**[Weasel words](https://www.dawn.com/news/1799337/weasel-words)**

[Mahir Ali](https://www.dawn.com/authors/322/mahir-ali) Published December 20, 2023 Updated a day ago

IT took 28 years of UN-sponsored climate conferences for one of them to even acknowledge the primary source of the planet’s woes. That was enough for the circus that concluded in Dubai a week ago to be hailed as a landmark.

It has been patently obvious for decades that fossil fuels are the chief culprits in global warming. Reports prepared for some of the biggest offenders pointed this out as far back as the 1950s. They were covered up, obviously. And varieties of greenwashing have been the norm since the world woke up to the challenge 30 years later.

Much attention has been focused lately on the Swiss cheese of loopholes that accompany the bland wish to ‘transition away’ from coal, oil and gas as the sources of most of the globe’s energy. This kind of wishful thinking might have meant something if the turning point had been recognised three decades ago, and efforts laun­ched to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Meaningful investments in solar and wind energy, if launched as recently as the 1980s-90s, could have made a huge difference to Earth’s fate. It was not to be. The COPs since then have been reluctant to spell out the source of the world’s woes, partly courtesy of the Saudi injunction that any initiative required consensus.

COP28 was deemed a step forward in calling out fossil fuels, but precious little was specified in terms of transcending them as the primary source of energy. The requisite sound and fury were absent from the ‘UAE consensus’, which effectively signifies nothing. The worst polluters can step up their activities without violating the meaningless Dubai injunction.

COP28 was just another milestone on the highway to hell.

That was apparently the intention. The choice of the Emirati petrostate as the next conference host at the conclusion of COP27 in Egypt occasioned plenty of dark humour even before the UAE picked Sultan al-Jaber, the head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company as its president. The UAE hired leading PR agencies to transform the narrative.

It was only partially successful, particularly once it was alleged that al-Jaber was keen on using COP28 as a platform for negotiating lucrative oil deals. And that he doubted the science behind decreeing fossil fuels as the chief hurdle to achieving net zero emissions. He pushed back against those media reports, acknowledging that the phase-out of fossil fuels was essential to cooling the Earth. But after the conference concluded, he returned to his job at the helm of the oil company, which reportedly intends to fire up its production levels in the years to come.

Another petrostate will host the next COP, and doubts about whether these conferences serve any useful purpose have steadily been mounting. More than 2,400 fossil fuel lobbyists were accredited to the farce in Dubai, an exponentially higher figure than their numbers in Glasgow and Sharm el-Sheikh. The numbers in Baku may be even higher. They needn’t worry too much, though — the biggest polluters will make sure that next to nothing is agreed that just might salvage the planet. And even if by some miracle a consensus were to be achieved on phasing out fossil fuels, it would mean very little without an enforcement mechanism — which doesn’t exist. Sure, Saudi output, for instance, would be set back if all other nations stopped buying its oil. But, seriously, what are the chances?

After all, as George Monbiot points out, “more carbon dioxide from fossil fuels has been released worldwide” since 1992, when climate negotiations began, than in all of human history. He compares the oil and gas lobbyists’ presence in Dubai to “allowing weapons manufacturers to dominate a peace conference”. Mind you, one hardly hears of a peace conference these days, whereas they were ubiquitous between the end of World War II and the 1980s.

They didn’t achieve much, but nor have the climate conferences. Arguably, even the two exceptions of some consequence, Kyoto and Paris, have simply been ignored by those who didn’t particularly care for their injunctions. There is absolutely no reason to expect that the UN climate conference process will ever yield anything resembling a practical road map for edging away from the impending apocalypse.

We live in a capitalist world where profits will always matter far more than common sense, even if they pave the path to the end of the world — which appears to be precisely what is in store. What will today’s politicians and economists say to future generations? Sorry that in the hottest year on record we partied in Dubai, and did almost nothing to shift our planet’s orbit away from the path to Armageddon?

Part of the reason why the UN climate conferences are such a cruel farce is that they raise hopes that are then brutally dashed — shortly afterwards, if not there and then. That climate is unlikely to change.

[*mahir.dawn@gmail.com*](https://Mailto:mahir.dawn@gmail.com)

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