

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2200 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

John Podesta
Senior Advisor to the President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Secretary Blinken and Mr. Podesta,

We are deeply concerned by the appointment of Mukhtar Babayev as president-designate of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties 29 (COP29). COP29 will be another instance where the host country has a poor human-rights record, which impacts civil society participation. When Mr. Babayev is elected, it will be the second year in a row that COP is headed by a fossil fuel executive. Given these conflicts of interest, we risk the process being co-opted by the same fossil fuel industry that is the greatest driver of our climate crisis. As the world races to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis we urge you to push the UNFCCC to develop and adopt conflict of interest guidelines for the COP presidency to ensure that this situation does not happen again.

Fossil fuel companies bear the largest responsibility for the climate crisis that is already harming millions of people across the globe. Yet these same companies have an oversized influence at COP. At COP28 in Dubai there were more than 2,450 fossil fuel lobbyists, many of whom entered on “party overflow” badges. That number was a stunning 285% increase compared to COP27, where at least 636 lobbyists from the oil and gas industries registered to attend.¹

Last year, the UNFCCC announced that it would require all participants to either disclose their “affiliations” ahead of COP28 or publicly refuse to do so. The UNFCCC also set up a consultative process, the Consultation on Net Zero Recognition and Accountability Framework, which aims to “identify . . . barriers [to net zero goals], understand more about how to refine approaches to transparency to promote greater ambition, and enable more consolidation, standardization and comparability.” The UNFCCC should require companies participating in COP to submit an audited climate policy influencing statement disclosing climate-related lobbying, campaign contributions, and funding of third parties active on energy and climate issues.

Disclosures and the Consultation are a small but notable step in the ongoing effort to limit obstruction and promote transparency at COPs but the UNFCCC must do more to manage the inherent risks from conflicts of interest. For all the same reasons, and in parallel to the Consultation’s work, the UNFCCC must also take additional steps to ensure accountability of the climate policymaking process more broadly, and protect climate policymaking from the undue influence of the fossil fuel industry.

This means adopting new policies to ensure that the COP presidency is not also co-opted by the fossil fuel industry. Time is running out, and this international process is too important for the United States to stand by as yet another negotiation is captured by fossil fuel interests.

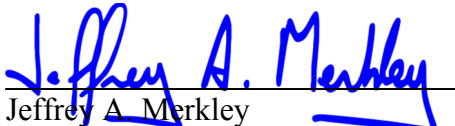
In addition to the outsized influence of the fossil fuel industry on COP we also find it deeply troubling that countries like Azerbaijan that persistently flout international human rights law are selected as conference hosts,

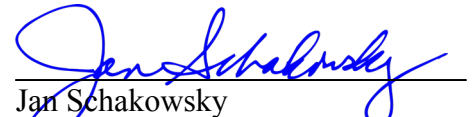
¹ Michaelson, Ruth. 2022. “‘Explosion’ in Number of Fossil Fuel Lobbyists at Cop27 Climate Summit.” The Guardian. November 10, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/10/big-rise-in-number-of-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-at-cop27-climate-summit>.

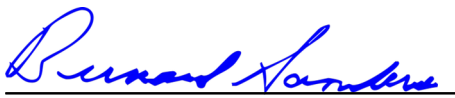
adversely impacting public participation. In 2023, Azeri authorities suppressed freedom of expression during multiple protests about climate concerns, highlighting the Azeri people's frustration regarding their government's failure to protect the environment as well as the government's intolerance of environmental defenders. We are also concerned by Azerbaijan's role in the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

We know that you share our sense of urgency about the climate crisis and the protection of human rights, and that you understand the importance of protecting the integrity of COP. That is why we urge you to work with the UNFCCC to adopt a conflict-of-interest policy for future COP presidents and the UNFCCC climate policymaking process more broadly that would preclude former or current oil executives from serving as presiding officers or hosts at future COPs, or from unduly influencing its outcomes, and that protects civil society participation.


Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

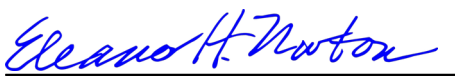

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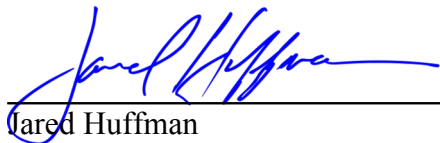

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Maxine Waters
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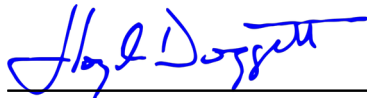
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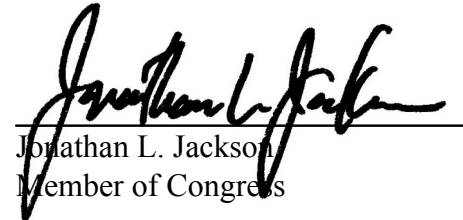
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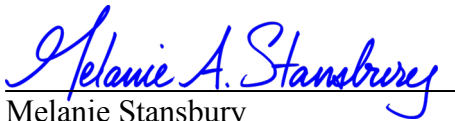
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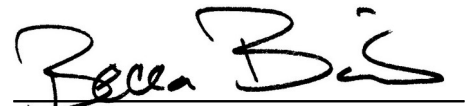
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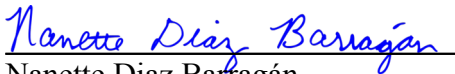
Becca Balint
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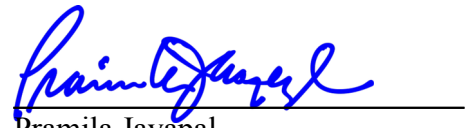
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