

UAE oil company executives working with Cop28 team, leak reveals

Exclusive: two PR professionals from national oil firm listed as providing ‘support’ to team running UN climate summit

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- The Cop28 president, Sultan Al Jaber, at an event in New York this week. Photograph: Zak Bennett/AFP/Getty Images
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Senior executives from the UAE’s national oil company are working with the **Cop28** team as the country ramps up its PR campaign ahead of the major UN climate summit later this year, leaked internal records show.

Two PR professionals from the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) are identified as providing “additional support” to the team running the summit, according to a Cop28 communications strategy document obtained by the Centre for Climate Reporting (CCR) and the Guardian. It adds to growing evidence of blurred lines between the UAE’s Cop28 team and its fossil fuel industry.

In January, Adnoc's chief executive, Sultan Al Jaber, who also serves as the UAE's climate change special envoy, was announced as Cop28 president, which is being hosted in Dubai in November and December. Since then, multiple reports have raised concerns about ties between his two teams. The Cop28 team previously stated that there were "clear governance guidelines in place to ensure the team can operate entirely independently from any other entity".

"It is wholly inappropriate for Adnoc staff to be doing PR for Cop28," said Pascoe Sabido, a researcher from Corporate Observatory Europe who co-coordinates the Kick Big Polluters Out coalition. He says the findings clearly demonstrate the close links between the oil company and the summit team.

Earlier this year, CCR and the Guardian revealed that several members of Adnoc staff **had taken up important roles at the summit**, including as climate negotiators. Some had even been seconded from ongoing roles with the oil company.

In June, the Guardian reported that Adnoc and Cop28 shared an IT system and that Adnoc staff **were able to read emails** sent to and from the Cop28 team. Adnoc had also been consulted on how to respond to a media inquiry about the summit. At the time, the Cop28 team insisted that the emails were held on a "standalone, firewall-protected network".

The two Adnoc communications executives named in the leaked document – Philip Robinson and Paloma Berenguer – have a combined 28 years of experience in the fossil fuel industry, according to their LinkedIn accounts. They both previously worked for Shell before joining Adnoc.

A Cop28 spokesperson said the two executives had not travelled as part of its team to New York for the UN general assembly this week and had not been involved in communications activities there.

"The COop28 team regularly receives queries not related to Cop28 that it directs to the appropriate UAE entities to answer," the spokesperson continued.

The document lays out the Cop28 team's public relations strategy and key talking points for Al Jaber and senior team members, who are attending the UN general assembly. The meeting at the UN will "set the tone, inform the climate agenda and shape the climate narrative in the lead up to Cop28", the document states.

Speaking at the UN on Wednesday, Al Jaber reiterated that a “phase down” of fossil fuels was inevitable and essential. But he stopped short of calling for a complete phase-out, which the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, has said is necessary to abate global heating.

“Actions are falling abysmally short,” Guterres said. “To stand a fighting chance of limiting global temperature rise, we must phase out oil, coal and gas in a fair and equitable way.”

The leaked communications plan makes no mention of a phase-down or phase-out of fossil fuels. Instead, it focuses on messaging around “fast-tracking the energy transition” by boosting global renewables capacity, reducing emissions from polluting industries and providing finance for green investments. As chief executive of Adnoc, Al Jaber is overseeing a major expansion of the company’s oil and gas production.

“The Cop28 presidency has consistently stated that the phase-down of fossil fuels is inevitable, as part of a just and orderly energy transition, and it must go hand-in-hand with a rapid phase-up of zero-carbon alternatives,” a Cop28 spokesperson said. “This position was reiterated on the floor of the United Nations.”

Adnoc did not respond to requests for comment.

Sabido said: “The fossil fuel industry has consistently and repeatedly pushed back against a managed phase out of all fossil fuels because it means the end of the road for their core business.” He called for measures to protect the UN from the “pervasive” influence of the fossil fuel industry and other oil-producing nations.

“Al Jaber and Adnoc have been part of this. But let’s not pretend this is Al Jaber alone.”