

Pacific Leaders set sail towards a “Fossil Fuel Free Pacific”, chart course for global phaseout of coal, oil and gas

17th March 2023 - Pacific leaders have closed a three-day Ministerial Dialogue in Port Vila, Vanuatu with an ambitious plan for a “Fossil Fuel Free Pacific” and a call for a global, just and equitable phase out of coal, oil and gas production.

The *2nd Pacific Ministerial Dialogue on Pathways for the Global Just Transition away from Fossil Fuels* was hosted by Vanuatu and Tuvalu with Ministers and officials from Tonga, Fiji, Niue and the Solomon Islands, and representatives from regional organisations including the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General, Henry Puna.

The formal outcome of the meeting, named the “*Port Vila Call for a Just Transition to a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific*”, calls for a global phase-out of fossil fuels in a manner that is fair, fast and financed. Specifically, the block of six Pacific countries at the meeting have committed to:

- Adopt a Pacific Island Forum Leaders Declaration for a just transition to a “Fossil Fuel Free Pacific” as soon as possible
- Spearhead the global phase out of coal, oil and gas production in line with global temperature goal of below 1.5°C, including at the UN Secretary General’s climate summit in September, at COP28, and beyond
- Join the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance and urge major oil and gas producers to join
- Call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and lead the creation of a global alliance to negotiate a new Treaty to govern the end to fossil fuel expansion, equitable phase out of fossil fuels, and a global just transition.
- Redouble efforts to reaffirm, strengthen and codify legal obligations with respect to the global phase out of fossil fuels, including through calling for all nations to support the adoption of the Pacific’s UN General Assembly Resolution seeking an [advisory opinion on climate change from the International Court of Justice](#)
- Avoid terminology such as “unabated” or “inefficient” that creates loopholes for fossil fuel producers and polluters

Maukoro Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, said: “While loss and damage intensifies in the Pacific and globally, the fossil fuel industry is making record profits. We can’t rely on the fossil fuel industry to break business as usual. We need both domestic action and international cooperation to explicitly stop the expansion of fossil fuel emissions and production in order to fulfil the aims of the Paris Agreement. Transitioning away from an extractive economy provides us with the opportunity to build one that is instead visionary, regenerative and fruitful.”

Vanuatu’s Climate Minister, Hon. Ralph Regenvanu said: “It is past time for governments to demand an end to fossil fuels, yet the Pacific has stepped out to make this call today. We see a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific as the only future possible that will ensure the survival of our islands from the ravages of climate change. Our ambition and political will is clear, and we are prepared to work for

this until the last barrel of oil, bottle of gas and ton of coal harms the people our Blue Pacific Continent.”

The meeting took place on the eve of the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) set to be released on Monday. The outcome document will be raised at the upcoming Pacific Energy Ministers meeting as well as next week’s high-level dialogue of climate ministers in Copenhagen, the first international gathering of climate policy makers since COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh last November.

Tuvalu’s Finance Minister, Hon. Seve Paeniu said: “Even as we call for an end of fossil fuels, we acknowledge that Pacific countries still rely on fossil fuels for our daily lives and our economy. That is exactly why we are planning our own just transition. The “Port Vila call for a Just Transition to a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific” is our commitment to work tirelessly to create a “Fossil Fuel Free Pacific,” recognizing that phasing out fossil fuels is not only in our best interest to avoid the worst of climate catastrophe - it is also an opportunity to promote economic development and innovation that we must seize.”

Pacific leadership has been essential to the international approach to tackling climate change. Pacific policymakers were critical in securing a 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement, Vanuatu has led the recent [push for an Advisory Opinion on climate change in the International Court of Justice](#) and Vanuatu and Tuvalu are the first nation states to formally call for negotiations of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. This “*Pacific Ministerial Dialogue on Pathways for the Global Just Transition away from Fossil Fuels*” is the latest in a series of efforts leading the call for climate justice globally.

Every year is a critical year for climate action in the Pacific, a region that has little historic responsibility for emissions, yet is one of the most impacted and at the same time burdened in leadership for finding policy solutions. This context was stark during the meeting, which took place during a State of Emergency as Vanuatu recovered from two Category 4 severe tropical cyclones which made landfall within 72 hours of each other last week. The destructive power of such weather systems are already increasing in an atmosphere that is warmer, wetter, and more energetic than in the past.

The primary cause of this destruction is the production of fossil fuels, responsible for 86% of all carbon dioxide emissions in the past decade according to the IPCC. Despite this, the fossil fuel industry is making historic profits from the continued expansion of coal, oil and gas production globally. In fact, a [UN report](#) has found that the world is on track to produce 110% more fossil fuels by 2030 than the world can ever burn if we are to stay below 1.5°C.

In response to this crisis, Pacific leaders have called for greater action on managing a transition away from fossil fuels for years. The outcome of the meeting this week in Vanuatu shows a clear intention to escalate these diplomatic efforts in the months ahead.

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Media contacts

- Ms. Fern Napuat, Vanuatu Government—fnapwatt@vanuatu.gov.vu / +6787733680
- Mr. Royson Willie, Vanuatu Government—wroyson@vanuatu.gov.vu / +6787658945