

Climate Action Network UK Priorities for the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels



April 2026

The First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels takes place in Santa Marta, Colombia 24-29 April 2026, and must be a decisive moment to enable a global just transition to sustainable energy for all.

At COP28 in 2023, governments reached a historic agreement to transition away from fossil fuels in recognition of this primary driver of climate change. The Santa Marta conference is an important moment to demonstrate the progress made to date and to increase international cooperation to overcome barriers and accelerate further action.

Delivering a global just transition away from fossil fuels is not just a question of ambition, but one of feasibility and fairness, particularly for low- and middle-income countries. The Santa Marta conference must showcase ambition but also crucially expand the conversation from targets alone to the conditions required to achieve them.

CAN-UK's six key priorities for the UK government for the conference and beyond are:

1. Ensure no new fossil fuel licences in the UK and reject the application to develop Cambo.
2. End fossil fuel subsidies and redirect the public finance to climate action at home and overseas.
3. End Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) arrangements in UK agreements and globally to end its chilling effect on climate policy.
4. Cancel debt and reform international financial architecture to enable a just transition, including strengthening the Common Framework and introducing UK legislation to compel private creditors to participate in debt restructuring.
5. Implement fair polluter pays taxation in the UK and globally to pay for climate action.
6. Anchor critical minerals policies and agreements in justice, sustainability, and accountability.

Ensure no new fossil fuel licences in the UK and reject the application to develop Cambo.

This government's 2024 manifesto stated: "We will not issue new licences to explore new fields because they will not take a penny off bills, cannot make us energy secure, and will only accelerate the worsening climate crisis." We support this commitment and the new North Sea Future Plan commitment to "take a globally standard setting, 1.5°C and climate science aligned approach to future oil and gas production." We urge the government to continue to strongly maintain these crucial commitments and reject Ithaca Energy's application to develop the Cambo oil field.

Shell's withdrawal from Cambo in December 2021 - following widespread public opposition - should have put an end to the proposed project for good. As the Prime Minister noted at the time, approving Cambo would "give off completely the wrong signal."ⁱ The scientific evidence is unequivocal: global 1.5°C

pathways require a rapid decline in fossil fuel production, and the global carbon budget is already exhausted by existing reserves. Adding new North Sea developments directly undermines the national transition to clean energy as well as the UK's obligations to pursue efforts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C under the Paris Agreement. Even the developer acknowledges that Cambo is not in line with 1.5°C.ⁱⁱ Cambo also will do nothing to improve energy affordability or supply for UK households, since it would mostly be for export. This all makes the project fundamentally incompatible with the UK's climate change obligations, the global agreement to transition away from fossil fuels, and the best interests of UK households.

We call on the UK to make clear at First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels, that developments such as Cambo will have no place in the UK's energy future.

End fossil fuel subsidies and redirect the public finance to climate action at home and overseas

The UK is a member of the Coalition on Phasing Out Fossil Fuel Incentives Including Subsidies (COFFIS), which was launched in November 2023, with the aim to improve transparency, accelerate action, and enhance international collaboration on subsidy reform. Through COFFIS, member governments commit to publish annual fossil fuel subsidy inventories within one year of signing and to develop a subsidy phase-out action plan within two years, but the UK has yet to submit an inventory. The Santa Marta conference is a critical moment for the UK and other COFFIS members to get back on track and demonstrate that fossil fuel subsidy reform is critical to accelerate the just energy transition.

The current fossil fuel supply and price shocks demonstrate once more that fossil fuel dependency makes our economies vulnerable to unstable global fossil fuel markets, with the most dire impacts being felt by the poorest. The more than one trillion US dollars poured into fossil fuels subsidies globally each year has not made our energy systems more resilient.ⁱⁱⁱ Subsidies have fuelled energy insecurity by artificially maintaining lower fossil fuel prices, and discouraged the uptake of renewable energy and energy efficiency, slowing down the much-needed transition. At the same time, during energy price crises such as the current one, the fossil fuel industry and their shareholders make outrageous windfall profits. Subsidies continue to perpetuate climate harm and inequality, and according to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on States obligations with respect to climate change, may be a breach of international law.

We support wider global civil society calls on COFFIS members to use the conference to:

- Communicate release dates for their annual fossil fuel subsidy inventory and phase-out plans, in line with the COFFIS commitments. Transparency and predictability must remain a priority. Phase-out plans should incorporate measures to guarantee equity and justice, and take into account the true social and environmental cost of fossil fuel subsidies.
- Collectively pledge to introduce no new fossil fuel subsidies. Instead announce immediate measures to limit the impact of current and future crises on vulnerable consumers and industries.
- Collectively prioritise an immediate phase out of fossil fuel exploration and production subsidies as a first step towards a full phase-out as soon as possible. This is to protect consumers from future price volatility, reduce fossil dependence, and lower the burden on public finance.

We must collectively work towards the end of all fossil fuel, large-scale bioenergy^{iv}, and other subsidies that damage our climate, and redirect the public finance to accelerate the just, equitable, sustainable, and rapid scale of renewable energy generation and doubling energy efficiency, ensuring strong social and environmental safeguards are in place, and integrating circular economy principles to get the right solutions for people, nature, and climate.

End ISDS arrangements in UK agreements and globally

Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) is a key barrier to achieving a global just transition, and we welcome this recognition in the thematic pillars of the conference, and call for action to end ISDS.

ISDS mechanisms are written into many trade and investment agreements, and are being inserted into new trade agreements by the UK, this despite their chilling effect on climate policy and the UK being sued under ISDS currently. ISDS entitles transnational corporations to sue governments, in secretive tribunals outside of the national legal system, over law and policy changes that they fear could reduce their profits. ISDS grants privileges to foreign investors that are unavailable to local businesses or ordinary citizens. It is a profoundly anti-democratic system that undermines rights and constrains sovereignty and self-determination.

Extractive firms in the oil, gas, and mining industries and energy corporations have brought hundreds of ISDS cases against countries. Fossil fuel and mining companies have used ISDS to rake in more than USD 87 billion in taxpayers' money since 1998 and recent years have seen a growing number of cases that directly challenge the transition away from fossil fuels. As a result, the fear of being sued may cause countries to delay or decide against taking necessary action on fossil fuels, and countries including Denmark and New Zealand have already stated publicly this has had an effect on their decision-making.^v

In August 2025, the UK was hit by its first ISDS case related to a climate change ruling. Investors in the proposed Cumbria coal mine are suing the UK government after the High Court in 2024 quashed the mine's planning permission over climate change concerns. This means UK taxpayers are shouldering the costs of defending a sovereign climate change ruling and will potentially have to pay out billions in compensation to the hedge fund behind a never-realised and unpermitted new coal mine, based on provisions from a 1975 investment treaty with Singapore.

ISDS is a systemic barrier to just transition nationally and globally, and puts billions of pounds of UK taxpayers' money at risk from profiteering by foreign companies seeking to undermine government commitments to clean and affordable energy for all households.

We join wider global civil society calls for the formation of a coalition of governments committed to ending ISDS. This alliance should:

- Commit to sign no new ISDS agreements.
- Cancel treaties with ISDS, or renegotiate to remove ISDS, between the governments involved, in ways that address 'sunset clauses'.
- Engage with other countries to support further potential for stepping away from ISDS.
- Initiate negotiations for a multilateral treaty to bring about a world free from ISDS.

Cancel debt and reform international financial architecture to enable a just transition

Reducing economic dependence on fossil fuels is hindered by systemic financial and structural barriers. High debt levels are a major barrier to phasing out fossil fuels for many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Many countries are trapped exploiting fossil fuels to generate revenue to pay off unfair and unsustainable debt, while at the same time fossil fuel projects often do not generate the revenues expected and can leave countries further indebted than when they started.^{vi} LMICs will not be able to phase out fossil fuel production unless harmful debt levels and the vulnerabilities and inequalities embedded within the existing debt and financial systems are addressed.

LMICs have been facing increasingly high debt over recent years, with external debt payments at their highest level in 30 years,^{vii} and with 54 countries in debt crisis.^{viii} High levels of indebtedness limit the resources to invest in what people need, including public services and transitioning to clean energy. Analysis shows that LMICs spend five times more on repaying debt than addressing the climate crisis.^{ix}

But 90% of the debts owed to financial giants by lower-income countries are overseen by UK law – which means the UK could play a significant role in addressing this barrier to transitioning away from fossil fuels by passing a debt justice law that would ensure private lenders take part in debt cancellation on fair terms. This law could make sure that no private lender could sue a country for more than they would have got if they had taken part in debt restructuring through existing agreements and prevent private lenders from suing while debt relief negotiations are taking place.^x

To address the significant barrier of debt to fossil fuel phase-out and the transition to clean energy, wealthy governments and institutions must:

- Agree to implement ambitious debt cancellation for all countries that need it, across all creditors, free from economic conditions.
- Reform the Common Framework to get debt relief working now, including the UK and other key jurisdictions introducing laws to ensure private creditors participate in debt relief on fair terms.
- UN Member States should agree to establish a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt to prevent and resolve unsustainable and illegitimate debts. The framework convention should encompass global consensus on the necessary rules, principles, and structures throughout the different stages of the debt cycle.^{xi}
- Significantly scale up public grant-based, new and additional climate finance for LMICs to ensure debt is not the only means available for countries to take climate action.

Implement fair polluter pays taxation in the UK and globally to pay for climate action

Fair polluter pays measures such as taxation on fossil fuel profits, high-emitting luxury travel, extreme wealth, and a frequent flyer levy, could raise tens of billions of pounds a year in the UK for climate action at home and overseas without unfairly costing UK households. Fossil fuel companies are projected to make around USD 234 billion in excess profits by the end of 2026 if oil prices remain elevated at above USD 100 a barrel.^{xii} Polling consistently shows the UK public supports fair taxation to pay for climate action:

- 85% say those most responsible for climate pollution should shoulder the costs of addressing the harm it causes.^{xiii}
- Nearly eight in ten people (79%) in the UK believe governments must tax oil, gas, and coal corporations for the environmental damages they cause, such as wildfires, flooding, and drought.^{xiv}

We join wider civil society calls for greater action in the UK and internationally to fairly tax fossil fuel exploitation and the largest and most wealthy polluters in our society. The UK government should:

- Lead a review of options for fair polluter pays taxes in the UK to raise public finance for climate action at home and to increase the UK's provision of International Climate Finance (ICF).
- Continue to support the call for inclusion of the Polluter Pays Principle in the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation negotiations and seek agreement on a range of international polluter pays measures to generate much needed public finance for climate action.

Anchor critical minerals policies and agreements in justice, sustainability, and accountability

Critical minerals are vital for the energy transition. All critical mineral policies and agreements must be anchored in justice, sustainability, and accountability to deliver resilient supply chains while addressing the social, environmental, and governance risks that have historically plagued mineral extraction.

Global agreement needs to be reached to prioritise equitable development for producer countries, strong human rights and environmental protections, and reduced demand through circularity and transparency.

We support wider civil society calls for critical mineral agreements to be based on a set of core social and environmental principles:

- **Equitable and beneficial trade agreements:** Protect producer countries' policy space to pursue their own industrial and development strategies, while supporting local value addition.
- **Corporate accountability:** Embed binding obligations on UK corporate actors to respect human rights, labour rights, and environmental standards.
- **Human rights protections:** Ensure compliance with key human rights conventions to protect the rights of civil society actors, particularly Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and workers.
- **Environmental rights protections:** Require high environmental standards, including best practices for water management, tailings safety, pollution control, and mine reclamation.
- **Demand management:** Drive demand reduction by integrating circular economy principles into trade agreements.
- **Energy transition focus:** Prioritise mineral supply chains which directly support net zero and socially useful sectors.
- **Transparency, anticorruption, and traceability:** Make negotiations transparent and subject to parliamentary and civil society scrutiny, strengthening anti-corruption, traceability, and beneficial ownership disclosure requirements.

About CAN-UK

Climate Action Network UK (CAN-UK) is the UK network of international development and environment NGOs working together at the nexus of poverty, nature, and climate, for climate justice and sustainable development for all. <https://can-uk.org>

CAN-UK is also the UK node of Climate Action Network (CAN), a global network of more than 1,900 civil society organisations in over 130 countries driving collective and sustainable action to fight the climate crisis and to achieve social and racial justice. <https://climatenetwork.org>

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- ^x Find out more about what UK legislation could achieve in this policy briefing for parliamentarians - The Lower-Income Country Debt Crisis and the Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Bill (2025) <https://debtjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-lower-income-country-debt-crisis.pdf>
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