



# YOUTH DECLARATION 2026

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Envisioning a fossil free future; Equitable pathways to defossilize our economies and effectively protect human rights.

# INTRODUCTION.

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**Dear Readers,**

In front of you lies the Youth Declaration for the First International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels. We commend the organizing countries, Colombia and the Netherlands, for their efforts to bring together a group of countries to discuss a question that, from our perspective as youth, should already have been decisively answered: not whether, but how we are going to transition away from the use of fossil fuels.

As youth from the continent most affected by impacts of fossil fuels, we took the lead in coordinating the process that led to this document. Our aim was to bring together young people from across regions, realities and energy systems, and to unite them behind a clear, ambitious and shared message for decision-makers.

Youth from Global South have found common ground in one core principle: the transition away from fossil fuels will only be successful if it is just. This Declaration sets a clear expectation for the level of ambition, equity and accountability that young people around the world demand from this Conference and from the transition ahead.

In April 2026, Uganda youth climate activists convened in Kampala-Uganda to generate a position paper to present during the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in Santa Marta Columbia. The conference is the first of a “series of conferences” agreed to by the 18 nation states participating in the development of a Fossil Fuel Treaty and will be a solutions-focused forum operating outside the auspices of traditional international climate architecture.

Participants had a common ground that the current wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are fueled by a thirst for fossil fuel revenues, do not sideline the transition debate they radically reinforce its necessity. Because fossil fuel production is so structurally embedded in global markets, financial systems, and geopolitics, no single country can manage this transition alone. Coordinated international cooperation, grounded in equity and justice, is essential to prevent disorderly phase-outs, economic downturns, and new forms of energy inequality.



*Sincerely,*

Handwritten signature of Mugisha Imam.

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# WHAT ABOUT THE SANTA MARTA CONFERENCE?

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For three decades, global climate negotiations have focused on managing the symptoms of the climate crisis, green house gas emissions while ignoring the root cause: the unchecked proliferation of coal, oil, and gas. While the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement are essential forums for global climate action, their consensus-based structures allow blockers backed by polluting industries to stall necessary action on fossil fuel production. Now, we have a vital opportunity to break this deadlock.

In April 2026, Colombia and the Netherlands will convene the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in Santa Marta. The conference is the first of a “series of conferences” agreed to by the 18 nation-states participating in the development of a Fossil Fuel Treaty, and will be a solutions-focused forum operating outside the auspices of traditional international climate architecture.

The current wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, fueled by a thirst for fossil fuel revenues, do not sideline the transition debate; they radically reinforce its necessity. Because fossil fuel production is so structurally embedded in global markets, financial systems, and geopolitics, no single country can manage this transition alone. Coordinated international cooperation, grounded in equity and justice, is essential to prevent disorderly phase-outs, economic downturns, and new forms of energy inequality.

The demand to transition away from fossil fuels is no longer only a whisper that many don't have the courage to say out loud; it's a universal cry for survival: we need to equitably move away from the extraction plotting our destruction. We need a global transition away from fossil fuels that is fast, fair, and financed — one that strengthens

energy sovereignty, stabilizes economies, and supports workers and communities, leaving no one behind.

All countries now face a stark choice: either unite to forge equitable new forms of international cooperation to deliver a fast and funded transition away from fossil fuels, or remain dangerously vulnerable to volatile supply shocks and the global conflicts they fuel.

The Santa Marta Conference is the decisive opportunity to strengthen international cooperation by finally confronting these interconnected crises at their shared source. It is a historic turning point in climate diplomacy, and a fundamental act for global stability. Tired of waiting for an elusive consensus, committed, high-ambition nations are coming together, ready to move from incremental pledges to concrete action.

They will champion coordinated solutions, including strengthening multilateralism to address the threat of fossil fuel extraction. This is why a global coalition of nation-states, subnational governments, Indigenous peoples, scientists and civil society will arrive in Santa Marta calling for countries to participate in the development of a Fossil Fuel Treaty as a key outcome of the summit.

The First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels will serve as a strategic space for dialogue among a broad range of stakeholders including government representatives, experts, rural and Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant communities, civil society, climate advocates, industry leaders, and academia — to explore viable, fair, and equitable pathways for transitioning to sustainable, diversified, and accessible energy. Designed to foster robust and structural transformations, the summit aims to facilitate a planned, just, and sustainable phase-out of fossil fuels and address the need for a structural shift in our socioeconomic model

# WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR FOSSIL FUELS' TREATY ?

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After almost three decades of climate negotiations, the need to transition away from fossil fuels was acknowledged in the decision text at COP28. Despite this, many governments are still approving new coal, oil and gas projects even as we crash past the 1.5 C degrees global warming limit.

All countries must phase out fossil fuel extraction as quickly as possible, but this must be done in a way which is equitable, acknowledging the historical and colonial power dynamics that have created and emboldened fossil fuel dependencies. A growing bloc of 13 countries are seeking a negotiating mandate for building a Fossil Fuel Treaty: a plan to end the expansion of new coal, oil and gas projects and manage a global just transition away from fossil fuels. This would complement the Paris Agreement by providing the global roadmap to manage an equitable phase out of fossil fuels, laying the groundwork for a just energy transition in which no worker, community or country is left behind.

The Just Transition Africa Report tells us that African countries particularly as a result of historical marginalization driven by colonial extractivism and a deeply unfair global political economy suffer from at least three major structural economic deficiencies: the lack of food sovereignty, lack of energy sovereignty, and the low value-added content of exports relative to imports. These contribute to structural trade deficits, weakened African currencies and a pressure to issue debt denominated in foreign currencies (typically U.S. dollars) with increased and perpetual indebtedness as a result. Many of the policies promoted to African decision makers have not resulted in alleviation of these challenges, especially not in terms of ensuring energy independence and access for all.

As a result, countries across Africa face many structural barriers to the energy transition. Africa is the continent endowed with the largest share of the Earth's renewable energy potential, home to 60% of the world's best solar resources and 39% of global renewable energy potential. Yet this potential remains largely untapped, as the continent has just 1% of the world's installed solar capacity and has received only 2% of global renewable energy investments in the past two decades.

African countries not only face deeply unfair costs of capital investment into transition energies and infrastructures but worsening debt burdens, pushing them further into a cycle of climate vulnerability and political-economic marginalization. For some, it is hard to imagine a path away from fossil fuels, particularly in terms of key public service revenues. According to Carbon Tracker, seven African (Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Angola, and Chad) countries depend on oil or gas for between 62 - 98% of government revenues.

# YOUTH CALL TO ACTION AT SANTA MARTA

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- We call on states to recognize that a transition away from fossil fuels is fundamentally a human rights imperative. It must protect livelihoods, close gaps in access to clean energy and resources, and address historical harms, not simply swap one extractive model for another. Energy must be treated as a public good and a human right, never a commodity for profit.
- We call on states to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of young people in the decision-making process regarding the transition, its implementation, and the follow-up mechanisms following the conference. Young people must be recognized not only as observers of the commitments made at this Conference, but as active protagonists in their implementation and follow-up.
- We call on states, international institutions and financial actors to recognize that young people are not only inheriting the consequences of today's decisions, but already building the transition through leadership, innovation and intergenerational dialogue. This requires investing in youth-led solutions, ensuring a just redistribution of opportunities for those affected by the phase-out of fossil fuels, and addressing the disproportionate risks young people face, including job displacement, skills gaps and economic uncertainty.
- We call on states and international institutions to co-create transition policies with the communities most affected, including indigenous peoples, frontline communities, women, and children and youth, at every stage from design to evaluation. Those who bear the greatest burden of both fossil fuel harm and poorly designed transitions must be the ones shaping the solutions.
- We call on creditors, Multilateral Development Banks and International Financial Institutions to cancel or restructure the debts that force Global South countries to keep extracting fossil fuels to service foreign-currency obligations. Grants, debt-for-nature swaps and concessional instruments must replace mechanisms that leave no fiscal space for transition. Where debts were accumulated under illegitimate conditions, citizen-led debt audits must be supported as a concrete path to relief.
- We call on states to establish binding agreements on responsible mineral sourcing and to enforce due diligence requirements throughout international supply chains. Communities in whose territories critical minerals are extracted must benefit from and participate in decisions about those resources, including young people from affected territories. A transition that reproduces dependency, environmental destruction and human rights violations, under a green label, is no transition at all.

- We call on states to reject the false narrative that fossil fuel dependence equals energy security. Import dependence creates fiscal vulnerability and exchange rate instability, every year of delay deepens that exposure. True energy security lies in decentralized, community-owned renewable systems that keep resources, revenues and resilience within the communities that need them most.
- We call on states to progressively eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, which disproportionately benefit higher-income households while draining the public resources needed for the transition. These must be replaced with redistributive carbon pricing and targeted cash transfers, with revenues reinvested in renewable energy infrastructure and affordable access ensuring that the end of fossil fuel support becomes the beginning of a fairer and greener economy for all.
- We call on states to guarantee universal access to electricity and clean cooking while establishing progressive limits on excessive consumption. This must include a rapid shift in transport systems by 2035, prioritizing the phase-out of fossil fuel-powered vehicles, investment in accessible public transit and the protection of workers through just reskilling pathways. These transformations must be sustained by embedding climate education and just transition principles across all levels of society, empowering young people as key drivers of change and ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and tools to lead this transition.

## First Conference on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

For three decades, global climate negotiations have focused on managing the symptoms of the climate crisis — greenhouse gas emissions — while ignoring the root cause: the unchecked proliferation of coal, oil, and gas.

 Fossil Fuel Treaty



Figure 1: Participants during the session on generating a declaration on fossil fuels a head of the santa Marta conference in Columbia.

# WHY THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

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Young people underscore that the transition away from fossil fuels is an urgent and necessary response to a crisis that directly affects their present and determines the future they will inherit. Continued dependence on fossil fuels poses significant risks to human rights, including the right to a healthy environment, while undermining public health, ecosystems, and livelihoods for current and future generations. As Elisa Morgera, the UN Special Rapporteur on climate change and human rights, said, “Defossilization of our whole economies is urgent from a human rights perspective and truly the single most impactful health contribution. It entails prioritizing the phase out of fossil fuels, including various forms of financing them, within and beyond the energy sector” . The impacts are already being experienced and will disproportionately affect children and youth through increasing climate related events such as extreme weather, droughts, and sea-level rise.

As the window to secure livable conditions continues to narrow, delays in action place a heavier burden on younger generations and on communities already more vulnerable. This reflects broader global inequalities in which those least responsible for climate change are most affected, underscoring the need for greater collective responsibility. For youth, this moment represents an opportunity to confront an environmental debt they did not create but are already bearing and to demand that climate commitments translate into concrete structural action.

Young people engage in this process because they are not only future leaders but current stakeholders, whose lives, livelihoods and opportunities are already being shaped by climate and energy transition decisions. The scale of these impacts is significant: recent analysis by the World Resources Institute, drawing on International Labor

Organization estimates, points to around 66 million people employed directly and indirectly in the oil and gas industry , a workforce that includes significant numbers of young people in petrostate economies where education systems have long been oriented toward fossil fuel industries. As the global economy transitions away from these sectors, young people face disproportionate risks: job displacement, skills mismatch, increasingly severe climate impacts and economic uncertainty.

At the same time, young people are not passive recipients of these decisions but active architects of the transition. Rural youth, young people from ethnic communities and women are already leading solutions from their territories, driving paradigm shifts and bringing lived experience and innovative approaches that must be incorporated into public policy.

Their unique position as bridges between past, present and future generations enables them to connect new ideas to those with decision-making power today, while keeping sight of the needs of generations yet to come. Because the decisions made today will determine the climate, economic opportunities and social security of the next century, meaningful youth participation in spaces such as this Conference is not symbolic, it is a practical requirement for a stable future and a precondition for the credibility and accountability of the transition itself.



# PRINCIPLES OF A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION.

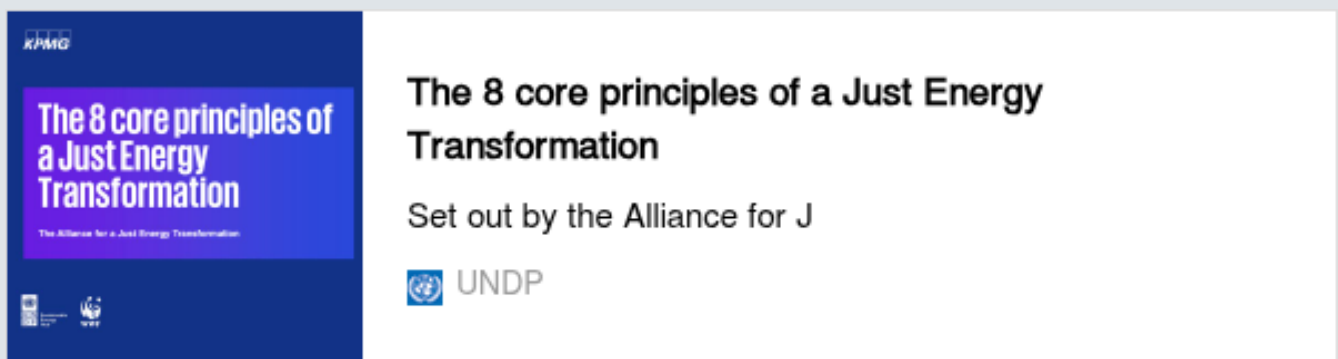
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As young people, we identify the following principles and approaches that must guide States in the design and implementation of fossil fuel phase-out measures. The transition away from fossil fuels must be fair and equitable, recognizing that it directly reshapes livelihoods, access to resources and social structures.

Energy and food must be treated as a public good and a human right, not a commodity for profit. A just transition cannot limit itself to changing energy sources while preserving the economic and political dominance of large industries; it requires a fundamental transformation of the energy and economic models that drive overreliance on extractive processes. At the same time, we must promote a transition toward sustainable food systems, where the traditional knowledge of communities.

- Intercultural approach: A just transition must respect the rights of indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural and local communities through recognition of their autonomy, knowledge systems, governance structures . As the green economy expands through growing demand for critical minerals, strong global safeguards must be established to protect human rights, labor standards and environmental integrity throughout supply chains preventing the reproduction of extractive patterns and green colonialism under a different name.
- Gender-based approach: Women are disproportionately affected by energy poverty and environmental degradation, which increase exposure to gender-based violence and health risks . Approximately 2.9 million people die prematurely each year from diseases caused by household air pollution from unclean cooking fuels , Transition policies must ensure women's meaningful leadership in designing and implementing solutions, with attention to awareness, cultural adaptation and local context, while formally recognizing the contributions of young women in biodiversity protection, seed sovereignty and water stewardship across all levels of governance.
- International support and economic diversification: Achieving a just transition requires dedicated international support for countries whose economies rely heavily on fossil fuel revenues. Access to transition finance, economic diversification and capacity-building are essential so that Global South countries can shift toward sustainable economic models without bearing a disproportionate share of transition costs, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
- Leaving no one behind Solutions must close structural gaps in access to resources, clean energy and emerging technologies, and must be co-developed with all stakeholders and adapted to regional realities. Migrants must be centered in this process, as migration is itself an adaptation pathway requiring dedicated policy support. Proactive investment in reskilling, social protection and locally adapted transition pathways is essential, particularly in regions where economies and education systems remain tied to fossil fuel industries.

- **Meaningful and active participation:** The just transition must be co-created with all actors, including indigenous peoples, local organizations, academia, NGOs and the private sector, across all stages of public policy: from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Frontline communities must shape solutions, given their direct experience of the harms of both fossil fuel dependence and poorly designed green transitions.
- **Community-centered approach:** The transition must recognize the autonomy and governance systems of peoples and fully respect free, prior and informed consent. Land rights must be protected to prevent displacement due to transition-related extraction. Investments in energy infrastructure, batteries and data centers must not result in the dispossession of Afro-descendant communities, indigenous peoples or smallholder farmers preventing new forms of green Extractivism.
- **Intergenerational approach:** The meaningful inclusion of younger generations and local youth is essential at all stages of public policy. Young people bring lived experience and innovative perspectives that must be incorporated into decision-making rather than dismissed or underestimated.



# ROLE OF YOUTH IN FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION.

Youth engagement is not rooted in idealism alone young people bring pragmatic perspectives that recognize the transition as a technical and gradual process requiring careful management of energy security, grid stability, and national economies. This makes youth not peripheral voices, but essential actors in designing transitions that are both ambitious and grounded in reality. Achieving this level of engagement requires sustained investment in youth capacities and the establishment of formal and binding mechanisms for youth representation, with dedicated funding and long-term support structures. Frontline communities must be connected and resourced to collaborate effectively, ensuring their voices are genuinely represented in the solutions that shape their futures. Young people are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between global processes and local realities — and that bridge must be built, not merely promised.



## Fossil Fuel Subsidies

Subsidies are intended to protect consumers by keeping prices low, but they come at a high cost. Subsidies have sizable fiscal costs (leading to higher taxes/borrowing or lower spending), promote...

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