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A Decision At COP31 Can Have An Immediate Impact On Global Warming

Turkiye, as host of the COP31 Presidency, has set a target to raise global final energy consumption from its current 23% to 35% from clean electricity across buildings, transport, and industry (35x35). This is part of a wider package of non-negotiated Action Agenda initiatives. In support of this target, the International Energy Agency (IEA) released a special report on global electrification on 22nd of September 2026. Commissioned by the COP31 dual presidency, Türkiye and Australia, the report presents a realistic roadmap to achieving the "35x35" target.

The COP28 decision in Dubai to triple renewable energy by 2030 was the first time a COP summit produced a concrete, quantified global energy target, and it was embedded within the broader Global Stocktake that also called for "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems." The COP29 then set a target to mobilize at least $300 billion a year by 2035 to enable actions in the developing world. In a world where wars have repeatedly demonstrated the price of remaining hostage to fossil fuel geopolitics, delivering on that pledge offers a rare alignment of climate necessity, economic self-interest and geopolitical security.

Renewable energy is inherently a domestic and distributed resource. Sunlight and wind cannot be embargoed, and once solar panels, wind turbines, and storage batteries are installed, their marginal cost of generation is close to zero and immune to the price volatility that plagues internationally traded fuels. Every gigawatt of renewable capacity added is, in effect, a gigawatt of energy security purchased in advance. European governments that accelerated renewable deployment and efficiency programs in the wake of the Ukraine war did so explicitly to reduce dependence on Russian gas, not merely to cut emissions. This experience offers a template: energy security and climate mitigation, often treated as competing priorities, converge decisively around renewable capacity expansion.

However, this tripling target is an extraordinarily steep trajectory. The record on implementation, however, has been uneven. An analysis by the energy think tank Ember found that two years after COP28, aggregated national





targets for 2030 had risen by only about 2%, bringing the collective global ambition to roughly 7.4 terawatts, still 3.7 terawatts short of the 11,000 GW goal. In other words, most governments are currently planning for something closer to a doubling of renewable capacity than a tripling.

The share of renewables in global power generation in 2025 – over a third that overtook coal for the first time. China, the world's dominant builder of solar and wind capacity, is on track to come closest to the pledge's spirit, while the European Union, Latin America, and many developing economies face a steeper climb, partly because their pledges also count hydropower capacity that has limited room to expand further.

Crucially, the IEA and independent analysts have concluded that the target is technically and economically achievable. Solar photovoltaics and wind are now the cheapest sources of electricity generation in most markets. What is missing is not technology but political will, grid investment, and, critically, finance for the Global South, where the cost of capital for renewable projects can be several times higher than in wealthy economies.

Closing the gap between ambition and delivery will require several concurrent efforts. Governments must raise their NDC targets to reflect the goal. Grid infrastructure and permitting reforms deserve as much attention as generation capacity. Multilateral development banks and public finance institutions need to substantially lower the cost of capital for renewable projects in the Global South, where the tripling goal will otherwise remain out of reach regardless of political will. All wealthy economies experiencing fossil fuel price shocks should treat renewable acceleration as core to energy security policy, not an optional climate add-on.

Australia, holding the negotiation leadership at COP31, can steer this priority under the energy transition away from fossil fuels. This author has been a climate negotiator since 2001 under the UNFCCC process, and together with other like-minded groups - the EU, LDCs, and SIDS- can push for some decision text reflecting this target of electricity expansion of 35x35. Such a move at COP31 will have the highest impact on global warming in the coming years. EP

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