



By: TA | AP Insight

Coalitions of countries willing to move faster on phasing out fossil fuels are being established



Against a backdrop of rising global tensions and energy market instability, governments from around 50 countries will gather Friday in Colombia's Caribbean city of Santa Marta for a summit aimed at accelerating the shift away from fossil fuels.

The April 24–29 conference, co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands, will bring together ministers, subnational governments, academics and civil society groups to discuss how to move beyond oil, gas and coal while ensuring the transition is “just, orderly and equitable,” organizers said.

The meeting reflects growing frustration among some governments and advocates that decades of [U.N. climate negotiations](#) have failed to directly address fossil fuel production – the main driver of global warming – prompting the Santa Marta summit to push the issue outside formal talks.

Space for debate, but no binding commitments

Organizers say the gathering is intended to open space for a politically sensitive debate that has long been avoided in international climate negotiations.

“It is definitely a political space. We are opening a space for discussion that does not exist,” Colombia's environment minister, Irene Vélez Torres, told The Associated Press in an interview ahead of the summit.

Unlike formal U.N. climate negotiations, the meeting is not expected to produce binding commitments. Instead, officials say the goal is to generate a set of proposals and build coalitions of countries willing to move faster on phasing out fossil fuels.

“We've also seen climate action unfortunately fall down the list of government priorities,” said Claudio Angelo, head of international policy at the Observatorio do Clima think tank in Brazil.

Nations from Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, many of which play key roles in fossil fuel production or consumption, will attend

Nations from Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, many of which play key roles in fossil fuel production or consumption, will attend.

The United States and Saudi Arabia – two of the world's largest oil producers – will not, underscoring divisions between countries pushing for a faster transition and those more closely tied to fossil fuel interests.

Under the [Paris Agreement](#) – the 2015 global climate accord – countries set their own emissions targets, meaning no international process can compel governments to phase out fossil fuels.

The summit is part of a broader push to move climate diplomacy beyond emissions targets and toward directly confronting fossil fuel production – a politically sensitive issue that has long divided countries.

Some advocates say new approaches are needed to close what they see as a major gap in global climate policy.

A push for fossil fuel free zones

“Fossil-free zones turn global climate goals into concrete geographic decisions,” said Andrés Gómez of the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative, referring to proposals to designate areas where oil, gas and coal extraction would be off-limits, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions.

Indigenous leaders involved in the process say they are pushing governments attending the Santa Marta summit to adopt fossil-free zones as part of their transition plans.

Oil and gas concessions already overlap with vast areas of tropical forest and Indigenous territories

“For Indigenous peoples, stopping fossil fuel extraction is not only a climate imperative – it is essential to defending our territories, our governance systems and our right to self-determination,” said Juan Carlos Jintiaich, executive secretary of the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, a coalition of Indigenous and local community organizations representing millions of people across forest regions worldwide.

He added that governments must move “from commitments to implementation” by integrating fossil-free zones into national energy transition plans.

Analysis by advocacy groups shows that oil and gas concessions already overlap with vast areas of tropical forest and Indigenous territories, underscoring the scale of the challenge.

Geopolitical tensions and energy shocks complicate the transition

The conference comes at a time of heightened geopolitical uncertainty, including the **war in Iran**, which has disrupted global energy markets and threatened supply through the Strait of Hormuz – a critical route for roughly a fifth of the world’s oil.

The resulting price spikes are already being felt far beyond energy markets.

“Oil prices don’t just stay in energy markets – they move straight into people’s lives,” said Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and a leading climate justice advocate expected to attend the Santa Marta conference, speaking at a press conference ahead of the event.



Oil prices don't just stay in energy markets – they move straight into people's lives - Mary Robinson

“Impacts are hitting the most vulnerable hardest, as always, while oil companies reap windfall profits,” she said.

In her interview, Vélez said such instability should accelerate – rather than delay – the transition.

“The crisis – and let’s call it what it is – the war in the Middle East has triggered a global crisis,” she said. “In this case, I believe the movement should be toward radicalizing the green agenda and the transitions.”

Some analysts warn that supply shocks could push countries to increase fossil fuel production in the short term, even as they commit to long-term climate goals – highlighting the tension between energy security and climate action.

That tension is particularly visible in Latin America, where many economies rely heavily on oil, gas and mining exports even as governments position themselves as climate leaders.

Colombia, one of the region’s top oil producers and home to roughly 6% of the Amazon rainforest, depends on crude exports for a significant share of government revenue and foreign income.

At the same time, Colombian President Gustavo Petro’s government has pledged to halt new oil exploration and push for a global phaseout of fossil fuels.

“Economic and fiscal dependence is a problem, and it is perhaps the main challenge we face,” Vélez said.

Financial constraints could slow the shift away from fossil fuels

Financial constraints are also expected to shape discussions. Many developing countries face high levels of public debt and limited fiscal space, making it difficult to invest in renewable energy and other elements of the transition.

Civil society groups say that without reforms to the global financial system, these constraints will continue to slow progress.

Moving away from fossil fuels requires a careful economic and energy transition plan - Carola Mejía

“Moving away from fossil fuels requires, without a doubt, a careful economic and energy transition plan,” said Carola Mejía of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Economic, Social and Climate Justice.

Gabriella Bianchini of Global Witness said the stakes go beyond climate alone.

“As people everywhere suffer the consequences of oil-driven conflict, it’s never been clearer that the world needs to leave the fossil fuel era behind,” she said. “Santa Marta is a chance for governments and communities to grab the bull by the horns and take action toward a greener, more equitable and peaceful world.”

She added that while U.N. climate talks remain crucial, they have repeatedly struggled to deliver meaningful progress on fossil fuels.

“Santa Marta represents space for governments to work on the one plan we know will stave off the worst impacts of climate breakdown: a rapid and just transition away

from fossil fuels,” Bianchini said.

Observers say a key question will be whether the meeting can produce a clearer political signal on an issue that has remained largely unresolved in global climate talks.

“If we think about it, the conference is that turning point where, collectively, we decide to be on the right side of history,” environment minister Vélez said.