

## **A Civilizational Moment for the Arabian Gulf: Energy Transition Diplomacy must be our global priority for COP28!**

My late Father-in-Law, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani famously said “The Stone Age came to an end not for a lack of stones, and the Oil Age will end, but not for a lack of oil.” We are in many ways on the precipice of a new energy age. 2023 marks an important geopolitical and historical crossroad for our planet with multilateralism at the brink of complete collapse and without any prospect of a collective global climate solution. Now that the UK has hosted the COP26 and the COP27 in Africa is behind us, attention turns to the role of the Arabs in hosting COP28 in Abu Dhabi this December. Now, more than ever before, it is crucial for the Arab World and the Gulf States in specific to unite against the ever-worsening climate crisis and deliver a message of peace and a civilisational solution for the rest of the World.

As an international peace mediator, energy lawyer and green-tech entrepreneur with deep roots in both the UK, US and Arab World, I recognised the need to form a diverse impact group that would tackle pressing environmental issues using the rule of law to establish legally binding environmental standards and policies. So in 2021, in the darkness of the Pandemic, I helped set up the Scotia Group, an independent, neutral, non-partisan network of internationalists working together in solidarity to “sherpa” the COP26 process to help make Glasgow meaningful, successful and impact driven. The composition and process of the Scotia Group aims to reflect that the issues surrounding climate change, just like the pandemic, are global, multidimensional, and intergenerational.

At first glance our track 2 diplomacy ‘coalition of the willing’ may have seemed too ideologically and culturally disparate to get anything done. But through a series of online Climate Majlis Dialogues, Scotia Group members have come together to deliberate the climate challenge and find innovative ideas that we think will add value to what exists at present – ideas that bring radical change as is demanded by the looming climate emergency, but that are nevertheless realistic and do not threaten existing consensus where we have it. This is the climate and diplomatic challenge, not the established science that proves it is a real crisis.

The Scotia Group committed to offering ideas that can feed into the inter-governmental COP process and that will help open up this process, adding broader legitimacy and access for diverse stake-holders including intergenerational dialogue. We got China to stop coal production abroad (even if temporarily) and for them to work with the US government on climate action.

Our success came through an urgent call to action addressed to the UN Secretary-General and the International Parliamentary Union declaring a “global diplomatic emergency” on climate. We also worked with the G-20 on a detailed proposal (C-20), outlining steps that can be taken in the face of the present emergency. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, contrary to what many might have argued, was one of the first responders. We also produced a model Net Zero 2050 agreement for most states to adopt for the wider UNFCCC community.

The Scotia Group argues that we need to change the way our economies function and the way we live. We will need to manage a broadly-based and just energy transition that offers challenges, but also opportunities for all of us- development finance, energy security, breakthroughs in green energy and carbon capture as well as social and food security. The move from a carbon-based economy should now be formalized by a GCC-G7 led diplomatic architecture with legal commitments to bring carbon emissions down to 45 per cent of the levels of 1990, with a view to reaching NetZero by 2050.

A GCC-G7 ‘Marshall Plan’ can only succeed if the issue of climate ethics is an integral part of it. This includes enabling all states to achieve the transformation of their economies in line with the need to safeguard the environment. No one can be left behind—all states willing to participate must be enabled to do so and to reap the benefits for their societies and economies that will flow from the energy transition process. Equally, business, finance and investment, and especially oil producing countries and companies must be part of the solution. A new spirit of climate action through a just energy transition policy sequencing process must be born this year in UAE.

In building on existing commitments, and extending them, we strongly encourage a greater emphasis on actual implementation and for accountability for reaching nationally and internationally agreed targets, both through domestic systems of compliance monitoring and through international processes, as well as internal corporate governance standards. We favour strengthening an international institutional architecture towards this end, and ensuring meaningful involvement of initiatives from citizens, group, cities and regions, industry and business, science and agriculture in the process of managing a much-needed energy transition towards NetZero 2050. This is why the Scotia Group is so diverse.

While the transition must be ignited, political economic development support needs to be enhanced for climate change adaptation for states specifically affected by early consequences of global warming. This will at least offer some initial help in balancing out injustices of the past that now cause environmental degradation, harm and national emergencies disproportionately affecting vulnerable states and populations.

The Scotia Group is committed to the idea that Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the GCC in general will be a leader in this process, through education, technology, investment in Africa, the law and investment in green transitions going to 2030. The UAE has a long record as a leader in diplomatic and humanitarian efforts and the Scotia Group underscores this position in the lead up to COP28. The Group is working closely with institutions, specifically the RAND Corporation and the International Bar Association, to conduct a rapid assessment of policy sequencing for the green transition and to create standards for compliance based on the Civil and Common Law systems, to think through an “Abu Dhabi Treaty”. The meaningful impact of this work will develop beyond the December meeting in the UAE, and the Scotia and the UN Habitat Sustainable Human Settlements Foundation efforts involves the creation and promotion of a comprehensive political economy ‘toolkit’, similar to the Marshall Plan. This plan can be used to encourage investment in green technologies, storage, projects and reconstruction in vulnerable communities, specifically in Africa and small island states where fragility is deeply manifested and experienced in our Planet.

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