

# Building a sustainable future

Leading the discussion in Egypt and the UAE at the COP 27 and COP 28





In November 2022, Egypt will play host to the 27th annual gathering of countries seeking to tackle the global challenge of climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP 27). Then in November 2023, the United Arab Emirates will host the 28th annual gathering, as they continue to develop frameworks and further position the critical roles that the public and private sectors play. All eyes of the world will be on these two regions, North Africa and the Middle East, as the international community takes several major steps over the next few years.

What can we expect of these conferences, and how do we anticipate Egypt and the UAE to help demonstrate the steps needed to be taken?

The current concern of climate change policy is to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, (preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius) compared to pre-industrial levels. This was made legally binding in the Paris Agreement, an international treaty on climate change adopted by 196 countries, following COP 21 in Paris in 2015. This requires a global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a climate neutral world by mid-century.<sup>1</sup>

The Agreement not only set this target, but also required countries to submit plans for five-year cycles of increasingly ambitious climate action known as "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) and communicate the actions they will take to build resilience to adapt to rising temperatures. The Agreement also put in place a framework of financial, technical, and capacity building support to those countries that need it.

Shortly before the most recent conference, the UK's COP 26 (November 2021), a report was issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was referred to in very strong terms by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres as "a code red for humanity" and that "The alarm

bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible.... we are already at 1.2 degrees and rising."<sup>2</sup>

The pressure was therefore on the UK's COP 26 to take some bold steps; the resulting Glasgow Climate Pact sought member countries to cut greenhouse emissions (including methane) at a greater rate by 2030, curb oil and gas exploration, protect forests, and shift from coal to clean power. In particular, it managed to articulate a "phase down" of coal, which was the first time that a UN climate text included a specific coal commitment.<sup>3</sup>

Other successes were the side agreements, such as those on deforestation (COP 26 saw a landmark commitment to end deforestation by 2030, signed by over 100 countries that together account for 85% of the world's forests, including Brazil); on methane reduction, with over 100 countries agreeing a scheme to cut 30% of methane emissions by 2030 (methane is a significant contributor to climate warming having a global warming potential (GWP) 80 times greater than that of carbon dioxide and responsible for 25% of the warming we are experiencing today<sup>4</sup>); and also on governance, the finalization of the important Paris Rulebook, by adding transparency on how and when emissions, financial, and adaptation actions in each country are reported, enabling countries to both better measure and better manage.<sup>5</sup>

Was this enough to keep a target of 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach?

Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the UNFCCC, said that the target was "definitely alive" due to the "big package of different decisions that will allow us and gives us very, very specific direction on what we need to work on in order to get there."<sup>6</sup>

However, other organizations were less

enthusiastic. Environmental organization Greenpeace considered the text of the Glasgow Pact as "meek, it's weak and the 1.5C goal is only just alive." In particular, as the group's executive director, Jennifer Morgan, said: "A signal has been sent that the era of coal is ending. And that matters. While the deal recognizes the need for deep emissions cuts this decade, those commitments have been punted to next year."<sup>7</sup>

And this is where Egypt's COP 27 and the UAE's COP 28 come in.

One of the Glasgow Pact's most positive actions was to increase the frequency of the compilation of NDCs required from each country from a five-yearly to an annual reporting cycle. The next two years, with the eyes of the world focused on the COPs in Egypt and then the UAE, will see both conferences take the Glasgow Climate Pact and drive the global community towards making more ambitious commitments to revised 2030 carbon emission targets and longer-term net-zero goals, update commitments for climate reduction activities, phase out coal, and hold contributors to the agreement for a US\$100 billion climate financing package.

What will we see as Egypt's particular contribution as host in 2022?

It is positioning itself to drive the acceleration of global climate action through emission reduction, scaled-up adaptation efforts, and enhance flows of finance from its viewpoint of being a developing country in Africa.<sup>8</sup>

While developing countries are often particularly vulnerable to climate change, there is potential for their future development to be built on energy-efficient and low-carbon economies. Egypt will therefore be championing a "just transition" with assistance from the developed world (that created many of the existing emissions in the atmosphere) to the developing world (so the same mistakes are not made).<sup>9</sup>

We are also likely to see a focus on representation, with the inclusion and participation of vulnerable communities from Africa in particular, demonstrating the impacts of climate change. In addition, we are likely to witness a level of collaboration, where governments will be called to take the lead and encourage all non-state actors, particularly those in developing countries, to adjust and adapt to climate change and be part of the solutions needed to address it.

If we are looking for an overall theme for COP 27, as the COP Egyptian Presidency stated, “Ensuring humans are at the center of climate talks is imperative.”<sup>10</sup>

The UAE’s COP 28 conference, set to take place a year later, is likely to change the theme to one of technology and innovation. Hosting the event at the EXPO 2020 site (an emphatic demonstration of recycling at scale), this event will reflect the government’s effort to transform and transition the economy to one that is fueled by clean and renewable energy. No doubt its significant achievements in renewable energy plants, hydrogen ambitions, nuclear facilities, carbon capture facilities, and mangrove planting endeavors, will feature heavily, as will the assistance the UAE is providing to 27 island nations facing the climate change threat with solar, wind, and battery storage projects, and its huge investments in climate-smart agriculture and food systems over the next 5 years.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, stated that COP 28 should be a “solutions COP” and it should create shareable solutions for all the difficult challenges the world is facing today.<sup>12</sup>

Both COP 27 and COP 28 will make demands of the global community and hold it to its updated commitments for climate change policies for the greater good, but they are likely to also be distinctive and persuasive through highlighting the impact on humanity of climate change

and ensuring “just transition,” as well as, the importance of developing and sharing technology and innovation to assist transition. These will be two very important events in our global battle to reduce climate change and its impact, further fortifying the impact that both public and private sector companies will play both in Egypt and the UAE in ensuring that we continue to reduce the impact of climate change in building a more sustainable world. ●

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#### Endnotes

1. The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC
2. Guterres: The IPCC Report is a code red for humanity (unric.org)
3. COP26 The Glasgow Climate Pact, 2021
4. Facts about Methane | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
5. Was COP26 a success? | Good Energy
6. Was Cop26 a success? | The Independent
7. Was Cop26 a success? | The Independent
8. COP27 - Egypt Goals
9. COP27 - Egypt Goals
10. COP27 - Egypt Presidency
11. UNFCCC COP 28 - The Global Climate Summit in UAE (globalmediainsight.com)
12. UNFCCC COP 28 - The Global Climate Summit in UAE (globalmediainsight.com)