

# Nothing will change on climate until death toll rises in west, says Gabonese minister

**Before Cop27, Lee White also says broken promises on funding leave sense of betrayal**



Residents fill a cooling centre in Portland, Oregon, during record breaking temperatures in 2021. Photograph: Nathan Howard/Getty Images

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The world will only take meaningful action on the climate crisis once people in rich countries start dying in greater numbers from its effects, Gabon’s environment minister has said, while warning that broken promises on billions of dollars of adaptation finance have left a “sense of betrayal” before Cop27.

Lee White said governments were not yet behaving as if global heating was a crisis, and he feared for the future he was leaving to his children. He said the \$100bn of promised climate finance from rich nations was not reaching poor countries, which was driving distrust in the UN climate process.

The UN has framed Cop27, which begins next week in Sharm el-Sheikh, as “the **Africa** climate conference”, and loss and damage finance for countries experiencing the worst consequences of global heating will be a key issue.

“With everything that’s happened in the last year in the Horn of Africa and Pakistan – those places really count,” White said. “But with the once-in-a-500-year drought in Europe, fires in France, and the New York subway becoming Niagara Falls, we might be at a point where things are getting bad enough that developed nations start taking the climate more seriously.



Gabon's environment minister Lee White at the COP26 summit in Glasgow. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

“It’s a horrible thing to say but until more people in developed nations are dying because of the climate crisis, it’s not going to change,” White said.

Recent **reports show** how close the planet is to climate catastrophe, with scientists warning that the world has reached a “really bleak moment”.

Gabon, one of the most forested nations and home to more than half of the remaining **critically endangered African forest elephants**, is holding one of the largest ever sales of carbon credits, generated by protecting its portion of the Congo basin rainforest, the world's second largest and the last that sucks in more carbon than it releases.

White said his country, which gets about 60% of its state revenue from oil, accepted that the oil economy would go and that greater emphasis needed to be placed on sustainable forestry and timber.

“We’ve not really actively promoted the death of the oil industry like Costa Rica,” he said, referencing the **Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance** launched at Cop26 in Glasgow by the Central American country and Denmark. “We recognise that the oil industry will disappear.”

The politician, originally from Manchester, said he had seen only small amounts of climate funding for his country despite big promises, which was driving frustration with the UN climate process.

“Over and over again, developed nations have committed and not delivered. They’ve committed to reduce emissions and they’re not delivering sufficiently. They’ve committed to funding and that funding doesn’t ever seem to materialise. We didn’t create the problem and so you would expect a more sincere engagement from developed nations and you would expect them to respect their word and their engagements,” he said.

“I have three kids. I tell them that my absences are about trying to save the planet. They get it, because it’s real. We are creating a really big problem for the next generation.”