

## Heroes, villains and opportunists at Dubai climate summit

*For small countries, these meetings are the only way to confront the major global powers face to face and have their opinions considered.*

Javier Andaluz Prieto

**L**ast December, [COP28 concluded](#) in Dubai, yet another summit in which the meagre progress is still far from addressing the real climate emergency we are experiencing. Although the need to get rid of fossil fuels has finally been recognised after 28 years of negotiations, the result is still bitter, especially because of the inclusion of false solutions such as nuclear energy, carbon capture, or gas as an alternative fuel, all of which are too expensive and dangerous technologies.

The best recap of this summit is probably in the last movements of the final plenary, when Al-Jaber, president of COP28 and CEO of the oil company ADNOC, rushed to approve the final document without all the countries being present. Among the absentees were the representatives of the small island states,

*Small island states have been stressing that, for these peoples, the climate struggle is a matter of survival.*

who criticised the president's conduct for excluding almost 39 small and very vulnerable states. Samoa, representing these islands, complained that the consensus reached was still far from the actions needed and showed that, despite progress in recognising the indications of science at this COP28, the outcome is insufficient to guarantee the 1.5°C target.

The role of these small States has always been relevant. Their positions have always underlined that, for these peoples, the climate struggle is a matter of survival. Thus, they have always stated that they cannot return to their



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territories with more time lost. For them, these summits are the only real loudspeaker they have at their disposal to confront the major global powers face-to-face and take their opinions into account.

This group represents better than anyone the urgency of the challenge and how expensive it will be to remain stuck in a permanent fight between those who want to do nothing, those who only want to reduce emissions and those who only seek climate funds. This competition framework between countries is exasperating as summit after summit repeats the confrontation between financing and mitigation, which prevents us from moving forward with the necessary speed.

It is a fallacious dilemma since progress on both elements is the only possible answer. A good example is the words of the Colombian Minister of the Environment, who expressed her willingness to do away with fossil fuels in one of the plenary sessions, but only if the necessary conditions were met. These conditions depended on the fact that a possible reduction in Colombia's exports would have the immediate consequence of devaluing its currency, a luxury they could not afford if they wanted to eradicate poverty. This intervention clearly showed the problem of an international financial structure where many countries depend on exploiting fossil fuels to maintain their economies and pay an illegitimate and odious debt. This reality is reflected for the first time in the text of a climate summit, recognising that the fight against climate change should not generate debt for countries. Unfortunately, this is left in the hands

*Saudi Arabia used the necessary unanimity at summits as a weapon to prevent progress in the climate struggle.*

of some institutions, such as the World Bank, to carry out fiscal reform to alleviate the problems they have generated.

The worst side of the defence of oil was the Saudi Arabian delegation, which has already managed to avoid an explicit mention of fossil fuels in the Paris Agreement and used the unanimity required at the summits as a weapon to prevent progress in the climate fight. The Saudi delegation's interventions during the Dubai summit focused on diverting attention away from talking about fossils and concentrating on talking about emissions. These interventions were entirely supported by OPEC, which, in desperation, came out against any mention of abandoning oil, arguing the negative effects on the economies of its member countries. Their position is not surprising: it should be remembered that before the discovery of oil, many of the organisation's member countries were extremely poor.

While it is true that the fight against climate change must be differentiated according to the capabilities of different countries so that those most responsible for the climate crisis are reduced first, this cannot be used as a pretext to prevent the world from moving towards decarbonisation. This summit has seen inequality increasingly used as an excuse to block ambition. In fact, many countries have tried to instrumentalise the principles of differentiated responsibilities to continue ad infinitum with fossil fuel exports, as Bolivia has repeatedly advocated.

As for the global North, the situation is much worse. Their speeches are hardly credible, the most hurtful being that of the United States, the country with the greatest historical responsibility, which time and again flatly refuses to acknowledge its enormous debt to the rest of the world. The announcement of the first funds for losses and damages was met with American condescension, which, in a burst of "generosity", pledged \$17.5 million. An amount that is, at best, a bad joke when compared to any of the contributions of other less wealthy and populated countries, and at worst, in a context of genocide in Palestine, with the American Administration spending billions of dollars on armaments, it is a direct insult. As if that were not enough, the enormous geopolitical power of the

White House is backed by the servility of the EU countries, which have not even opened their mouths to ask for a greater contribution.

In this game of interests, Europe tries to present itself as a climate leader on the basis of defending, on numerous occasions, the most ambitious position in terms of emission reductions and being the leading international contributor to climate funds. This image contrasts with the promised reductions falling far short of scientific recommendations and, above all, with the continued encouragement of fossil fuel projects within and outside European borders. Europe's attitude is often perceived as paternalistic and colonial, especially in its efforts to demonstrate that its way of responding to the climate crisis is the best option, ignoring the experiences and needs of other countries.

This need for financing was reflected in the COP28 text, which recognises that eight to fifteen times more financing is needed. The next summit will not succeed if the countries of the North do not provide the necessary and sufficient funding so that the hundreds of impoverished countries can opt for models far removed from fossil fuel dependence and face the climatic consequences.

This complexity requires a lot of empathy. Understanding what the global reality is is fundamental if we want to end a capitalist, extractivist and patriarchal system. Clearly, superficial judgments of these frameworks only abound in distancing us from a viable response. Facing the climate emergency requires being precise in the critique, mainly when dealing with something as complex as the economic, social and cultural diversity reflected in the negotiation spaces. Understanding the multiple points of view that converge in the climate summits becomes an urgent and ethical responsibility of public authorities and social movements.

To understand that this framework is the consequence of societies and States. A meeting that is neither the only nor the most decisive but is where the changes achieved at the local, regional and state levels must be reflected. We should not deceive ourselves and pretend that, without having put an end to the fossil, extractivist, neocolonialist and patriarchal system, these summits can agree on something different from capitalism, in a dynamic that we see repeated in the hundreds of multilateral climate treaties that follow the same tone of lack of ambition and action.

It is necessary to end the eco-posturing (whether healthy or ill-intentioned) that summits bring with them. During the days the COP lasts, constant events, articles, and publications in the media and social networks launch messages far removed from the content or understanding of space. Simplistic messages of greenwashing, possibilism or outright contempt for the international climate struggle are a constant in social networks and other spaces that distract from the real priorities. This attitude leaves fertile ground for those who used to dedicate effort to denying the climate crisis and now dedicate it to falsely "sell themselves" as the solution to the problems. The

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denouncing their presence and pointing them out.

ideal for them would be to remain alone in this space as the only actors to continue with the trivialisation of the climate struggle and the transformation of the negotiations into an even more useless fair. The first line of defence is to continue

Nor can we ignore our responsibility as a privileged North to be present to accompany the denunciations of those who risk their lives and demand from our governments the historic reparations we owe. Staining ourselves to the incoherence and frustration of being in these spaces is the first step in demanding those historical reparations.

Participating in the international climate community requires an exercise in generosity and empathy. It requires understanding the realities of each territory, how far they can advance, and how the different ways of seeing the world come together. These summits are the loudspeaker of injustices, where precisely those who live in contexts such as Europe have more responsibility.

We cannot base our evaluations of these summits on the assumption of the same capacity for advocacy and self-organisation in all countries, especially if we come from a European colonising power. The privilege of being critical of our governments allows us to say what many others cannot and to take responsibility for the impacts we are generating in the global South. For many peoples, the pressure exerted from European civil society on their countries matters. Showing solidarity and the will of citizens for these historical reparations calls into question the declarations of political leaders.

It is worthwhile to unite to denounce the systematic violation of human rights through actions, slogans, applause and tears. Especially this year, it is showing the pain of the world's social movements in the face of the genocide in Palestine and demanding in front of the whole world and on the front page of the leading international media the immediate ceasefire.

The timid climatic advances make clear all that remains to be done at all levels. To continue resisting and weaving ties in an increasingly hostile world is how to fight for the planet we want.

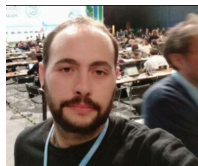
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❖ **About the author: Javier Andaluz Prieto** is a delegate of Ecologistas en Acción at COP28.



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❖ **Quote this paper as:** Javier Andaluz Prieto: "Heroes, villains and opportunists at Dubai climate summit" — The Jus Semper Global Alliance, June 2024.

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