

Peoples' Sustainability Treaty On Transitioning to a Zero Fossil Fuels World

1. PREAMBLE

Purpose of the treaty

Our “fossil age civilization” must be transformed to one based on a clean zero carbon renewable energy matrix and sustainable land-use. The purpose of this treaty is to mark a starting point for humanity to undertake a concerted effort towards ending the fossil age. It shall bring together all that are ready to embrace the vision of a sustainable world society that leaves fossil fuels in the ground. It shall trace the pathway towards implementing that vision.

The Problem

Humanity has started to burn fossil fuels on a big scale during the past few generations. It was only in the last few decades that more and more human beings have become dependent on burning fossil fuels for meeting even their basic human needs. About 80% of primary energy used by humans today comes from fossil fuels. This fossil fuel based civilization has already passed several planetary boundaries, destabilized the global climate and is undermining the prospects for ecological, social and economic stability of current and future generations. The science is definite that only stopping all industrial carbon emissions ('zero carbon') can allow the global temperature, climate change and ocean acidification to stabilize.¹

The fossil age has to be put to an end through a collective and targeted effort of transformation, specifically of energy generation, distribution and use. Climate science tells us that major disruptions to the global climate system can be expected when passing the thresholds of 1.5°C and 2°C temperature rise above the pre-industrial level, and the window of opportunity for avoiding these increases is closing fast. The transition needs to be initiated now and the global peaking of emissions needs to be achieved during this decade. Meanwhile, rich countries such as the United States and the European Union countries are simultaneously the champions of an unsustainable high-emissions lifestyle and at the top of the ladder of what we call “economic development”. The rich in poor countries also lead a similar lifestyle and poorer people everywhere aspire to it.

Tackling the problem so far

Current governments in most countries plan to maintain or even increase high-emissions lifestyles for decades into the future as can be clearly seen in the mitigation pledges currently under negotiation in the UNFCCC process. This must be changed.

Despite the UN climate convention that was signed in Rio in 1992, and despite various intergovernmental processes since the Earth Summit, responsible policies have not come forward - or their impacts have been humanity's response to the climate crisis.

Today's established reserves of oil, gas and coal would take us way beyond any carbon levels deemed manageable, if they were to be burnt. Even though it is obvious that the better part of them must stay in the ground for a liable climate, governments and corporations are continuously pushing

¹ http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg1/en/faq-10-3.html

to make even more fossil fuel deposits accessible. Emissions continue to rise, even after the implementation of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol which is considered “state of the art” of humanity’s response to the climate crisis.

While the fossil fuel industry is at the root of the climate crisis and phasing it out is key to our planet’s well being, the international environmental negotiations continue to have a short term vision, resulting in a lack of coherent, science-based proposals for a zero carbon world economy. Most current proposals, often market-based, are not solutions, but rely on supposed emissions reductions processes that allow the fossil fuel industry to keep polluting while negative impacts and even emission increases go hand in hand with massive profits for a few. They tend to include false solutions such as nuclear energy, genetically engineered tree plantations and unsustainable agrofuels.

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There are champions emerging, such as the governments of Bhutan, Samoa, Maldives, Costa Rica, Ethiopia and Denmark who have set themselves “carbon neutrality” or zero fossils targets and some cities such as Växjö in Sweden that have embraced the vision of reducing fossil fuel use to zero. Some regions are already operating on a clean energy matrix, such as Güssen in Austria and several “100% regions” in Germany. And traditional indigenous and farming peoples all around the world are leading a very environmentally friendly lifestyle and continue to maintain the important heritage of zero fossils solutions for human needs.

Civil society organizations have prepared detailed plans on transitioning their towns, regions and countries to post-carbon prosperity, such as Zero Carbon Britain 2030 and Zero Carbon Australia 2020. These studies and plans have shown that the transition is technologically and economically feasible. The main obstacles are governments who are backed by dirty industries and have no political will to commit to the much needed energy transition.

Sustainability

Burning fossil fuels is an inherently unsustainable activity that is leading us to a planetary catastrophe. Leaving them in the ground untouched is the only truly sustainable alternative. Phasing out dirty, unsustainable energy is the biggest cornerstone of the transition to a sustainable civilization. The sustainability and possible negative side-effects of all energy sources should be examined before including them in an transition strategy.

Well-being

Human well-being has been achieved without fossil fuels for most of humanity’s history. Policies that focus on human well-being and quality of life, instead of a materialistic focus on a consumptive economy where the more and the bigger is the better, will help free up resources for meeting the basic needs of all people. Gandhi’s idea that there is enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for anyone’s greed can guide us. Today’s unequal, greed-based economy needs to be transformed into a just, needs-based economy where instead of money, people’s well-being and a healthy planet are at the heart.

Mother Earth Rights

There are unwritten natural laws that we currently disrespect at our own peril. While our dependence on our Mother Earth is recognized by most people and the United Nations, in recent times, an era dubbed the anthropocene epoch, we have increasingly forgotten to honour her and fail to respect her needs. In the current economic system she is treated as a lifeless “resource” to be exploited for the supposed benefit of humans. Putting a price on her exploitation - the so-called “green economy” - is only adding a degree of sophistication to the disrespectful behaviour and threatens to legitimize further exploitation. Ending ecocide and preserving resilient, biodiverse ecosystems such as indigenous forests needs a shift in our focus and in our attitude.

Precaution

The precautionary principle that was recognized in the Rio Declaration dictates a global zero fossils target. Climate science can give an indication of the degree of mitigation ambition required to honour this principle. In order to keep temperatures under a 1.5°C rise - as demanded by the countries more severely affected by climate change - we need to eliminate fossil fuel burning in the next decades, unless we want to gamble on “negative emissions” in the second half of the 21st century. Initiating the transition to a zero carbon world economy now is a moral imperative. The possible negative impacts of alternative energy options also need to be evaluated and taken into consideration when establishing an energy strategy.

Equity

The transition to a zero fossils world must be just and respect the rights and needs of all people while taking into account their respective necessities and capacities. A fair distribution of costs and benefits between countries, within societies and between generations is a moral imperative that will guide us in shaping the transition. The budget approach is an example of a way to share responsibilities and burdens in a just and equitable fashion while achieving the transition to zero fossils. While concepts for equity on the demand side, such as per capita emissions exist, an equitable way to organize the supply-side of a fossil world economy in transition (i.e. which deposits get extracted and which will stay in the ground) needs to be worked out.

Decentralization

Decentralization is a principle that will help speed up the transformation to a global renewable energy matrix that puts people first and delivers energy access and increases well-being.

3. COMMITMENTS

We urge **Civil Society Organizations** to initiate the discussion about the transition in their cities, regions and countries and pressure governments, businesses and other institutions to place leaving fossil fuels in the ground as a priority.

We urge **Governments** to make a clear commitment to transitioning to zero fossils by setting a date for the completion of the transition to zero fossil fuels in their jurisdiction and by reviewing the overall size of fossil fuel reserves in their jurisdiction and determining which portion of them shall stay in the ground and which portion shall be extracted and burned during the transition period, using equity principles as a guideline.

We call on **Legislators** to enshrine climate protection targets in constitutions and legislation and to amend current laws and clauses that promote fossil fuel industries and research.

We call on **Businesses and Industries** to redefine the parameters of success, creating products and services that are designed from cradle to grave to benefit the people of this Earth and account for the full lifecycle instead of simply maximizing profit while generating negative externalities. We invite them to become leaders of the transition in their industry and set strategic long-term goals linked to sustainability, such as a zero fossils target for their own business.

We call on **Media** to put a focus on the need for the transition and to expose those working to delay or stop it. Sharing stories of zero fossils solutions and those working on the transition will help build its momentum.

We call on **Universities, Schools and other Educational Institutions** to include the visioning, research and practical skills needed for achieving the transition into their practice. Young people can create new and meaningful contributions to the transition, while learning essential skills at the same time.

We urge **Individuals** to take responsibility for initiating the transition process in their cities and countries by starting working groups that develop local and regional solutions to transitioning and draw friends, family and other persons into the process and to harness the power of social media to share zero fossil fuel lifestyles and transition processes.

5. SIGNATORIES

The undersigning are committed to initiating the transition to a zero fossils world and are listed below with a specific pledge of a strategic action that they commit to carrying out.

Saving civilization is not a spectator sport. (Lester Brown)

1. Kjell Kühne, Germany/Mexico, I pledge to initiate the discussion on the zero fossils transition in every country I visit.
2. Ankit Maheshwari, India, Indian Institute of Technology, BHU, I pledge to initiate the discussion on zero fossil transition in the appropriate Government ministries and institutions.
3. Laura A. Fernandez, Colombia, The Graduate Institute (IHED), I pledge to initiate the discussion on the transition into a zero fossil world in country of residence, to engage other students in it and to be persistent.
4. Stephen Murphy, South Africa/Independent, www.durbanclimatejustice.net, I pledge to provide digital support to LINGO & zero carbon plans.
5. John Wiseman, University of Melbourne, Australia, I pledge to continue to strengthen understanding of actions needed for rapid implementation of post carbon economy transition strategies.
6. Amara Possian, Canada/Independent, I pledge to continue strengthening the resistance against fossil fuel extraction projects, especially non-conventional fuels.
7. Melissa Sikosana, University of Cape Town, South Africa, I pledge to strengthen the understanding of LINGO and Zero Fossil plans, particularly in developing countries.
8. Dr Peter Carter, Canada, Climate Emergency Institute and onlyzerocarbon.org website, I pledge to use every chance I get to communicate the imperative of converting to the zero carbon world.

Please send your pledge along with your name, country/organization, address, website and email to kjell.kuehne@gmail.com.

5. ANNEXURES

Action Plan

The time for the transition to a zero fossils world has come. The following milestones will guide action in the way of the transition.

Short Term (2012-2015)

- Create discussion and planning circles and design transition plans.
- End fossil fuel subsidies.
- Initiate discussion on a planned phase-out of fossil fuel extraction.
- Moratorium on non-conventional fossil fuel developments.
- Prepare structural changes in the energy sector, especially for replacing power plants nearing retirement.
- Implement policies that incentivize and promote the development of sustainable energy and decentralized energy sources.

Medium Term (2015-2020)

- Research, develop and distribute zero carbon technologies.
- Moratorium on all exploration for new fossil fuels.
- Dramatically reduce primary energy demand in many countries.
- Substitute fossil fuels with renewable energy.
- Negotiate a plan for the closure of coal mines and oil wells.
- Implement the transition to a clean, zero carbon energy supply in pilot areas and sectors.

Long Term (2020-2050)

- Upscale from pilot regions and sectors to nation-wide implementation.
- Implement transition plans.
- Close all wells and coal mines with a globally agreed-on plan.

Target

- A global zero carbon economy that maximizes the well-being of all, minimizing the suffering created by climate change impacts and resource struggles.

2. Proposed Actions

The following actions are proposed as contributions towards initiating or accelerating the transition. Please pick the contribution you are going to make and mention it in your pledge.

Civil Society:

- preparing detailed transition plans;
- focussing work on strategic elements of the transition;
- propose ways to overcome social equity challenges arising from transitioning;
- strengthening the resistance against fossil fuel extraction projects, especially non-conventional fuels.

Governments:

- embedding decarbonisation objectives in all government policies and programs;
- creating structural change of the energy matrix and urban infrastructure;
- rescuing traditional sustainable ways of well-being;
- giving incentives for the use of renewable resources;
- strengthening local zero-fossils/sustainable economies;
- promoting fossil fuel free means of transportation, such as bicycles and public transport;
- investing in innovation;
- exploring and taking advantage of co-benefits of zero fossils policies;
- stopping the expansion of the fossil frontier;
- agreeing on a global decarbonisation road map;
- stop providing licences for new exploration, first for the most contaminating ones, then for all fossil fuels;
- prohibit all petrol derivate products that do not contribute to human wellbeing (e.g. plastic bags);
- promoting shared approaches to carbon taxes;
- promoting regional alliances involving nation states, provinces and cities;
- constructing international smart electricity grids and networks;
- making sure renewable energy investment priorities are at the heart of international aid and development programs;
- promoting local economy and local consumption wherever possible and demanding imported products to be sustainable;
- strengthening international governance institutions, such as IRENA;
- encouraging local food sovereignty;
- establish deliberative “future” chambers of parliament that provide an opportunity for informed consideration of the impact of policy decisions on future generations;
- create a legal obligation for citizen participation;
- promote grassroots citizen mobilisation through extension of opportunities;
- promote an increased role for local government and local community organisations in exploring and implementing innovative post carbon economy transition solutions;
- increased support for decentralised local systems of economic production and distribution and for distributed energy systems;
- providing research and development investment for renewable energy;
- establish an office for the follow-up of this transition treaty.

Business:

- generate your own energy;
- invest in the creation of clean technologies that consume zero fossil fuels;
- think outside of the box and create new zero fossils business opportunities, working together with new partners;
- use clean production processes;
- achieve zero fossils in the whole life-cycle of a product or service.

Scientific Community:

- renew the commitment to the research and support of climate science;
- communicate more effectively and urgently the science of zero carbon;
- continue diffusing the urgent need for humanity to stop the exploitation of natural resources for the sake of having cheap fossil energy;
- research most effective governance strategies for emissions reduction agreements;
- research strategies to facilitate informed public debate about climate change challenges and solutions;

- research ways for encouragement, support and mobilisation of local community innovation and activism.