AND COP 28: A BOLD VISION

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COP28

UAE

The contemporary global scenario grapples with a range of non-traditional security challenges, among which climate change stands out as one of the most significant. The world is at a crucial point in addressing the repercussions of climate change, causing widespread destruction and escalating with each passing day. It also poses a serious risk to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The destructive effects of climate change have reached a critical juncture, necessitating urgent action by the global community.

The 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), recently held in Dubai, led to a landmark agreement, marking a pivotal shift towards the phase-out of fossil fuels. Following intensive negotiations, the global community forged a historic climate accord, emphasizing the urgency of transitioning away from these carbon-intensive energy sources.

Over the span of two consecutive years, the Arab world has shouldered the responsibility of hosting two significant climate change summits, commonly referred to as the Conference of the Parties (COP). The most recent gathering, COP27, occurred in Egypt in November 2022, and COP28 took place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in November 2023. Preceding these events, the Arab region has hosted three other COPs, with two in Morocco (COP7 in 2001 and COP22 in 2016) and one in Qatar (COP18 in 2012). Notably, among others, the UAE has demonstrated substantial leadership in promoting climate action. Despite the establishment of administrative institutions by host countries

to tackle climate change, tangible national-level climate action was limited until the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Before 2015, among the six GCC states, only the UAE had a consistent climate policy framework, while green energy initiatives in the GCC region were predominantly experimental or research-oriented, lacking practical integration as alternatives to hydrocarbons. The UAE is a strong advocate for action on air quality as a complement to climate action. Addressing air quality has been a focal point of environmental concerns in the UAE since the initiation of the UAE Vision 2021 plan in 2013.¹ The UAE has been consistent in its efforts towards achieving meaningful results vis-a-vis climate change and green energy opportunities. The country continues to work towards a green future and the initiation of the UAE's Green Agenda 2030 is an example, which is geared towards achieving objectives such as a 4 to 5 percent GDP growth, a rise in exports by approximately AED 24 to 25 billion, and a reduction of the country's emissions to below 100 kilowatt-hours.² UAE's NetZero 2050 strategic initiative is also a testament to the country's commitment to mitigating climate change. The commencement of data collection and air quality monitoring coincided with the inception of UAE Vision 2021, and it was subsequently broadened to support the objectives outlined in the UAE's National Air Quality Agenda 2031 (NAQA). NAQA serves as the guiding framework for addressing indoor and outdoor air pollution, as well as noise pollution and ambient odors. The UAE has a dedicated commitment to minimizing emissions originating from gas flaring. Over the period spanning 1995 to 2010, the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) achieved a notable reduction of up to 78 percent in gas flaring. The current strategic objective is to completely eliminate routine flaring. The reduction of methane emissions and ground-level ozone is poised not only to enhance health outcomes but also to align with the UAE's targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The consensus at COP 28 and the following agreement signifies a critical step in achieving the 1.5°C warming limit, recognized as essential for combating climate change. It underscores the need for drastic and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, aligning with scientifically-informed 1.5°C pathways. A core outcome of COP 28 is the 'Global Stocktake,' a fresh mechanism for strengthening climate action before 2030. This plan guides countries to formulate robust climate action plans by 2025, prioritizing a 43% global emissions reduction by 2030 (compared to 2019) to stay on track for the 1.5°C target.³ The agreement emphasizes ambitious global initiatives, including

¹ UAE Enters COP28 Leadership With National Air Quality Agenda, Climate and Clean Air Coalition, October 4, 2023 <https://www.ccacoalition.org/news/uae-enters-cop28-leadership-national-air-quality-agenda>

² The UAE's Green Agenda – 2030, <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/environment-and-energy/the-uaes-green-agenda-2030>

³ Sadiq Shaban, Explainer: COP28 is a milestone in climate action, December 13, 2023, Gulf News, <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/explainer-cop28-is-a-milestone-in-climate-action-1.99926262>

tripling renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency improvements by 2030. Furthermore, it highlights initiatives to phase out unrestricted coal power, eliminate inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and ensure a fair transition away from fossil fuels, with developed nations playing a leadership role. Recognizing the urgency of translating pledges into action, the agreement calls for immediate implementation of measures aligned with the Global Stocktake's objectives. Notably, the emphasis on a just and equitable transition underscores the responsibility of developed nations to guide this pivotal transformation.

The COP28, hosted by the UAE in Dubai, reflects an evolving commitment to addressing climate change. Notably, the UAE has showcased proactive leadership in advocating climate action, transitioning from experimental green initiatives to strategic frameworks which are a part of its vision and the Green Agenda 2030. COP28's landmark agreement denotes a crucial milestone in pursuing globally agreed targets, stressing radical emission reductions, renewable energy amplification, and equitable fossil fuel phase-out. The UAE's proactive stance with regards to climate action reflects its serious commitment to the cause and is seen in its leadership role in this regard. By utilizing their extensive renewable energy assets and financial capabilities, the Gulf States have the potential to significantly contribute to advancing the worldwide shift towards a green future.