

Oil Chief Exec ‘Captures’ COP28

Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber 'must quit as chief executive of oil company before taking on presidency of COP28'.

By [Brendan Montague](#)

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*A chief executive of an oil company will lead the United Nations COP international climate conference for the first time in its 30 year history. There have already been calls for **Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber** to stand down from the fossil fuel major before negotiations begin in earnest.*

Al Jaber has been confirmed as the incoming COP28 president. He is an influential member of the United Arab Emirates government, holding roles as a minister of industry, chief executive of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and chair of the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar).

The 49-year-old was educated in the US and the UK, and has been the face of the UAE's energy sector over the last decade, setting up Masdar [in 2006](#) while running the UAE government's strategic investment arm. Al Jaber is not in the royal family, making his rise all the more remarkable. He is known to have close relationships with world leaders and CEOs.

Planetary

Tasneem Essop, the executive director of Climate Action Network International, said:

“With the COP28 host, the UAE, announcing the appointment of His Excellency Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber as president of COP28, it is imperative for the world to be reassured that he will step down from his role as the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Corporation.

“He cannot preside over a process that is tasked to address the climate crisis with such a conflict of interest, heading an industry that is responsible for the crisis itself. If he does not step down as CEO, it will be tantamount to a full scale capture of the UN climate talks by a petrostate national oil company and its associated fossil fuel lobbyists.

“COP26 in Glasgow had 500 fossil fuel lobbyists in attendance, the COP in Egypt saw a 25 per cent increase in their presence, COP28 now seems to be open season for vested interests who will no doubt use the climate talks to continue to undermine any progress on climate action. As civil society we demand that Al Jaber does the right thing and either stand aside or step down.”

Rachel Kyte, the dean of the Tufts University, Fletcher School, said:

“The incoming COP president has a dilemma. The UAE is competing to be the most efficient and lowest-cost source of fossil fuels as global production must diminish through the energy transition in line with IPCC and IEA pathways.

“There cannot be any more development of fossil fuels. It will be challenging as COP president to unite countries around more aggressive action while at the same time suggesting that other producers stop producing because UAE has you covered. We don’t have the planetary space for mixed messages.”

Health

Christiana Figueres, the UN climate chief from 2010 to 2016, said:

“The International Energy Agency (IEA) has been abundantly clear that there is no more atmospheric space for any new oil, gas or coal. This policy clarity echoes the findings of science and the increasing demands of public opinion. COP28 must not only align itself with this reality, but in fact accelerate global decarbonization. There is no other path forward.”

Vanessa Nakate, a climate justice activist from Uganda, said:

“COP28 needs to see real money put into the loss and damage fund agreed in Egypt. But alongside this, COP28 must speed up the global phase out of fossil fuels – we cannot have another COP where fossil fuel interests are allowed to sacrifice our futures to eke out another few years of profit.

“And finally, the voices of civil society and young activists are crucial in holding governments to account — they must be heard in Dubai without intimidation.”

Maria Mendiluce, the chief executive of the We Mean Business Coalition, said:

“Strong ambition and leadership from the UAE’s new President of COP28, Sultan Al Jaber, is critical for accelerating the significant investment needed globally to deliver a clean energy system – with the new jobs, health and economic benefits it will bring.

“Science is telling us the perils of going beyond the 1.5C limit: there can be no new fossil fuel projects, according to the International Energy Agency.”

Embrace

She added:

“At COP27, global business strongly backed the call to ensure we limit global temperature rise to 1.5C, and over 80 countries supported a call to phase down fossil

fuels. Simply put: fossil fuels will inevitably be replaced with clean energy.

“Business needs the COP28 presidency to mobilize ambitious government policy and finance to dramatically scale up investments in clean energy while stopping new investment in fossil fuels. This will enable companies to cut emissions at speed, and build a safer, more stable and thriving global economy.”

Manuel Pulgar-Vidal was the president of COP20 and minister of environment for Peru. He is currently the global climate and energy lead at WWF. He said:

“In time, we will realise that 2021-2022 was a critical turning point.

“It is the moment that a few calls at COP to once and for all end climate-wrecking fossil fuels became an undeniable clamour. We need COP28 in the UAE to build on this foundation with a well-considered approach that quickly enables the whole world to fully embrace a complete transition to clean energy. We have no more time to lose. I look forward to supporting COP28 to achieve successful outcomes.”

Petroleum

Yvo de Boer, the UN climate chief from 2006 to 2010, said:

“The UAE has much to offer, especially when it comes to the thorny question of how to rise to the climate challenge while creating prosperity at the same time. Masdar City in Abu Dhabi is a renowned green innovation hub that also houses the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

“In addition the UAE has adopted a sound green growth strategy and is a major investor in renewable energy both at home and abroad. The COP President designate has been instrumental on many of these issues. This equips him with the understanding, experience and responsibility to make COP28 ambitious, innovative and future focussed.”

The 2023 conference promises to be a particularly tough event, given worsening geopolitics, rising climate damages and a fractious end to the COP27 summit in Sharm El Sheikh. The COP28 event will be the third time a major UN climate summit has been held in the Middle East, with Qatar (2012) and Egypt (2022) among the previous hosts.

UAE has a huge per capita carbon footprint: the world’s [4th largest](#) behind Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) it’s the [seventh-largest](#) petroleum and other liquids producer in the world with export revenues topping \$70 billion.

Technology

The government’s PR machine does a good job highlighting the Masdar initiative and solar investments through to 2030. Solar is now available at 1.35 cents per kilowatt hour in UAE, with [9GW](#) due online by 2030. Renewables nonetheless account for a fraction of the country’s power mix, as the US EIA observes.

Recent energy announcements include plans to [switch](#) a coal fired plant under construction to gas; a deal [valued at \\$100bn](#) with the US government to invest in carbon capture

technology and grow its renewables sector; a [green hydrogen](#) partnership with Germany and an [\\$11bn](#) onshore wind farm in Egypt.

Al Jaber himself claimed in a [piece for Project Syndicate](#) that all the electricity consumed by ADNOC comes from zero-carbon nuclear and solar power in August 2022. But ADNOC's [announcement](#) of this in December 2021 said construction would begin in 2022 with commercial operation commencing in 2025. Then there is the issue of the gas that would previously have been burned to power its operations being sold instead.

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Brendan Montague is editor of *The Ecologist*.

Featured image: Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber chairs a meeting. Image: [NEA ΔHMOKPATIA](#) / Flickr / NEA ΔHMOKPATIA / Creative Commons 2.0

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