



Faster, Fairer: The Urgency of Breaking Away from Fossil Fuels-A Plurilateral Priority

The Group of 78

A Canadian foreign-policy non-profit, the Group of 78 (<https://group78.org/>) is a member of the Fossil Fuel Treaty and an invitee to the Pre-Assembly gathering of civil society organizations at the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in April 2026.

“At COP28, the world reached a landmark agreement, countries must begin transitioning away from fossil fuels in a way that is just, orderly, and equitable for everyone. These fuels are responsible for roughly 75% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. We are moving in the wrong direction. This sits within an even broader challenge that scientists call the triple planetary crisis. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Three crises that are deeply connected and that demand coordinated action. The question is no longer whether we need to transition, it's how. And that's exactly the gap this conference is designed to fill.”

HE Carlos Arturo Morales, Ambassador of Colombia to Canada, G78 Webinar, March 11, 2026

“The conference will not be a negotiation session. It will be a conversation. We want to really engage ministers and other stakeholders in different formats than the usual COP formats that are very rigid. We want to have more informal dialogues and allow some space for thinking differently, more creatively, and really just starting a conversation that needs to continue after Santa Marta. But it will have concrete outputs: a detailed implementation report and a coalition of countries saying that they really want to continue these conversations and demonstrate their commitment to take concrete actions to really move forward in their own national transitions, while also cooperating with other countries and stakeholders. Especially in these interesting times, people need hope and something positive. I think we're offering that.”

HE Margriet Vonno, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Canada, G78 Webinar, March 11, 2026

Introduction

The alarming price and supply shocks in oil and gas markets triggered by the illegal war by the United States and Israel against Iran have signaled to many countries that their dependence on fossil fuels must end. Not only does this energy source hold them hostage to the whims of far-away actors, it also wreaks havoc on their climate and public health. There is a new urgency everywhere to act decisively to break away from fossil fuels. This is what should be done by Canada:

Priority Actions

- 1) The Colombia Conference is an important plurilateral initiative.** The Group of 78 salutes the courage and vision of Colombia and the Netherlands as co-hosts of the Santa Marta conference on transitioning away from fossil fuels. *Canada and like-minded nations should provide funding and diplomatic support for this strategic event to accelerate the global process of breaking away from oil, gas and coal.*
- 2) Canada should be represented at the Conference at the highest level.** Like Norway, Australia and Mexico—countries that will play active roles at Santa Marta—Canada is a petro-state with net-zero ambitions and must, for the sake of our children and grandchildren, manage its own careful and fair transition process. *Canada should join its peers by sending an official high-level delegation to the conference.*
- 3) Economic diversification strategies will fail without addressing governments' underlying fiscal dependence on fossil revenues.** Pillar 1 of the conference focuses on overcoming economic dependence on fossil fuels, especially in emerging economies with high debt. *Working with other countries and multilateral institutions, Canada should prioritize mechanisms that replace lost public revenue in the transition, including concessional finance and debt relief.*
- 4) To strengthen their energy security, countries should accelerate the large-scale adoption of renewable energy.** As the International Renewable Energy Agency recently showed: “Renewables are already reducing dependence on fossil fuel imports across countries, the new brief finds—from Spain and Portugal in Europe, to China, India and Pakistan in Asia.” *Canada should use its trade, aid and diplomatic tools to support partner nations in fast-tracking major projects to expand clean energy production, electrification, grid expansion and storage capacity.*
- 5) Participation of civil society and affected communities must move beyond consultation toward agenda-setting and decision-making authority.** CSOs should exercise these responsibilities through institutionalized roles in priority-setting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. Without this, participation risks legitimizing predetermined transition pathways rather than shaping them. *Canada should provide grant funding for models*

that test and refine robust, consequential decision-making by civil society and affected communities in transitions away from fossil fuels.

- 6) The production of solar, wind, hydro and geothermal energy must benefit not only national grids but the local communities in which renewables operations are based.** Financial incentives to ensure local access to affordable energy, gender equality in employment and training, and community ownership are imperatives. *In developing economies, through Global Affairs Canada, multilateral and national development banks, and the International Development Research Centre and its partners, Canada should deploy grants, loans and incentives to expand locally driven clean energy projects.*
- 7) Just transition policies must anticipate and mitigate displacement risks—both from climate impacts and from transition processes themselves—by embedding mobility, urban planning, and social protection into national and regional transition strategies.** Civil society, independent scholars and the private sector should be engaged to examine and address this cluster of issues. *Domestically and internationally, Canada should support new programs and models that mitigate displacement risks in the transition away from fossil fuels.*
- 8) In all economies, an important strategy for replacing fossil fuel jobs is to enhance the quality of jobs in other sectors with improved wages and benefits, clear career pathways, internships and on-the-job training.** Building on the research of Harvard professor Dani Rodrik, governments in developing countries should design industrial policies aimed at producing high quality jobs in the services sector, in particular, which will be the leading sector for generating growth and employment in coming decades, displacing the manufacturing sector. Just transition strategies should take this into account. *Through both domestic and foreign policy, Canada should support these efforts, including through knowledge-sharing in plurilateral networks.*
- 9) Workers employed in the fossil fuel sector matter and the phasing down of these jobs must be carried out fairly and with precision.** Jim Stanford at the Centre for Future Work reported that: “Direct employment in fossil fuel industries (involving the extraction, processing, and distribution of fossil fuel energy) is relatively small: around 170,000 jobs in 2019, or under 1% of total Canadian employment.” Indirect employment generated by these jobs in other sectors (real estate, auto, services) must also be considered. *In Canada and abroad, the Canadian government should support appropriate retirement packages and retraining and relocation programs for fossil fuel workers in a systematic just -transition process that works for all.*
- 10) Governments and civil society must counter and lay bare for citizens the anti-environment and anti-regulation lobbying campaigns by the fossil fuel industry and its allies in the defence and plastics industries.** American activist researcher Lisa Graves points to the extreme distortion of US policy driven by fossil fuel billionaires like the Koch family through unaccountable dark-money vehicles and industry-created, pseudo-scientific think tanks (she calls them “stink” tanks). Tzaporah Berman, Fossil Fuel Treaty Chair, warns such petrostate politics are infecting Canada. Nation-states across the world should build their capacity to uncover, blunt and reverse the effects of these threats to democracy and

citizens' interests. *Canada should take serious steps to counter overt and covert policy distortion by the fossil fuel industry.*

- 11) Youth-led climate litigation is a key strategy for advancing the transition away from fossil fuels.** From the Pacific islands to Europe and North America, including Ontario, young people are taking governments to court for backsliding on climate commitments. As Ecojustice emphasizes: “What makes climate litigation so powerful is that it backs up climate action with the power of the law.” *Under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Government of Canada should provide financial support to youth-led lawsuits for climate harms perpetrated by governments and fossil fuel companies.*
- 12) Lessons from past successful climate negotiations should inform the deliberations at Santa Marta.** Susan Tanner, Vice Chair of the Group of 78 and a champion of environmental sustainability and gender equality, has pointed to three factors that enabled the success of the international negotiations nearly 40 years ago that produced the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer. The first success factor was that all countries, from both the Global North and South alike, were granted equal status and voice in the process. The second factor was that there was a strong bond of trust between government negotiators and civil society representatives. A third factor was that both Northern and Southern CSOs were obliged to coordinate their advocacy and recommendations. The Santa Marta conference process, including the Pre-Assembly deliberations, is designed to create these conditions. *Through funding and diplomacy, the Government of Canada should endorse and actively support strong partnerships at the conference among states and CSOs, and among Northern and Southern actors from all sectors.*

Further Information

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Land Acknowledgement

The Group of 78 acknowledges that the land on which we operate is the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people, who have lived here for thousands of years at this gathering point at the confluence of three rivers in the place we call Ottawa. We respect all sacred, ancestral, treaty and unceded territories of diverse and distinct Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. We recognize the damage perpetrated on this land and its original peoples by our colonial institutions. As a foreign-policy non-profit, we support the full implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Group of 78 has much to learn and do in integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into our work as well as working in partnership as an effective ally with Indigenous peoples, councils, and organizations.