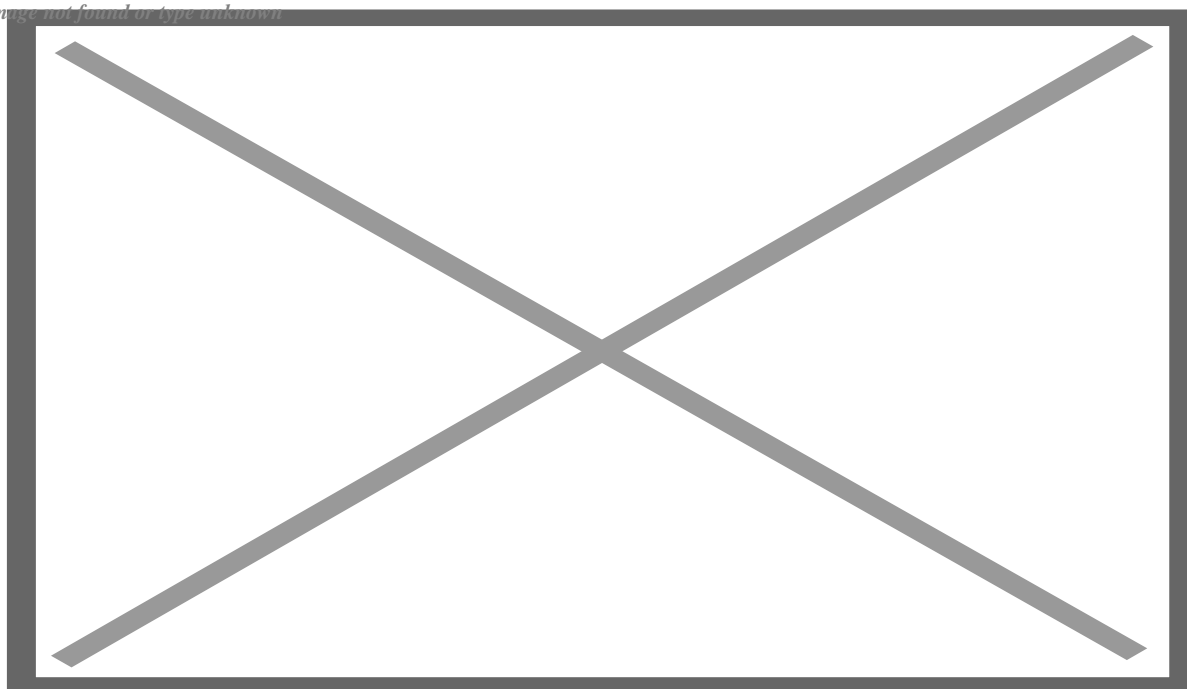


UN chief warns fossil fuels are incompatible with human survival

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Bonn, June 16 (RHC)-- As United Nations climate talks came to a disappointing conclusion in Germany on Thursday, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres delivered remarks in New York City targeting "the polluted heart of the climate crisis: the fossil fuel industry."

Guterres' comments came just after he met with civil society leaders and ahead of his September Climate Ambition Summit in NYC, which is set to be followed in November by the U.N. conference COP28, hosted by the United Arab Emirates in Dubai.

"Countries are far off track in meeting climate promises and commitments. I see a lack of ambition. A lack of trust. A lack of support. A lack of cooperation. And an abundance of problems around clarity and credibility," he said. "The climate agenda is being undermined. At a time when we should be accelerating action, there is backtracking. At a time when we should be filling gaps, those gaps are growing."

"Meanwhile, the human rights of climate activists are being trampled. The most vulnerable are suffering the most," Guterres continued, noting that current policies put the world on track for a 2.8°C temperature rise by the end of the century, nearly double the 2015 Paris climate agreement's more ambitious 1.5°C goal. Hitting the higher number, he said, "spells catastrophe."

"Yet the collective response remains pitiful. We are hurtling towards disaster, eyes wide open—with far too many willing [to bet it] all on wishful thinking, unproven technologies, and silver bullet solutions," he declared. "It's time to wake up and step up. It's time to rebuild trust based on climate justice. It's time to accelerate the just transition to a green economy."

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While acknowledging the important roles of governments and financial institutions—particularly from the Global North—in the worldwide transition to renewables, Guterres also said that "the fossil fuel industry and its enablers have a special responsibility."

"The problem is not simply fossil fuel emissions. It's fossil fuels—period," he said in what was widely seen as a rebuke of recent remarks from Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, whose selection as COP28's president-designate is controversial around the world given that he is also the UAE's industry minister and CEO of the country's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

"The solution is clear: The world must phase out fossil fuels in a just and equitable way—moving to leave oil, coal, and gas in the ground where they belong and massively boosting renewable investment in a just transition," Guterres asserted. However, just a tiny fraction of the oil and gas industry's record \$4 trillion windfall last year was put toward a clean future.

Stressing that "the world needs the industry to apply its massive resources to drive, not obstruct, the global move from fossil fuels to renewables," Guterres called for "credible" transition plans "that chart a company's move to clean energy—and away from a product incompatible with human survival."

"Otherwise, they are just proposals to become more efficient planet-wreckers," he said. Condemning plans that "rely on dubious offsets," the U.N. leader said that they "must include reducing emissions from production, processing, transmission, refining, distribution, and use."

"Fossil fuel companies must also cease and desist influence peddling and legal threats designed to knee-cap progress," he added, specifically calling out the industry for abusing antitrust legislation for its own advantage.

While the press conference was far from the first time Guterres has called out the fossil fuel industry, his comments were lauded by campaigners preparing for a global mobilization in September, planned for just before the U.N. chief's summit.

"The U.N. secretary-general's speech echoes the call from people from across the world today demanding an end to the era of fossil fuels," said Alex Rafalowicz, executive director of the Fossil Fuel Nonproliferation Treaty Initiative. "The time for rhetoric, empty promises, and greenwashing is over."

"Governments must work together to put in place an action plan to move away from dependence on oil, gas, and coal in the fairest and fastest way possible," Rafalowicz added. "We will be on the streets to ensure peoples' demands are carried into the negotiation halls in September. Climate impacts are escalating, fossil fuel corporations are digging in, but people are stepping up to end fossil fuels; fair, fast, and forever."

Guterres' remarks came as negotiators finished gathering in the German city of Bonn to prepare for COP28.

Oil Change International (OCI) global policy lead Romain Loualalen said Thursday that "this speech by the U.N. secretary-general is a wake-up call for the countries that wasted two weeks arguing over procedural matters at the Bonn climate conference instead of charting a path towards a COP28 decision to phase out fossil fuels."

"Countries must step up and fulfill the promises they made in Paris in 2015 to halt fossil fuel expansion and agree to a fair, fast, and full transition away from oil, gas, and coal and towards renewables," Loualalen continued. "Over 70 countries have called for a COP28 decision on fossil fuel phaseout in Bonn. Countries like Colombia and the members of the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance are doing the hard work of implementing measures to keep oil and gas in the ground."

"The contrast between this leadership and the actions of the world's biggest historic polluter, the United States, could not be more striking," he argued, adding that under President Joe Biden, "the U.S. has failed in its responsibility to lead a global and just transition away from fossil fuels and avert further climate disaster and has instead actively promoted fossil fuel expansion including with public money."

OCI was among over 500 groups that sent a letter Thursday to Biden and leaders of key U.S. federal agencies demanding executive action "to stop expanding oil, gas, and coal production, the core driver of the climate emergency," by the September summit.

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