

# Climate change: UAE names oil chief to lead COP28 talks

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Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company

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**The head of one of the world's biggest oil companies has been named to lead the COP28 global climate talks in Dubai, later this year.**

Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber is currently the chief executive officer of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

He is also the minister for industry and advanced technology for the COP28 hosts, the United Arab Emirates.

Campaigners say he must stand down from his oil business role while president as it is a clear conflict of interest.

They believe someone steeped in the oil industry may not push countries to rapidly reduce their production and use of fossil

fuel, which scientists say is critical to avoiding dangerous climate change.

- **Europe and polar regions hit hardest by warming**
- **Ozone layer may be restored in decades, UN says**
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Running the global climate talks process is not an easy job - for months before, and especially during the conference, every word and action of the president is heavily scrutinised.

COP28 is already mired in some controversy as the hosts, the United Arab Emirates, are one of the world's biggest producers of oil and gas.



Abu Dhabi National Oil Company is the 12th biggest in the world

The appointment of a key figure in the energy industry as the president-designate of COP28 will likely increase the concerns that the global climate talks process is facing significant influence from fossil fuel interests.

The recent COP27 gathering in Egypt was described by some attendees as a "glorified fossil fuel trade show".

Analysis of those who registered for the event showed **a significant increase in those who were connected to the oil and gas industry** compared to previous meetings.

Among the large delegation from the UAE at the conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, there were 70 people closely connected to fossil fuels.

Mr Al Jaber is the chief executive of the **Abu Dhabi National Oil Company**, said to be the world's 12th biggest oil company.

Over the past decade he has become the face of the UAE's energy industry but he will be the first serving oil executive to assume the role of COP president.

As well as being a minister and his country's climate envoy, he is also chairman of **Masdar**, the government-owned renewable energy company that he helped set up.



Protestors at the recent COP27 summit in Egypt were disappointed that efforts to phase out oil and gas were rejected

He has certainly long warned of the dangers of climate change but campaigners are concerned about his appointment, and are calling for him to step aside from his industry roles.

"It is imperative for the world to be reassured that he will step down from his role as the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company," said Tasneem Essop, from Climate Action International.

"He cannot preside over a process that is tasked to address the climate crisis with such a conflict of interest, heading an industry that is responsible for the crisis itself."

What will concern campaigners is that major oil and gas producers are among those opposed to a more rapid phase out of all fossil fuels.

At COP27, there was a strong push from more than 80 countries for the conference to declare support for a phase down of oil and gas as well as coal.

This attempt came to nothing **in the face of strong opposition** from countries the rely of fossil fuel exports.



A fuel outlet in Dubai, where the COP28 talks will be held later this year

While Mr Al Jaber's appointment has been met with criticism from activists, others involved in climate diplomacy have welcomed the move.

"The UAE has adopted a sound green growth strategy and is a major investor in renewable energy both at home and abroad," said Yvo de Boer, who was UN climate chief between 2006 and 2010.

"The COP president-designate has been instrumental on many of these issues. This equips him with the understanding,

experience and responsibility to make COP28 ambitious, innovative and future focussed."

Certainly those skills will be tested at the gathering in Dubai in early December this year.

COP28 will hold the first formal assessment of progress on cutting carbon since the Paris agreement was signed.

The "global stocktake" as it is called will be a key moment in clarifying just how much further countries will need to go in restricting their emissions.

## UAE's Cop28 president will keep role as head of national oil company

**Campaigners warn 'breathtaking conflict of interest' could jeopardise climate negotiating process**



Sultan Al Jaber is chief executive of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, which is one of the world's biggest oil producers. Photograph: Rashed Al-Mansoori/UAE's Ministry of Presidential A/AFP/Getty Images

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Sultan Al Jaber, the government minister for **United Arab Emirates** who will preside over this year's crucial UN climate talks, will retain his roles as head of the country's oil company and sustainable energy businesses, UAE has confirmed.

Campaigners have been angered by the decision, **revealed by the Guardian on Wednesday** and confirmed on Thursday by the UAE government, which they see as a clear conflict of interest, with some likening it to putting a tobacco company head in charge of an anti-smoking treaty, and warning it could jeopardise the negotiating process and hasten climate breakdown.

UAE will host this year's **Cop28 UN climate summit in Dubai**. The fortnight-long talks, starting on 30 November, are viewed as vital to try to put the world on track to limit global heating to **1.5C above pre-industrial levels**, a target that scientists have warned is in **imminent danger of being lost forever**.

Al Jaber is minister for industry and advanced technology, but is also chief executive of the Abu Dhabi National **Oil** Company (ADNOC), which is one of the world's biggest oil producers, and whose plans for new drilling will amount to the second largest expansion of oil and gas production planned globally.

A Cop28 spokesperson for UAE told the Guardian: "Dr Sultan [Al Jaber] has a long career serving as a diplomat, minister, and business leader across the energy and renewables industry, including as the founding CEO of **Masdar, a global renewable energy leader**, and ADNOC. To deliver a just energy transition, a deep understanding of energy systems is essential. His experience uniquely positions him to be able to convene both the public and private sector to bring about pragmatic solutions to achieve the **goals and aspirations of the Paris climate agreement**."

The spokesperson said: "Dr Al Jaber has helped accelerate adoption of renewables as founding CEO and current chairman of Masdar, the world's second largest renewable energy company with clean energy investments in over 40 countries, operating three of the world's largest and lowest-cost solar plants. As ADNOC CEO, he has spearheaded investments of \$15bn over five years in decarbonisation strategy and new low-carbon solutions."

Two other top officials have been appointed. Shamma Al Mazrui, will act as youth climate champion, and Razan Al Mubarak as UN climate change high-level champion, leading efforts to bring businesses to the summit with stringent commitments to cut their greenhouse gas emissions.

Tony Blair, the former UK prime minister, who has worked closely with the UAE government in the past, welcomed the appointments.

He said: “Domestically and internationally, the UAE has shown leadership in climate investment and innovation. It is already one of the largest investors in renewables at home and abroad and is an innovator in technologies crucial to the energy transition, such as carbon capture and low-carbon hydrogen.”

He added: “Al Jaber brings deep diplomatic and commercial experience through his work as the UAE’s special envoy on climate change and as chairman of Masdar. I am confident that Dr Sultan has both the standing and the capability to offer groundbreaking leadership for **Cop28**.”

The Cop president plays a vital role in the annual climate talks, acting as an “honest broker” among bickering governments, and with a large degree of latitude in determining the direction of the talks and what issues are given priority and negotiating time.

But campaigners have been dismayed that the talks will be overseen by an oil executive.

Romain Ioualalen, global policy manager at the campaigning group Oil Change International, said: “This is a truly breathtaking conflict of interest and is tantamount to putting the head of a tobacco company in charge of negotiating an anti-smoking treaty.”

“ADNOC’s investment decisions in the next few years will make it the second largest expander of oil and gas production globally, despite clear warnings from the International Energy Agency and the UN that any new oil and gas production is incompatible with limiting warming to 1.5°C. ADNOC will surely tout its investments in renewable energy but the reality is that the climate talks

will be run by the CEO of a company betting on climate failure. These are the worst possible credentials for an upcoming COP President.”

Zeina Khalil Hajj, the head of global campaigning at the pressure group 350.org, said the decision risked “jeopardising the entire UN climate progress. We are extremely concerned that it will open the floodgates for greenwashing and oil and gas deals to keep exploiting fossil fuels.”

Chiara Liguori, a climate adviser at Amnesty International, urged the government to rethink. “The fact that the UAE is a major oil producer does not bode well for the outcome of Cop28, and the appointment of the head of the national oil company will heighten concerns that the UAE will use its presidency of the climate conference to foster fossil fuel interests,” she said.

“There is still time to reverse course. Sultan Al Jaber should resign from his role with the state oil company, and the UAE’s Cop28 leadership team should include phasing out fossil fuels among its priorities for the conference.”