

Climate activists condemn spike in fossil fuel delegates at COP27

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Demonstrators participate in a Kick Big Polluters Out protest in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, the site of the COP27 climate change conference [Peter Dejong/AP Photo]

Cairo, November 12 (RHC)-- More than 600 delegates affiliated with the fossil fuel industry are attending this year's climate talks in Egypt, campaign group Global Witness has found, a number greater than the combined delegations from the 10 most climate-impacted countries.

The attendance at COP27 marks a 25 percent increase from last year's summit in Glasgow, Scotland, where the fossil fuel industry already counted more delegates than any single nation.

This year's biggest single delegation was from the oil-producing United Arab Emirates, which will host COP28 next year. They sent 1,070 people to the summit, compared to just 170 last year. "The path to averting climate catastrophe isn't through negotiations flooded with industry lobbyists," Hellen Neima, director of the African Climate Campaign at the United States non-profit Corporate Accountability, told Al Jazeera.

"Enough is enough in treating those most culpable for the crisis as 'partners' or 'stakeholders' in the solution," she said.

The climate summit held in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh from November 6 to 18 – dubbed the "African COP" – has seen nations from the continent argue they should be allowed to develop fossil fuel resources to help lift their people out of poverty.

Echoing comments from other African nations, Namibia's petroleum commissioner Maggy Shino said representatives from many oil and gas companies were attending the summit precisely because "Africa wants to send a message that we are going to develop all of our energy resources for the benefit of our people".

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), however, has issued stark warnings against developing any new fossil fuel infrastructure in order to limit warming to 2C or 1.5C and avoid catastrophic effects, including more frequent wildfires, longer periods of drought and devastating floods.

Activists in Sharm el-Sheikh staged a protest on Thursday in a designated area of the summit's perimeter to demand that "big polluters" be barred from the climate talks. "It's time to kick out polluters from this space and reclaim it for its true purpose – to deliver climate justice and take rapid action to cut greenhouse emissions," Dharini Parthasarathy of the Climate Action Network, which is comprised of more than 1,800 civil society organisations, told Al Jazeera.

Philip Jakpor, a Nigerian campaigner at Public Participation Africa, told Al Jazeera from Sharm el-Sheikh that people's hopes that an "African COP" would give voice to those most affected by climate change were being dashed.

"People in communities at the front lines of climate change could not get accreditation," Jakpor said. "Yet, we have lobbyists who could get accreditation and that's why you have this carnival. COP is supposed to address climate change but what we are seeing here is buying and selling."

The impact of lobbying on decision-making at the European level was documented earlier this month in a report by the Brussels-based Corporate Europe Observatory, one of the groups that released the data along with Corporate Accountability and Global Witness.

According to the report, the access granted to fossil fuel lobbyists within the European Union undermined and delayed measures that could have eased the cost-of-living crisis triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, effectively thwarting efforts towards decarbonisation.

Shell, TotalEnergies, Eni and Repsol have reportedly made 78 billion euros (\$79.4 billion) in profits so far this year. "These eye-watering profits have only been possible thanks to oil and gas companies enjoying unprecedented access to EU leaders since the invasion of Ukraine," Pascoe Sabido, campaigner at the Corporate Europe Observatory, told Al Jazeera.

According to the organisation, the fossil fuel industry held more than a hundred lobby meetings with high-level EU Commission officials since the Ukraine invasion on February 24 – equivalent to meeting more than once every second working day.

A number of countries did not charge a windfall tax – a one-off levy on profits that result from a sudden gain to a particular company or industry – which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for in order to help countries harmed by the climate crisis.

“The fossil fuels industry and European leaders are still hand-in-hand deciding our energy policy,” Sabido said. “COP27 is a great opportunity for more gas deals and more business as usual.”

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