Epic Fail at COP28: Time for a New Approach!

COP stands for Conference of the Parties. It is an annual meeting of the nations that signed the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to assess progress and make further plans to deal with climate change. Thousands of organization, corporation, and government representatives also attend in an effort to influence COP outcomes.

Official reports on the state of the climate and progress toward meeting the 2015 Paris Agreement 1.5°C and 2.0°C targets for limiting global warming set the stage for COP28 opening on November 30. The findings were alarming to many, but apparently, not alarming enough for negotiators gathered in Dubai to accept reality. Bottom line, the temperature is rising at an accelerating pace and progress toward meeting the Paris targets is sorely lagging. It may not be as bad as it could have been if we did nothing, but that is a poor excuse for COP28 refusing to admit that the current global climate strategy is an epic fail.

Central to the continuing failure of the COP process is the sole reliance on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removing accumulated emissions from the atmosphere to limit temperature rise. A much broader approach is urgently needed to restore and stabilize climate conditions that can sustain all life forms. It is time to integrate climate cooling into a credible global strategy.

Climate change and the severity of its impacts are increasing much faster than calculated by various models and analyses projecting future conditions. What's more, the impacts are interacting to push critical ecological, hydrologic, and glacial systems over thresholds, known as tipping points, thus amplifying climate disasters. This truth is being told by current events, not speculative assumptions. The reports released to inform COP28 deliberations confirm 2023 as the worst year yet of climate change with the Global South and vulnerable populations around the world bearing the brunt.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) provisional State of the Global Climate report presented data through the end of October showing 2023 average global temperature at about 1.40°C (±0.12°C) above the pre-industrial 1850-1900 baseline. The report also documents other record highs and lows. According to WMO Secretary-General Professor Petteri Taalas, *"Greenhouse gas levels are record high. Global temperatures are record high. Sea level rise is record high. Antarctic sea ice is record low. It's a deafening cacophony of broken records."*

Also released for COP28 consideration was the first draft United Nations Global Stocktake. The draft projected that even if parties to the Paris Agreement implement their National Determined Contribution climate action plans, total emissions in 2030 will be just 2% below 2019 levels. This is a far cry from the 43% reduction needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The 2023 Emissions Gap Report issued by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) finds that current pledges under the Paris Agreement put the world on track for a 2.5-2.9°C temperature rise above pre-industrial levels this century.

In spite of the daunting reality documented by the advance reports, after 12 days of negotiations, COP28 triumphantly accepted a revised Stocktake renamed the "The UAE Consensus" and deemed the gathering a success, that is, if the commitments made are fulfilled. Chief among the "good news" reported are agreements to transition away from fossil fuels to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and to triple renewables and double energy efficiency by 2030. Commitments

to reduce methane emissions; focus more on nature, land, and food systems; and operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund were also in the mix.

The "bad news" is that The UAE Consensus agreements are non-binding and unenforceable. Moreover, independent analyses indicate they will not come close to keeping temperatures from exceeding the 1.5°C or 2.0°C targets.

The world doesn't need another trail of broken promises. The handshaking and back thumping of COP28 leaders bring to mind the Albert Einstein quote: *"The definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over again but expecting different results."*

The world needs a new, credible strategy that incorporates the most promising measures for cooling the climate. The notion that limiting global warming to 1.5°C will restore the stability of Earth's natural systems must be discarded along with the notion that emissions reduction and removal alone will get us there. It's already too hot. Ever more rampant weather events are already too extreme! World leaders must initiate actions that halt temperature rise in the near-term with the ultimate goal of returning global warming to under 1°C.

Achieving new, more ambitious goals would require: 1) rapidly reducing both carbon dioxide and methane emissions in accordance with more rigorous Nationally Determined Contributions; 2) scaling up carbon removal to reduce atmospheric carbon concentrations; and 3) until 20th Century climatic conditions are restored, implement climate cooling measures that reboot and amplify Nature's cooling capacity.

It's time to seriously pursue preventing "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system" as called for in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. All the dallying to date now necessitates including climate cooling in the international pathway to a sustainable and livable climate. Waiting until COP29 to start the process will be too late. The reality is that time is up!

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Word Count: 748