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Cairo, November 20 (RHC)-- For the first time, the nations of the world decided to help pay for the damage an overheating world is inflicting on poor countries, but they finished marathon climate talks without further addressing the root cause of those disasters — the burning of fossil fuels.

Early Sunday, delegates approved the compensation fund but failed to deal with the contentious issues of an overall temperature goal, emissions cutting, and the desire to target all fossil fuels for phasedown.

Through the wee hours in the Egyptian Red Sea resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh, the European Union states and other nations fought back at what they considered backsliding in the Egyptian presidency's overarching cover agreement and threatened to scuttle the rest of the process. The package was revised again, removing most of the elements Europeans had objected to but added none of the heightened ambition they were hoping for.

"What we have in front of us is not enough of a step forward for people and planet," a disappointed Frans Timmermans, executive vice president of the EU, told his fellow negotiators. "It does not bring enough added efforts from major emitters to increase and accelerate their emissions cuts."

"We have all fallen short in actions to avoid and minimize loss and damage," Timmermans said. "We should have done much more."

Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock likewise voiced frustration. "It is more than frustrating to see overdue steps on mitigation and the phase-out of fossil energies being stonewalled by a number of large emitters and oil producers," she said. France said it regretted the "lack of ambition" in the agreement.

"No progress" was made on making additional efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and abandoning fossil fuels, Energy Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher said in a statement, regretting a "real disappointment" but welcoming the "loss and damage" fund for nations vulnerable to climate change.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: "Our planet is still in the emergency room. We need to drastically reduce emissions now – and this is an issue this COP did not address."

Sunday's agreement includes a veiled reference to the benefits of natural gas as low-emission energy, despite many nations calling for a phasedown of natural gas, which does contribute to climate change. While the new agreement does not ratchet up calls for reducing emissions, it does retain language to keep alive the global goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). The world has already warmed 1.1C (2F) since pre-industrial times.

The deal does not expand on last year's call to phase down global use of "unabated coal" even though India and other countries pushed to include oil and natural gas in language from Glasgow. That too was the subject of last-minute debate, especially upsetting Europeans.

Last year's climate talks president chided the summit leadership for knocking down his efforts to do more to cut emissions with a forceful listing of what was not done. "We joined with many parties to propose a number of measures that would have contributed to this emissions-peaking before 2025, as the science tells us is necessary. Not in this text," the United Kingdom's Alok Sharma said emphasizing the last part.

"Clear follow through on the phasedown of coal. Not in this text. A clear commitment to phase out all fossil fuels. Not in this text. And the energy text weakened in the final minutes." And in his remarks to negotiators, UN climate chief Simon Stiell, who hails from Grenada, called on the world "to move away from fossil fuels, including coal oil and gas." However, that fight was overshadowed by the historic compensation fund.

"Quite a few positives to celebrate amidst the gloom and doom" of not cutting emissions fast enough, said climate scientist Maarten van Aalst of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center, which responds to climate disasters. It is a reflection of what can be done when the poorest nations remain unified, said Alex Scott, a climate diplomacy expert at the think-tank E3G. "I think this is huge to have governments coming together to actually work out at least the first step of ... how to deal with the issue of loss and

damage,” Scott said.

But like all climate financials, it is one thing to create a fund, it is another to get money flowing in and out, she said. The developed world has still not kept its 2009 pledge to spend \$100bn a year in other climate aid — designed to help poor nations develop green energy and adapt to future warming.

Next year’s talks will also see further negotiations to work out details of the new loss and damage fund, as well as review the world’s efforts to meet the goals of the Paris accord, which scientists say are slipping out of reach.

According to the agreement, the fund would initially draw on contributions from developed countries and other private and public sources such as international financial institutions.

While major emerging economies such as China would not automatically have to contribute, that option remains on the table. This is a key demand by the EU and the United States, who argue that China and other large polluters currently classified as developing countries have the financial clout and responsibility to pay their way. The fund would be largely aimed at the most vulnerable nations, though there would be room for middle-income countries that are severely battered by climate disasters to get aid.

Martin Kaiser, the head of Greenpeace Germany, described the agreement on a loss and damage as a “small plaster on a huge, gaping wound”.

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