

Treaty against fossil fuels floated at UN climate summit

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today



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Kausea Natano, prime minister of Tuvalu, speaks at the COP27 U.N. Climate Summit, Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — The world should confront climate change the way it does nuclear weapons, by agreeing to a non-proliferation treaty that stops further production of fossil fuels, a small island nation leader urged Tuesday.

The proposal by Tuvalu came as vulnerable nations pushed for more action and money at [international climate talks in Egypt](#), while big polluters remained divided over who should pay for the damage industrial greenhouse gas emissions have done to the planet.

“We all know that the leading cause of climate crisis is fossil fuels,” Tuvalu Prime Minister Kausea Natano told his fellow leaders.

The Pacific country has “joined Vanuatu and other nations calling for a fossil fuels non-proliferation treaty,” Natano said. “It’s getting too hot and there is very (little) time to slow and reverse the increasing temperature. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize fast-acting strategies.”

Vanuatu and Tuvalu, along with other vulnerable nations, have been flexing their moral authority against the backdrop of recent climate-related disasters. The idea of a non-proliferation treaty for coal, oil and natural gas has previously been advanced by campaigners, religious authorities [including the Vatican](#), and some scientists, but Natano’s speech gave it a boost in front of a global audience.

AFRICA

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A year ago at [climate talks in Glasgow](#), a [proposal to call for a “phase out” of coal](#) — the dirtiest of the fossil fuels — was changed at the last minute to “phase down” by a demand from India, earning the wrath of vulnerable countries.

Since then the global energy crunch triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has prompted a scramble by some countries and companies seeking to tap fresh gas and oil sources.

Pushing back against that, vulnerable nations also called for a global tax on the profits of fossil fuel corporations that are making billions of dollars daily from sky-high energy prices.

“It is about time that these companies are made to pay a global carbon tax on their profits as a source of funding for loss and damage,” said Gaston Browne, prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda. “Profligate producers of fossil fuels have benefited from extortionate profits at the expense of human civilization.”

The idea of a windfall tax on carbon profits has gained traction in recent months amid sky-high earnings for oil and gas corporations even as consumers struggle to pay for heating their homes and filling their cars. For the first time, U.N. climate conference delegates are to discuss demands by developing nations that the richest, most polluting countries pay compensation for damage wreaked on them by climate change, which [in climate negotiations is called “loss and damage.”](#)

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley said fossil fuel companies should contribute to those funds, which would provide vulnerable countries with financial aid for the climate-related losses they are suffering.

Other leaders rejected the idea.

“I think this is not the place now to develop tax rules, but rather to jointly develop measures to protect against the consequences of climate change,” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters.

If the small islands can’t get a global tax on fossil fuel profits, Antigua’s Browne suggested going to international courts to get polluters to pay. Scientists from Dartmouth College calculated specific damages for all the world’s countries and how much was caused by other nations, saying it would work well in international court cases.

Browne quoted William Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” in sharing his frustration with lack of action.

“Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time. And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death,” Browne said.

Despite 27 climate summits “tomorrow has not come,” he said.

Speaking for a country that has suffered from the consequences of climate change recently, Somalia's president said it faces "one of the worst droughts in modern history."

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said more than 7 million Somalis, or about half the population, cannot meet their basic food needs as the Horn of Africa region has seen two years of failed rains.

"We are trying desperately to respond," he said. The drought has killed thousands of people, many of them children. It is also reshaping Somalia's landscape as the country struggles with one of the world's fastest urbanization rates as many people flee parched areas.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif told fellow leaders how his country was struck by catastrophic floods in recent months that affected 33 million people and caused more than \$30 billion in economic damage.

"This all happened despite our very low carbon footprints," Sharif said, insisting: "Of course it was a manmade disaster."

Sharif called for additional financial support for his country and others suffering from the effects of climate change, saying money to help Pakistan rebuild after the floods should be on top of other aid and not come in the form of loans. Further debts, he said "would be a financial death trap."

The president of Malawi, meanwhile, praised those leaders present in Egypt for simply showing up.

"The temptation to abstain from COP this year was great," President Lazarus Chakwera said, referring to the talks by their U.N. acronym, "because of the great and unprecedented economic hardships your citizens are suffering."

"But you resisted this temptation and chose the path of courage," he said.

Chakwera said any agreements forged at the two-week meeting should recognize the different abilities of countries such as the United States and China, and developing nations like his own.

There is growing pressure on Beijing to step up its climate efforts given its massive economic clout.

So far, the world's biggest polluter has insisted that it cannot be held to the same standards as developed economies like the United States or Europe because it is still lifting millions of its citizens out of poverty.

Beijing's climate envoy said Tuesday that the meeting in Egypt should focus on "implementation" of existing pledges.

"The developed countries will take the lead in effectively scaling up their emission reduction targets and achieving carbon neutrality ahead of time," Xie Zhenhua said, according to an official translation of the speech.

Xie said it was up to developed countries to "achieve substantive results" on measures for adapting to climate change and financial aid for the poor that are "of greatest concern to developing countries."

The U.S. mid-term elections were hanging over the talks, with many environmental campaigners worried that defeat for the Democrats could make it harder for President Joe Biden to pursue his ambitious climate agenda.

Also hanging over the conference was the fate of one of Egypt's most prominent jailed pro-democracy activists, Alaa Abdel-Fattah, who has been imprisoned for most of the past decade. He stopped even drinking water Sunday, the first day of the conference, vowing he is willing to die if not released, his family said.

[Numerous world leaders raised his case](#) in meetings with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, and the head of the U.N. human rights office called for his immediate release.

Egypt's longtime history of suppressing dissent has raised controversy over its hosting the annual conference, with many climate activists complaining that restrictions by the host are quieting civil society.