

TEXT 1



‘Every company wants to produce the last barrel sold’: the treaty to stop fossil fuel production

Tzeporah Berman’s campaign group believes Cop30 will help its initiative to phase out oil, coal and gas take shape

Jonathan Watts

Tue 2 Sep 2025

The fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty initiative aims to sidestep slow-moving UN climate talks by gathering together nations, cities and companies that want to rapidly phase out oil, coal and gas. At the coming Cop30 summit in Belém, it hopes to gather support so it can launch negotiations for a new treaty next year. The group’s founder, Tzeporah Berman, explains why the Amazon rainforest and the global south are an ideal springboard for the movement.

Why will you be campaigning for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty?

We have to change the way people think about oil, gas and coal, which are responsible for 86% of the carbon dioxide emissions that are trapped in our atmosphere. The world is on track to produce 110% more oil, gas and coal by 2030 than we can ever burn if we want to keep global warming below 2C [above preindustrial levels]. That’s because the market is distorted by trillions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies.

And it’s only getting worse because every country is trying to artificially keep alive their fossil fuel industries, even though they know the damage they cause. At Cop30, we will be working to expand the group of countries participating in the development of the treaty.

What do you say to those who say a non-proliferation treaty is unfeasible anytime soon?

Change starts that way. When we first talked about renewable energy, people literally laughed at us because it was so expensive. But we’ve seen a tremendous change in technology and in prices so that today we are powering whole countries with renewable energy. Every day, we see major breakthroughs. Last year, one in five cars sold on the planet was electric. We can change very quickly when we want to.

Yes, the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty is a big new idea, but at this moment in history, with floods, fires and heatwaves sweeping the planet, we need big new ideas.

What progress have you made since the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty initiative was founded?

The push to negotiate a treaty is endorsed by more than 4,000 civil society groups including all of the world's major faith, health, women's and climate organisations. More than 120 cities have passed motions to support the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty and they are increasingly being joined by subnational governments such as California. We also now have 101 Nobel laureates and over 3,000 scientists who have endorsed the treaty. This growing movement helps create the political space for more countries to join.

So far 17 countries are participating in the development of the treaty. In addition, 10 countries have been attending senior officials meetings as observers and are showing significant interest and we hope there will be another string of announcements at and before Belém.

But what are the prospects of achieving a critical mass?

Treaties for landmines and chemical weapons started with a core group of just 20 to 30 countries who wanted ambitious, binding rules. That shifted the social norm so it became unacceptable to stockpile those weapons even for many nations who were not signatories to those treaties.

Today, fossil fuels are our weapons of mass destruction. They kill more people on this planet every year than anything else. Even before we calculate the toll from climate change, air pollution alone kills 8 million people each year. Fossil fuels are the greatest threat to human life.

We expect to have enough countries next year to begin negotiations. Before and during Cop30 we will be hosting major meetings of senior officials and ministers mapping the pathway toward negotiations, including the key convenings and conferences that need to be held in that process in the months ahead and we hope there will be a significant announcement on progress at Belém, so look out.

This goes beyond the traditional left-right divide, doesn't it?

For me, this all started with the conversations I had in Canada with the oil industry over the tar sands in Alberta. The Trudeau government back then would say: "We know we need to reduce emissions and the world is going to get off fossil fuels but our oil is ethical," even though the tar sands produce some of the heaviest carbon in the world.

I later realised that whether you're in Norway or Ecuador or Argentina, it's the same conversation. Every company wants to produce the last barrel sold. So every year we miss our emissions reduction targets and every year we drill for more oil, we frack for more gas and we dig up more coal. And then we wonder why the system isn't changing, even though renewable energy is cheaper.

As long as there is no supply side climate policy, then we are trying to cut with one half of the scissors by solely focusing on reducing demand. This is true even with supposedly progressive climate leaders in office, such as Trudeau in Canada, Biden in the US or Starmer in Britain. The system has been designed in such a way that, domestically, elected officials don't feel responsible for constraining production. That means we are continuing to put our intellectual, financial and political capital towards expanding a system that we say we're phasing out. And it is almost always the case that what we build today will be what we use tomorrow.

Why do you think the Brazilian climate summit is the place to expand this dialogue?

Indigenous nations in the heart of the Amazon campaigned to keep fossil fuels in the ground long before anywhere in the global north. It has now spread across the world from Standing Rock and the tar sands in the US to anti-coal campaigns in Australia and Europe.

In the run-up to Belém, we've been working with indigenous nations and associations across the region to promote the idea of a fossil-free Amazon zone so it can be a model for other parts of the world. We have tremendous support from civil society and significant backing from countries. Colombia was the first to endorse a fossil-free Amazon – a commitment to no oil and gas exploration and extraction in the region – and a global fossil fuel treaty, and it is doing diplomatic outreach to other countries.

How do you tackle climate justice issues?

For the last several years, we've been commissioning studies looking at how to apply equity and finance principles to a negotiation on fossil fuel production: who gets to produce and for how long? This takes in historical responsibility, just transition, social justice and levels of fossil fuel dependency.

Brazil – the biggest nation in the Amazon region – has just sold more than 100 oil and gas exploration blocks, including some offshore from the rainforest. How do you make it worthwhile for countries such as Brazil and leaders such as Lula to give up on fossil fuels?

At this moment in history, leadership is important. What Gustavo Petro, the president of Colombia, said when he joined the fossil fuel treaty was that the science is clear: no new fossil fuel expansion fits in a world where we meet our climate targets. The International Energy Agency has said the same and so has the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The international court of justice has now suggested that is not only a scientific finding but a legal obligation.

It's absurd that there's this constant drumbeat of pledges and speeches to protect the Amazon, to support Lula and other leaders in the Amazon while, at the same time, financing new oil drilling in the heart of the rainforest, in the mouth of the river, and then buying that oil. We need responsibility along the entire chain and we need more than press releases and empty pledges. We need support for Lula and other leaders to move forward with protecting the Amazon and stopping drilling.

How do you make it worthwhile for countries such as Brazil to give up on drilling particular fields?

We've formed a finance working group that has experts predominantly from the global south. They're producing a series of papers on trade agreements, tax agreements, debt relief and market access that would provide countries who have joined the fossil fuel treaty with financial support and benefits, as well as looking at specific just transition funds from the private sector available only to countries participating in the development of the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty.

A larger question is whether or not fossil fuel development in the global south can eliminate poverty. The plans for expansion in Latin America, south-east Asia and Africa show the fossil fuel industry using these regions as a gas station for the global north: Europe and North America. They are unlikely to provide significant economic revenue or products to the areas that they're exploiting. There's a tremendous amount of evidence from the last 50 years to show the legacy is more likely to be poisoned waterways and expensive spills. This has been the case for countries that have had fossil fuel development for decades such as Ecuador or Nigeria. The ecological devastation dramatically diminishes local communities' abilities to support themselves.

New fossil fuel infrastructure has high costs and leads to ongoing dependency whereas renewable energy infrastructure creates independence and greater long-term health and

economic benefits. But less than 2% of global finance for renewables was in the global south. It's great that we have seen a commitment from governments in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to triple renewables, but we need those commitments to be coupled with commitments to decommission existing fossil fuel assets and to ensure money flows into the global south.

Won't the likely absence of the US make it difficult to move forward?

We don't expect the US and other major producers to join at this point and that's fine. That means the treaty being developed will be strong and built by those committed to ambitious action commensurate with the science calling for absolute decline of emissions and production.

The far right is already on the offensive against net zero [emissions targets]. Won't the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty initiative give them an even bigger target?

Politicians can talk about the benefits and costs of fossil fuels and renewable energy all they want, but the real benefit for real people is that the sun doesn't send you a bill at the end of the month. When we build renewable energy infrastructure, that means energy is free for life. Make no mistake about it, renewables are not just a different way of powering our cars and our homes; they're about changing power in every sense of the word.

TEXT 2



Ethiopia completes controversial Nile dam, escalating dispute with Egypt

Middle East

Ethiopia's prime minister said on Thursday the contested Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile is complete, a key step in a dispute with Egypt over water rights. Cairo opposes the project, fearing it will cut its vital Nile water supply, calling it an existential threat. Egypt, reliant on the Nile for agriculture and its 105 million people, has long sought a binding deal on water sharing.

July 4th 2025



Egypt and Sudan have long worried Ethiopia's mega-dam on the Blue Nile will impact their water supply. © Amanuel Sileshi, AFP

Ethiopia's prime minister said Thursday that a controversial power dam on the Nile is now complete, a major milestone for his country amid a dispute with Egypt over equitable sharing of the water.

Egypt has long opposed the dam because of concerns it would deplete its share of Nile River waters. Egypt has referred to the dam, known as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, as an existential threat because the Arab world's most populous country relies almost entirely on the Nile to supply water for agriculture and its more than 100 million people.

Negotiations between Ethiopia and Egypt over the years have not led to a pact, and questions remain about how much water Ethiopia will release downstream if a drought occurs.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, in his address to lawmakers Thursday, said his government is “preparing for its official inauguration” in September.

“While there are those who believe it should be disrupted before that moment, we reaffirm our commitment: the dam will be inaugurated,” he said.

Abiy said his country “remains committed to ensuring that our growth does not come at the expense of our Egyptian and Sudanese brothers and sisters”.

“We believe in shared progress, shared energy, and shared water,” he said. “Prosperity for one should mean prosperity for all.”

Ethiopia and Egypt have been trying to find an agreement for years over the \$4 billion dam, which Ethiopia began building in 2011. Tensions over the dam, the largest in Africa, once were so high that some observers feared the two countries might go to war over it.

But Ethiopia won the diplomatic support of upstream nations such as Uganda, home to a regional partnership of 10 countries that last year signed an accord on the equitable use of water resources from the Nile River basin.

The accord of the partnership, known as the Nile Basin Initiative, came into force in October without being ratified by Egypt or Sudan.

The dam, on the Blue Nile near the Sudan border, began producing power in 2022. The project is expected to ultimately produce over 6,000 megawatts of electricity, which is double Ethiopia’s current output and enough to make the East African nation of 120 million a net energy exporter.

The dam is located about 500 kilometres (311 miles) northwest of the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. It is 1,800 metres long and 175 metres high, and is backed by a reservoir that can hold up to 74 billion cubic metres of water, according to the main contractor.

Ethiopia insists the dam is a crucial development that will help pull millions of its citizens out of poverty and become a major power exporter.

It was not immediately possible to get a comment from Egypt, which has long asserted its rights to Nile water according to the terms of a colonial-era agreement.

The agreement between Egypt and the United Kingdom gave downstream Egypt and Sudan rights to the Nile water, with Egypt taking the majority.

That agreement, first signed in 1929, took no account of the other nations along the river basin that have demanded a more equitable accord.