

Governments flaunt their indifference to runaway global warming at COP28 climate summit

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The 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference opens today against the backdrop of soaring global temperatures and mounting extreme weather events that have contributed to hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths and the displacement of millions of people.

Earlier this month, the Copernicus Climate Service reported that November 17 was the hottest day on record, clocking in at 2.07°C above the 1850–1900 global average.

At the present rate, 2023 will be the hottest year on record, and 2024 is expected to be even hotter. About a third of the days in 2023 were at least 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average—considered one of the critical limits for Earth’s climate—the most ever recorded in a single year.

The United Nations 2023 Emissions Gap Report warns:

Even in the most optimistic scenario considered in this report, the chance of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is only 14 percent, and the various scenarios leave open a large possibility that global warming exceeds 2 degrees Celsius or even 3 degrees Celsius.

Everything about this year’s COP28 summit expresses the total indifference of capitalist governments to the accelerating climate catastrophe. The conference is being hosted by the United Arab Emirates, a country which generates a third of its gross domestic product from fossil fuel sales. It has nominated as president of the summit Sultan al-Jaber, the CEO of the state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). Under these conditions, the summit has been described as a “trade

show” for the fossil fuel industry.

During the 2020 presidential election, US President Joe Biden appealed to voters, and in particular young people, by claiming to take climate change seriously, and made a show of attending the 2021 and 2022 climate summits, in contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump. But the White House announced that Biden would not attend this year’s summit, and would instead send Vice President Kamala Harris, whose only distinguishing characteristic is that she somehow manages to maintain a lower approval rating than the president.

Since the emergence of capitalism, energy has been mostly produced by burning coal, oil, and natural gas, which releases the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. As a result, the global average temperature has risen 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) in less than 200 years.

The rash of extreme weather records broken in 2023 exemplify the dangers of the crisis. This past July was the hottest month in recorded history and was accompanied by a heatwave that killed thousands across North America, Europe and Asia. Flash floods in September killed more than 4,000 in Libya, with between 10,000 and 100,000 missing. A tributary of the Amazon River reached its lowest level since records began in 1902, threatening the lives and livelihoods of 481,000 people in Manaus, Brazil, including inducing diarrhea, vomiting and infection in the city’s children.

Such events are only a small sample of the numerous instances of lengthier droughts, torrential floods, searing heat waves and catastrophic hurricanes that have emerged as a regular part of life over the past 15 years. Extreme weather events that were once projected to happen once every 100, 200 or even 500 years now occur once every decade and are on track to be annual disasters.

The more Earth warms, the more disastrous the long-term consequences will be. The ongoing ecological catastrophe has been called Earth's "sixth extinction," with more than a third of all animal and plant species, an estimated 3 million different types of flora and fauna, slated to go extinct by 2050. More than 70 percent will go extinct by 2100 if current greenhouse gas emissions are not immediately and drastically cut. The increasing acidification of the oceans threatens the world's phytoplankton. In the most extreme scenario, in which phytoplankton are completely killed off, it would cut off the base of the world's food chain and reduce the production of Earth's oxygen by half.

Ahead of this year's climate summit, over 200 health journals issued a call to the United Nations warning, "This overall environmental crisis is now so severe as to be a global health emergency." They stated that "Climate change is set to overtake deforestation and other land use change as the primary driver of nature loss." They continued, "Changes in land use have forced tens of thousands of species into closer contact, increasing the exchange of pathogens and the emergence of new diseases and pandemics."

Other existential threats abound. Sea levels have already risen more than 25 centimeters in the past century, causing more deadly storm surges. Glacial melting threatens to raise sea levels by five or even ten times that amount by the end of the century. More than 821 million human beings face hunger or starvation as the land on which they depend for food can no longer be farmed. At least 3.2 billion people are living in areas that will be uninhabitable as a result of floods, wildfires or hurricanes in the coming decades.

These are not new dangers. The science behind the interaction of greenhouse gasses and Earth's climate has been known for more than a century, and the specific impacts to weather patterns, agriculture and biodiversity have been known for decades. Scientists have published reports, held conferences, testified at Congressional hearings, and rung every other alarm bell they possibly could to rouse governments to action.

What has become crystal clear, however, is that capitalist governments simply do not care that millions, possibly billions, might die as a result of their actions. The focus of the imperialist powers, above all the US, is on war.

In Ukraine, the US and NATO are providing hundreds of billions of dollars to the fascistic Zelensky regime and his neo-Nazi allies to wage war in order to destabilize and

provoke regime-change in Russia. In Gaza, Biden is explicitly supporting and funding Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians, which has so far killed 20,000, and is attempting to drive all 2.3 million of the Gaza Strip's inhabitants into the Sinai desert. It is not the environment, but blood and oil that are the order of the day for capitalism.

The fact that any appeal to the powers that be to fight climate change will fall on deaf ears was underscored by the recent attacks on Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg after she condemned the genocide in Gaza. Thunberg, who had earlier been hailed by the US media as a *Time* Person of the Year and one of the *Forbes* 100 Most Powerful Women, is now slandered as a "terror supporter."

Just as governments have demanded that the world's population "live with" perpetual mass infection, debilitation, and death from COVID-19, they are now demanding that the population simply accept a preventable climatological catastrophe.

The real solution to climate change lies in a vast transformation of social and economic life on a global scale. Energy production, logistics and agriculture must be wholly reorganized to transition to renewable energy and to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. This in turn requires an international effort to build new infrastructure and explore new technologies. Banks and corporations must be expropriated, their hoarded wealth used to fund this effort rather than being used to finance genocidal wars and the enrichment of Wall Street and oil sheikdoms.

Resolving the climate crisis is fundamentally a class question. It is not "humanity" that has caused climate change, but a definite socioeconomic order: capitalism. It thus makes the political task of overthrowing capitalism by the working class all the more urgent. The same system that produces war, pandemics and social inequality will also see the planet set aflame for profit. The only solution is a revolutionary struggle by the working class for socialism.



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