



BEYOND SANTA MARTA: Charting the Path Away From Fossil Fuels

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The Santa Marta conference is a global inflection point because it tackles the toughest climate hurdle – transitioning away from fossil fuels – turning ambition into implementation, while considering the views of all stakeholders.

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Background

In 2023, as part of the [Global Stocktake](#) (GST) – designed not only to assess progress in implementing the Paris Agreement but also to define concrete measures to strengthen global and domestic climate action – the international community collectively agreed on the objective of “transitioning away from fossil fuels.” This commitment was articulated alongside clear targets related to the deployment of renewable energy and the promotion of energy efficiency. These outcomes were firmly reflected in the [COP28 UAE Consensus](#) document, which provided guidance for further implementation.

Soon thereafter, the global context changed dramatically. The resurgence of denialism, the imposition of tariffs, escalating trade disputes, and the proliferation of military conflicts –many framed and amplified through mis- and disinformation – fundamentally altered the landscape for the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement and the GST outcomes. Advancing action and building consensus became increasingly difficult. COP29, and even more so COP30, reflected this new reality. A formal plenary decision proved unattainable, prompting Brazil to propose an alternative pathway on transitioning away from fossil fuels: the development of a Presidency-led [roadmap](#). At the same time, Colombia and the Netherlands had already announced their intention to [host a conference](#) dedicated specifically to addressing this critical process.

This strong momentum from COP30 led to Santa Marta. There, representatives 58 countries – representing more than half the global GDP, 30% of the world’s population and 20% of global fossil fuels production – joined voices with more than 2 600 civil society and community organizations. Together, they [engaged](#) in defining a way forward in an exceptionally successful manner.

The Santa Marta High-Level Segment was structured around eight background papers supporting debate and discussion. These documents addressed key pillars of the transition, including governance, science, social justice, political will and cooperation, and finance. Although the conference was not designed as a decision-making forum, these papers summarize the content of the many submissions, outline concrete solutions, and identify enabling pathways for implementation.

Santa Marta has launched a valuable and innovative process to address what is arguably the most challenging obstacle to achieving climate objectives: the transition away from fossil fuels. It is different from existing processes as it has a focus on implementation, and it is bottom-up, engaging key stakeholders since the beginning. This raises the question of why Santa Marta deserves to be celebrated, and which elements have made the conference a pivotal milestone.

1. Inclusive, unprecedented dialogue

The very fact that country representatives convened – outside the formal UNFCCC COP framework but in alignment with it – to define pathways to transition away from fossil fuels is itself worthy of recognition.

The [participation](#) of Indigenous Peoples, Afro descents and local community representatives, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, scientific institutions, and women, children, and youth constituencies alongside governments underscores the significance of the [Santa Marta Conference](#).

2. New implementation model, backed by experience

Since the adoption of the UAE Consensus/GST outcomes in 2023, the world has awaited concrete next steps to fulfill the commitment to transition away from fossil fuels. Santa Marta delivered that signal, through a new format explicitly focused on implementation. Importantly, this progress occurred in an exceptionally challenging political and economic context, marked by rising oil prices, interrupted supply and energy uncertainty – making it the worst energy crisis in history.

In addition, this model has come at a time in global politics when consensus-building has become extraordinarily difficult. It is grounded in a clearly agreed objective and driven by a coalition that clearly signals a way forward and plants the seeds for broader participation by others over time.

At a moment when safeguarding multilateralism is essential, rather than undermining the UNFCCC, the Santa Marta approach reinforces it, materializes the COP30 shift to implementation and helps to overcome the influence of denialists and laggards. In some way, actors are rediscovering an old model that made it possible to address important and challenging topics such as nuclear weapons or anti-personnel landmines.

3. Coalition work boosting international cooperation

Santa Marta convened a [coalition of countries](#) that understand there can be no credible climate solutions without transitioning away from fossil fuels. These countries recognize that the process will not be easy. But they are equally aware of the costs of inaction. They acknowledge that future development and competitiveness must be rooted in cooperation and dialogue, paving the way towards a future in which fossil fuels no longer drive climate extremes, economic volatility, ecosystem degradation or social injustice.

4. Reconnecting science and decision-making

As was the case with the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – which informed the adoption of the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and many other landmark decisions – Santa Marta reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the role of science in decision-making on the transition away from fossil fuels. This is particularly critical in an era where misinformation and disinformation are becoming the norm.

Reconnecting science and policymaking can help rebuild trust in the process, re-engage citizens, and clarify how the transition away from fossil fuels is intrinsically linked not only to climate change and the 1.5°C threshold, but also to biodiversity loss, pollution, social impacts, and economic distortions. The decision to [create a dedicated scientific panel](#) to inform and support this process, in addition to the existing science on fossil fuels and its effects, is both timely and necessary, and it will help attract additional countries and stakeholders to the table. It can also be an opportunity to engage more scientists from the Global South.

5. Reinforcing inclusive multilateralism

Calls for comprehensive reform of the UN system and reconsideration of multilateral decision-making are increasingly common. While improvements are undoubtedly needed, defending multilateralism remains a central task. In 2023, former Pope Francis, in an [exhortation issued for COP28](#), emphasized the importance of building a more democratic and inclusive climate regime. Santa Marta demonstrated that this level of openness is achievable.

Climate governance has historically been among the most participatory global processes, enabling participation by Parties, subnational governments and non-Party stakeholders. Santa Marta reinforced this tradition by fostering a bottom-up approach, amplifying voices from territories, communities and constituencies, and ensuring they are heard by national decision-makers.

6. National TAFF pathways

Defining clear timelines and policies and measures for transitioning away from fossil fuels and peaking emissions are critical. Santa Marta sent a strong message encouraging countries to define their own transition pathways and integrate these commitments into their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Doing so can provide greater clarity, accountability, and momentum towards fulfilling climate obligations as well as translate the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities. Such roadmaps must also contribute to raising ambition in NDCs, that currently do not place the world on track to 1.5°C.

7. Strengthening the TAFF Roadmap

Beyond its relevance to NDCs, the Santa Marta conference also sent a clear signal regarding the COP30 Presidency proposed Roadmap for Transitioning Away from fossil Fuels ('the TAFF Roadmap'). Brazil's active participation in Santa Marta indicates a clear understanding of the need to transform the TAFF Roadmap into a robust and operational tool, complementing the outcomes of Santa Marta and aligning with initiatives such as the Fossil Fuel Treaty. Coherence between those initiatives remains essential for success and keeping the unprecedented momentum for the transition.

8. Justice, equity and order

Reinforcing the need for a just, equitable, and orderly transition away from fossil fuels was the central message of the conference. These principles define how the process must evolve: grounded in diverse national development realities, guided by ethical and social considerations, and firmly aligned with the foundational principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs of leaving no one behind.

A just transition requires protecting jobs while also safeguarding communities, territories and the broader right to development and prosperity. It demands capacity-building, effective governance structures, adequate human, technical, and financial resources, and integrated approaches that account for climate extremes, ecosystem fragility, geographic vulnerability, and the interconnected transitions needed to address climate change and biodiversity loss.

In conclusion – a transformational opportunity

Transitioning away from fossil fuels is undeniably a political process, but it is equally an economic one. It offers the opportunity to guide the planet towards a more equitable climate economy – one that generates prosperity based on inclusion, fairness and ethical values. Moreover, renewables are now a reality, as demonstrated in a recent report, solar and wind outpaced demand growth in the first half of 2025, as renewables overtook coal's share in the global electricity mix.

Santa Marta represents a key milestone of this journey. It has sparked significant momentum to address fossil fuel dependence through cooperation and collaboration. It is clearly additional to the UN Climate Change process, sending a signal to COP31 for the need for stronger complementary and coherent decisions. It also aligns with Brazil's TAFF Roadmap, resonates with the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on climate change, and responds to growing societal demands for more effective climate action and reduced vulnerability among those most affected. It could even lay the foundations for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

WWF will continue to support this implementation-focused initiative and its next steps, consistent with its longstanding mission to advance solutions that place people, nature and the planet on a sustainable path.

For further information, contact

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