

COP30 Presidency Roadmap

Part I — Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels

Stakeholder Inputs: Vanuatu

Introduction

Vanuatu welcomes the COP30 Presidency's invitation to contribute to the Roadmap on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels. This submission reflects Vanuatu's experience as one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations and our long-standing role in international climate diplomacy.

Alignment with 1.5°C: The Global Stocktake at COP28 called on countries to accelerate “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner” so as to achieve net zero by 2050. Vanuatu supports this commitment fully and urges the Roadmap to give it real, practical meaning.

No new fossil fuels: Keeping to 1.5°C means not only cutting emissions but stopping the expansion of fossil fuel production. Countries are currently planning to produce 120% more fossil fuels by 2030 than is consistent with 1.5°C. This gap must be closed. There should be no new oil, gas, or coal development anywhere in the world.

Unstable geopolitical and economic landscape: The current conflict involving an oil producing region clearly depicts the fragility of fossil fuel dependency. Multilateralism is under pressure, There are shockwaves through the global economy. Prices spike. Supply chains fracture. The most vulnerable communities — our communities — suffer first and suffer most

False solutions must be rejected: Technologies like carbon capture and storage (CCS) and carbon offsets are being used to justify continued fossil fuel expansion. The science is clear: these approaches cannot substitute for directly reducing production and use of fossil fuels. The Roadmap must be built on real emissions reductions, not accounting tricks.

The need for a binding international framework: Many countries are structurally locked into fossil fuels and cannot break free through domestic policy alone. Vanuatu calls for a Fossil Fuel Treaty to create the international governance needed to support a managed and equitable phase-out.

The ICJ Advisory Opinion: Vanuatu led the campaign for the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on states' obligations on climate change. That opinion makes clear that continuing to subsidise and expand fossil fuels may constitute an internationally wrongful act under international law. The Roadmap must reflect this legal reality. Vanuatu also calls for the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution endorsing the ICJ Advisory Opinion at its 2026 session, which would give it wider normative weight.

(a) What are the most critical barriers preventing a transition away from fossil fuels?

The barriers Vanuatu faces are both practical — the realities of a small, remote island economy — and structural, rooted in weak international governance and inadequate finance. Both types of barriers must be addressed.

i. Lack of Political Leadership and Binding Targets

- Rich nations are not moving fast enough. Without strong leadership from high-income, high-emitting countries, the global transition stalls.
- There are no legally binding international targets to limit fossil fuel production or consumption, and no rules to stop countries from licensing new projects. Countries continue to grant new licenses and pay subsidies that prop up fossil fuel industries.
- Continuing to subsidize fossil fuels while countries have committed to phase them out may be in violation of international law, as the ICJ Advisory Opinion makes clear.

- Weak regulation means companies and investors are not required to align with a 1.5°C trajectory.

ii. False Solutions Delaying Real Action

- Technologies such as carbon capture and storage (CCS), carbon offsets, and nuclear are being promoted as alternatives to phasing out fossil fuels. They are not viable substitutes at the scale and speed required.
- Gas is increasingly promoted as a “clean” transition fuel. This is misleading: gas accounts for 20% of energy-related emissions, and further investment in gas infrastructure creates decades-long lock-in that will breach the 1.5°C threshold. Methane leakage across the gas supply chain makes this worse.
- Demand for plastics is a growing but underappreciated driver of fossil fuel production. The IEA projects that petrochemicals — the raw material for plastics — will account for 75% of global oil demand growth between 2023 and 2030. The fossil fuel industry is increasingly relying on plastics as its commercial lifeline. Any serious transition must address this.

iii. The Climate Finance Gap

- Developed countries have consistently failed to deliver the climate finance they promised. This directly limits developing countries’ ability to invest in clean energy and move away from fossil fuels.
- There is no “polluter pays” principle in the current system. Fossil fuel companies continue to make enormous profits while the costs of climate damage fall on those who did least to cause it.
- Debt repayment obligations are a structural trap. Many developing countries are locked into fossil fuel dependency because they need the revenue to service their debts. This leaves them no fiscal space to invest in alternatives.

iv. No International Framework for a Managed Phase-Out

- No international instrument governs fossil fuel production. The Paris Agreement addresses emissions but not the extraction that causes them.
- Without a coordinated international framework, fossil fuel production will end in a disorderly way — imposing the highest costs on workers, communities, and vulnerable countries.
- International investment treaties allow fossil fuel companies to sue governments that introduce climate policies. This discourages action. Because this problem is embedded in the treaty system, only new or amended treaties can fix it.

v. Economic and Financial Barriers

- Vanuatu is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels for electricity, shipping, and transport. This exposes the country to volatile prices and supply disruptions.
- Climate finance processes are too slow and complex for small island governments with limited capacity.
- High upfront costs for resilient renewable energy systems are difficult to meet without grant-based support.

vi. Physical and Climate Risks

- Cyclones, flooding, and earthquakes require energy infrastructure to meet much higher resilience standards, raising costs significantly.
- After disasters, reconstruction often defaults to fossil fuel systems because they are cheaper and faster to deploy — reversing progress already made.
- The remoteness of Vanuatu’s islands makes affordable electrification harder.

vii. Technology and Capacity Gaps

- There are not enough cyclone-resilient renewable energy technologies available for small island grids.
- Vanuatu depends on outside expertise for installation and maintenance, which is expensive and unreliable.
- Small domestic markets limit the growth of local clean energy businesses.

viii. Social and Governance Barriers

- Fossil fuel revenues support government services in many countries. Transition must address this dependency, not ignore it.
- Workers and communities in fossil fuel sectors face real risks. Without just transition plans that include them, political support for the shift will be fragile.
- Indigenous peoples and frontline communities bear the greatest costs of both fossil fuels and climate change, but are often excluded from decisions.

(b) What levers exist to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels?

The barriers above are structural. Fixing them requires coordinated international action, not just incremental steps by individual countries. Below are the key levers Vanuatu supports.

i. A Fossil Fuel Treaty

A dedicated international legal instrument on fossil fuel phase-out is the most important lever available. It would complement the Paris Agreement by targeting the problem at its source — production — rather than just managing emissions. The Treaty, currently supported by 18 nations, would:

- Establish binding commitments to end new oil, gas, and coal licensing and phase out existing production on a differentiated timeline;
- Set up cooperative mechanisms: a buyers-sellers club, a debt resolution facility, and scaled-up public finance from rich to developing countries;
- Redirect financial flows away from fossil fuels, including by ending subsidies;
- Support countries in developing national phase-out roadmaps and just transition plans;
- Clarify international legal obligations on fossil fuels; and
- Stigmatize continued fossil fuel expansion globally, including for countries that do not join.

ii. National Phase-Out Roadmaps

Every country should develop a national fossil fuel phase-out roadmap. These plans should:

- Set binding timelines aligned with 1.5°C and differentiated by a country’s historical responsibility and capacity;
- Commit to no new fossil fuel development immediately;
- Set targets for developed countries to phase out coal power by 2030 and gas power by 2035, and all fossil fuel use by 2040;
- Allow developing countries more time — coal and gas power by 2040 and fossil fuel use by 2050 — with full financial and technical support; and
- Cover sectoral plans for industry, transport, and buildings, not just electricity.

iii. Making Polluters Pay: Tax Reform

The current tax system rewards fossil fuel companies while the public bears the costs of climate damage. This must change.

- **A surtax on fossil fuel company profits:** Governments should agree a “polluter pays” surtax on the profits of fossil fuel corporations, implemented at global, regional, and national levels. Revenue should fund climate action, economic diversification, and loss and damage — in line with the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities.

- **A global wealth tax:** The richest individuals have outsized carbon footprints. A coordinated global wealth tax would raise revenues for international climate action. The UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation (UNFCITC), expected to be adopted in 2027, provides a vehicle for both reforms.
- **End fossil fuel subsidies:** Governments must stop directing public money to fossil fuels. These subsidies distort markets, lock in emissions, and may now constitute violations of international law under the ICJ Advisory Opinion. The 2028 Global Stocktake should include explicit commitments to eliminate them and redirect flows to clean energy.

iv. A Global Just Transition Fund

A dedicated fund, financed by a levy on fossil fuel production and direct contributions from developed countries, should:

- Make the phase-out financially viable for fossil fuel-dependent states;
- Ensure clean energy alternatives are affordable and accessible;
- Protect workers and vulnerable communities through the transition; and
- Support economic diversification so countries are not simply trading one dependency for another.

v. A Debt Resolution Facility

Debt is one of the least-discussed but most important barriers to transition. Many developing countries cannot afford to invest in clean energy because their revenues must service foreign debt. A dedicated debt resolution facility would free up fiscal space for the transition, allowing governments to redirect money from debt payments to clean energy and diversification.

vi. A Buyers-Sellers Club

Countries that import fossil fuels could agree to buy only from producers committed to a managed phase-out. This gives fossil fuel exporters a guaranteed market and price stability in exchange for credible transition commitments — reducing the economic shock of phase-out for both sides.

vii. A Global Plastics Treaty

A fossil fuel transition cannot succeed if the industry simply shifts from burning fuels to making plastics. Petrochemicals are now the primary growth strategy for the fossil fuel industry. A strong Global Plastics Treaty that cuts plastic production by at least 75% by 2040 — starting with a moratorium on new production facilities — would close off this escape route and remove a major source of future fossil fuel demand. This is an urgent, near-term lever that Vanuatu supports.

viii. End Fossil Fuel Financing

Banks and financial institutions must stop funding new fossil fuel projects and infrastructure. Governments and regulators must require this. Without cutting off finance, new projects will continue to be built despite international commitments.

ix. Addressing Investment Treaties and Investor Protections

International investment treaties that allow fossil fuel companies to sue governments over climate policies must be reformed. A Fossil Fuel Treaty could create a coalition of support for renegotiating these provisions. Until that happens, the threat of costly legal action will continue to deter governments from acting.

x. Policy and Institutional Levers

- Fast-track financing and approval processes for SIDS-led transition projects.
- Long-term institutional support rather than short project cycles.
- Regional procurement and maintenance networks to reduce costs.
- Legislation to embed the transition commitment in law — for example, through a Clean Energy Transition Act that integrates energy, climate, and fiscal governance.
- Stronger mandates and enforcement powers for independent energy regulators.

(c) What experiences and lessons can be shared?

Vanuatu's Experience

- **Leading on fossil fuel phase-out:** Vanuatu has consistently pushed for global action on fossil fuels across the UNFCCC, the Pacific Islands Forum, and wider multilateral forums. This includes coordinating the Pacific Islands' position on the Port Vila Call for a Fossil-Free Pacific and supporting the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty initiative.
- **The ICJ Advisory Opinion:** Vanuatu led the successful campaign to bring climate change obligations before the International Court of Justice. The resulting Advisory Opinion establishes that states have clear legal obligations to prevent further warming and that continued expansion of fossil fuels — and subsidies to fossil fuel companies — may violate those obligations. Vanuatu calls on the UN General Assembly to adopt and operationalize a resolution endorsing the Opinion in 2026, which would give it broader legal and political weight in the transition process.
- **Renewable energy in practice:** Vanuatu's work on solar, hydro, wind, and hybrid systems shows that fast transitions are possible in fragile island grids when finance and technology are properly aligned. This experience is a practical model for other SIDS.
- **Rebuilding after disasters:** Cyclones Pam (2015) and Harold (2020) showed that post-disaster reconstruction often defaults to fossil fuels because they are faster to deploy. Vanuatu advocates for resilient, clean energy standards to be built into all reconstruction financing, so that disasters do not undo transition progress.
- **Whole-of-government coordination:** Energy transition works best when it is integrated with climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and economic planning. Vanuatu's experience confirms that siloed approaches do not work.

Key lesson: For Vanuatu and SIDS, speed and resilience are the same thing. Slow transitions cost more and put lives at risk. International support must come early, not as a last resort.

(d) How can the transition be just, orderly, and equitable for all countries?

A just transition cannot be defined by emissions levels alone. It must be defined by vulnerability, historical responsibility, and the capacity to act. Vanuatu outlines the principles it believes should guide the Roadmap — each of which could be supported and made binding through a Fossil Fuel Treaty.

i. Rich Countries Must Move First and Fastest

Countries with the highest historical emissions and the greatest financial capacity must lead the phase-out. The frameworks developed by Muttitt and Kartha (2020) and the Civil Society Equity Review provide practical tools for working out who should transition first and who needs the most support.

For Vanuatu, an accelerated transition is not a choice — it is a survival requirement. The flexibility built into differentiated pathways must allow vulnerable SIDS to move faster than the global average, while requiring large emitters to act in proportion to their historical contribution to the crisis.

ii. Just Transition Mechanisms Must Be Put in Place

Without specific support mechanisms, the costs of transition will fall unfairly on those least responsible for the crisis. The Roadmap should explicitly commit to establishing:

- A Debt Resolution Facility — to remove debt as a barrier;
- A Global Just Transition Fund — to share the costs and benefits of transition fairly;
- A Buyers-Sellers Club — to provide stability for fossil fuel-dependent economies; and
- National phase-out planning support — including technical help for developing transition roadmaps.

iii. Economic Diversification, Not Just Energy Switching

In many developing countries, fossil fuel revenues fund schools, hospitals, and government services. A truly just transition must support economic diversification — helping countries build new sources of

income and public revenue, not just replacing one energy source with another. A Roadmap that ignores this will not be credible with the countries whose participation is most needed.

iv. Workers' Rights and Community Livelihoods

People working in fossil fuel industries, and the communities that depend on them, must not be left behind. Just transition plans must be developed with workers and communities — not imposed on them. Plans should include social safety nets, retraining and alternative employment, protection of labour rights, and clear timelines so people can plan ahead.

v. Health, Gender, and Human Rights

Fossil fuels cause direct harm to people's health. Phasing out fossil gas, in particular, improves indoor air quality and reduces respiratory illness, with benefits that disproportionately help women and children who spend more time at home. Distributed renewable energy enables communities to access electricity as a right, not a privilege.

The transition must take a human rights-based approach. International courts have confirmed that states have obligations to prevent rights violations caused by climate change. These obligations extend to the companies with the greatest historical role in causing the problem.

vi. Full Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Frontline Communities

Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by both fossil fuel extraction and climate change, while also being among the most important stewards of ecosystems and biodiversity. Any transition pathway must:

- Ensure full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in decisions that affect them;
- Respect their rights and territories, including the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC);
- Incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems in designing transition pathways; and
- Include frontline communities, cities, subnational governments, and civil society as active participants, not observers.

Concluding Message to the COP30 Presidency

Vanuatu's position is clear:

- The transition away from fossil fuels must be fast, supported, and differentiated. For climate-vulnerable nations like Vanuatu, delay is not a policy option — it is a threat to survival.
- There should be no new fossil fuel development anywhere in the world. The 120% production gap between current plans and a 1.5°C pathway is the central challenge the Roadmap must confront.
- False solutions — CCS, offsets, gas as a bridge fuel, and plastics as an industry lifeline — must not be allowed to replace genuine action.
- The Roadmap is important but it is not enough on its own. A Roadmap is not binding. To deliver on its promise, a Fossil Fuel Treaty is needed — one that creates enforceable obligations, establishes the cooperative mechanisms required for a just transition, and addresses the problem at its source.
- Making polluters pay — through profit surtaxes, wealth taxes, and the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies — is essential to fund the transition fairly and close the finance gap.
- The ICJ Advisory Opinion, once endorsed by the UN General Assembly, will strengthen the legal foundation for all of these actions. Vanuatu urges the COP30 Presidency to support this step.

Vanuatu calls on the COP30 Presidency to ensure the Roadmap explicitly endorses the mechanisms set out in this submission, supports the pathway to a Fossil Fuel Treaty, and reflects the legal clarity provided by the ICJ Advisory Opinion. The tools exist. What is needed now is the political will to use them.