

CoP 28 limped to its predictably calamitous conclusion on December 13th.

The heavily spun headline (“historic breakthrough”) quickly dribbled away into the sands of Dubai, to be replaced by more “balanced” commentaries from governments, businesses and some mainstream NGOs. Three weeks on, even that laboured balancing act now looks either totally naïve or deeply dishonest.

The “historic breakthrough” boiled down to one simple fact: that the final CoP 28 Agreement refers explicitly to the burning of fossil fuels as the primary cause of today’s climate breakdown – the first time that has happened in 30 years of futile climate diplomacy.

It gets worse. I won’t weary you with the forensic details of how critical sections of the Agreement have been worded to minimise any serious impact on petrostates and fossil fuel companies. It’s so full of loopholes, weasel words, and vacuous generalisations, let alone unlimited boosterism for all-but-useless technologies like Carbon Capture and Storage, as to fast track this Agreement instantly into the pantheon of toxic suicide notes.

Every Government delegation will have known that as they watched that gavel come down on the final text on December 13th. Some will have felt “job done”; others “game over”.

Every business delegation, messing around in the margins of CoP 28 trying to be useful, will also have known this. But will have avoided talking about it, assiduously averting their eyes from the monstrous heap of Emperors’ clothes in the corner.

Worst of all, every NGO with any serious knowledge of the gap between what the science tells us today and the policies now needed to narrow that gap, will have known this. But they held dutifully to the line that CoP 28 demonstrated “real progress” – if not exactly an historic breakthrough – implying that all is still well with the current CoP process.

My criticism here applies just as much to those NGOs as to all those government delegations and businesses enjoying the latest CoP tourism offer. They’re either totally naïve or deeply dishonest.

And I hate to have to say this, but that particularly applies to many of those “stubborn optimists” or “resolute climate solutionists” who still cannot accept just how fast things are changing around the world. Having come to the conclusion some time ago that there’s only so much painful reality that even well-informed citizens can cope with, they continue, CoP after CoP, to offer up a “solutions agenda” that they know means very little faced with the raw power of today’s fossil fuel incumbency.

It was that incumbency that was in charge in Dubai – very visibly indeed. And it still will be at CoP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, unless things change radically over the next few months.

Don’t get me wrong: I’m not saying that the work of these organisations (including Forum for the Future) isn’t still critical: it is. In fact, it’s going to be even more critical over the next few years. People do indeed need to know that the transition away from fossil fuels is both necessary and absolutely doable – in a remarkably short period of time. That’s still the central premise of all the talks I’m doing these days.

But to remain both honest and effective, we solutionists must now preface that authentic solutions agenda, on every possible occasion, with this harsh and sometimes unbearable set of truths:

1. There is literally no combination of emergency interventions, at this stage, which will keep the average global temperature increase below 1.5°C by the end of the century. As a target, 1.5°C is no longer on life-support: it is definitively dead. Indeed, it’s looking increasingly possible that the

average temperature may temporarily reach 1.5°C this year – primarily because of the cumulative impact of the current El Nino.

2. That doesn't automatically mean an irreversible slide on to 2°C and beyond. But if we're not completely honest about why we have failed so comprehensively to protect 1.5°C, then all future efforts to protect 2°C will fail just as comprehensively, for exactly the same reasons. Stubborn optimism that denies this undeniable realpolitik is now a massive barrier to forcing today's politicians to narrow that science-policy gap for real.

3. The UN's CoP process is almost as dead as its deeply dishonest posturing about "keeping 1.5°C alive". This has serious implications for all those NGOs still hoping to justify the millions of dollars their funders and members provide them with. With the CoP process itself on life support, surely it's time to change tack, prioritising a last-ditch global "save our CoP" campaign, demanding hard-edged reforms? This has to happen before the whole circus descends on CoP 29 in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, a country even more corrupt and just as much in thrall to the curse of fossil fuels as the United Arab Emirates.

4. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should also be put on notice. Forced to comply with the UN's highly politicised, consensus-based decision-making process, its Assessment Reports (and occasional Special Reports) do not tell the truth. The IPCC has rarely managed to reflect the frontline science going on all around the world; its generic reassurances (that 1.5°C is still alive, for instance) are now a travesty of what good, responsible science is all about. The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly (and for good reason) to the IPCC and to former Vice President Al Gore. Al Gore has stayed constant in his advocacy role, calling out the lies and corruption at the heart of today's climate diplomacy, with real passion and clarity. By contrast, the IPCC makes a mockery of that Nobel Prize in its refusal to speak the real truth about accelerating climate change to the world's real power-brokers.

5. All multinational companies should now threaten to boycott Cop 29 – unless a list of "save our CoP" conditions are met. And this should include banning the representatives of all fossil fuel companies. The sight of 80,000+ delegates unwittingly providing credibility to the fossil fuel incumbency that CoP now unapologetically represents, has become sickening. Stay away. Call it out. Tell the truth.

I know a lot of my colleagues in both the NGO and business worlds will resent these comments: "unreasonable", "hectoring", "extremist" – these are just a few of the responses I get these days. But where, I ask you, have reasonable, calm, middle-of-the-road voices got us over the last 30 years? Irrefutably, just a whole lot closer to that point where we find ourselves tipped over into irreversible climate change.

There's too much political naivety at the heart of today's solutions agenda. Do any of these genuinely caring, passionately committed, reasonable solutionists seriously think that today's fossil fuel incumbency (embedded so deeply in both governments and the whole global business community) gives a flying fuck about what they think, say or do?

I understand why few of my erstwhile colleagues will be keen to join me in taking a different path – in advocating on behalf of those who believe that civil disobedience is now the only way forward: Just Stop Oil, XR and so on. For those of us who've worked inside "the system" (as I have done since stepping down as Director of Friends of the Earth in 1990), it's deeply uncomfortable to have to acknowledge how little real impact we've made during that time – both on the climate and the

biodiversity fronts. There have been so many dead horses that we should have stopped flogging a long time ago.

For me personally, that realisation kicked in around 2010, when the Tories came back into power, and even more definitively after 2015. It was clear then that there is no accommodation to be had with ideological zealots of that ilk, still locked in a deadly embrace with an industry that will go on prioritising shareholder dividends over the future of life on Earth – until we stop them.

For anyone else feeling that discomfort, one way of dealing with it is the old trick of spreading one's bets: don't give up on the mainstream day job, working the inside track, selling in the solutions agenda with (hopefully!) ever greater eloquence and creativity. But perhaps "offset" any turning of a blind eye to today's irrefutable scientific reality by contributing as generously as your circumstances allow to those out there doing the heavy lifting on the radical flank of today's climate movement.

Just Stop Oil: [www.juststopoil.org](http://www.juststopoil.org)

XR: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk>

Fossil Free London: [www.fossilfreelondon.org](http://www.fossilfreelondon.org)

Stop Rosebank: [www.stopcambo.org.uk](http://www.stopcambo.org.uk)