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5. Thematic session on the promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums: Climate change and energy

Christiana Mauro, European Ecoforum

**New civic initiatives helping to foster information integrity in international organizations and agencies**

Dear Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

My goal is to brief Aarhus Convention advocates about new tools and initiatives that may be helpful in countering climate mis- and disinformation in the international sphere.

We are seeing a reshaping of public debates around policy that shift focus away from the best climate mitigation solutions: increased energy efficiency, attention to energy demand response and the speedy development of renewables. As all maladaptive solutions have the effect of prolonging the use of fossil fuels, their producers are often behind the misdirection tactics.<sup>i</sup> Among some of the recent consequences of these strategies in Europe are the Antwerp Declaration, calling for the deregulation of toxic products, and the untimely failure of the Energy Charter Treaty.

Climate mis/disinformation – a reverse of the principle of transparency – can mean diverting discussions about sustainability towards implausible solutions that delay action. Watchdog organizations like Corporate Europe Observatory and EU DisinfoLab have demonstrated that carbon-producing industries are slowing the implementation of decarbonisation mandates.<sup>ii</sup>

In a new reality of influence operations we may feel helpless, but as practitioners we are called upon to disrupt this dynamic by promoting the features of the Convention that can foster more effective debates.

International entities often operate in an unregulated environment and can considerably influence the pace of the global energy transition. Agencies and intergovernmental bodies do not always scrutinize the quality of the studies informing their policy but are rarely called out for promoting industry-backed studies. This can have the effect of deliberately or unintentionally clouding the landscape of achievable climate policy.

Because information integrity and credibility was deemed a key factor in accelerating decarbonisation, a high-level UN task force was established to create net-zero assessment criteria. The resulting report strongly encouraged outreach and engagement plans and endorsed the principle of “established credibility through plans based in science and third-party accountability”.<sup>iii</sup>

While the challenges of information integrity are great, there are a growing number of civic initiatives developing instruments to evaluate the trust and integrity of claims.

**Civic disinformation strategy platforms**

Such platforms combine independent climate expertise and practical support to identify and contest false assertions. This includes:

- Canada's Reclimate, which produces climate teaching methodologies and addresses the credibility of carbon capture plans<sup>iv</sup>
- Brussels' Climate Clarity Hub, which offers research, analyses and other community resources<sup>v</sup>
- the global coalition Climate Action Against Disinformation, which initiates accountability projects<sup>vi</sup>
- the Institute for Strategic Dialogue identifies some of the biggest threats to decarbonisation action<sup>vii</sup> and
- Germany's Forum against Fakes helps citizens to advise on measures to tackle misinformation<sup>viii</sup>.

### **Legal remedies**

We are also now seeing promising signs of legal accountability in Canada, the US and Scotland in cases linking climate damage to disinformation.<sup>ix</sup> These rulings can offer remedies for other countries to model.

### **Climate information integrity and international entities**

To provide context for climate-focused videos Youtube cites the United Nations as an "independent, third-party partner" in its definition of 'climate change'<sup>x</sup>, but some of the UN's own programmes and agencies are not living up to these expectations. They have been criticized for partnering with fossil fuel companies and continue to promote plans for a "continued and potentially greatly amplified role for nuclear energy"<sup>xi</sup>; if realized, such proposals could severely disrupt the pace of global warming mitigation efforts.<sup>xii</sup> Intergovernmental bodies like the International Energy Agency and the OECD have also been criticized by environmentalists for promoting plans that would result in the exacerbation of climate breakdown.

Policy packages that are supposed to make a country or region climate-neutral by 2050 are often launched with fanfare but upon scrutiny are found to contain proposals that are wide of the mark of IPCC recommendations.

If fossil fuel company ads are banned, as UN Secretary General Guterres advocates<sup>xiii</sup>, should international entities not also be censured when using their sponsored studies?<sup>xiv</sup>

### **Conclusion**

NGOs can do their part in raising awareness of these issues but Convention Parties are much better placed to craft new standards of information integrity. Parties can use the efforts of these civic initiatives to foster in international entities an understanding that the public is demanding a more science-led response to the climate crisis.

We encourage everyone to consult the links that will direct you to the work of our civic partners to help in assessing some of the key defiant false claims that take up too much space in climate debates.

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<sup>i</sup> This is referred to as climate mitigation obstructionism and comes from the desire of certain vested interests “to retain social license to continue expanding production during a climate-aware political moment”, Reclimate, *What Lies Beneath: Pathways Alliance, Greenwashing, Networks and Narratives*, 23 May 2024; See also K. Ekberg, et al, *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay and Inaction are Heating the Planet*: Routledge, 2022, [www.nature.com/articles/s41558-023-01685-6](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-023-01685-6); M. Aronczyk et al, *Greenwashing, net-zero and the oil sands in Canada: The case of Pathways Alliance*, June 2024, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629624000938](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629624000938)

<sup>ii</sup> See [www.counter-balance.org/publications/export-credit-agencies-under-scrutiny-eus-climate-commitments-in-question](https://www.counter-balance.org/publications/export-credit-agencies-under-scrutiny-eus-climate-commitments-in-question); [www.corporateeurope.org/en/blog/EU-watchdog-radio](https://www.corporateeurope.org/en/blog/EU-watchdog-radio) and *The Carbon Coup: How corporate capture is locking Europe into a fossil-fuelled future*, 29 April 2024, [www.corporateeurope.org/en/carboncoup](https://www.corporateeurope.org/en/carboncoup)

<sup>iii</sup> United Nations High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities, Integrity Matters: Net Zero Commitments by Businesses, Financial Institutions, Cities and Regions, [www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/high-level\\_expert\\_group\\_n7b.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/high-level_expert_group_n7b.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> [www.reclimate.ca](https://www.reclimate.ca)

<sup>v</sup> [www.disinfo.eu/climate-clarity-hub/](https://www.disinfo.eu/climate-clarity-hub/)

<sup>vi</sup> [www.caad.info/](https://www.caad.info/)

<sup>vii</sup> [www.carbonbrief.org/experts-what-are-the-biggest-geopolitical-risks-to-climate-action-in-2024/](https://www.carbonbrief.org/experts-what-are-the-biggest-geopolitical-risks-to-climate-action-in-2024/)

<sup>viii</sup> Forum against fakes, [www.forum-gegen-fakes.de/de/start](https://www.forum-gegen-fakes.de/de/start)

<sup>ix</sup> See W. Hendrickson, *Fossil Fuel Fraud*, Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law, Vol. 56 (1), 2024, [www.scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol56/iss1/18](https://www.scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol56/iss1/18); J. Wentz and B. Franta, *Liability for Public Deception: Linking Fossil Fuel Disinformation to Climate Damages*, Environmental Law, Vol. 52, 2022, [www.scholarship.law.columbia.edu/sabin\\_climate\\_change/195](https://www.scholarship.law.columbia.edu/sabin_climate_change/195); R. Dixon, *How a Supreme Court ruling is forcing politicians to get real about the main cause of climate change*, 26 June, 2024, [www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/how-a-supreme-court-ruling-is-forcing-politicians-to-get-real-about-the-main-cause-of-climate-change-4678743](https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/how-a-supreme-court-ruling-is-forcing-politicians-to-get-real-about-the-main-cause-of-climate-change-4678743); and ClientEarth’s Jun 6, 2024 webinar “Greenwashing as disinformation: how the law can protect us”, [www.clientearth.org/latest/events/summit-2024-greenwashing-as-disinformation](https://www.clientearth.org/latest/events/summit-2024-greenwashing-as-disinformation)

<sup>x</sup> [www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change)

<sup>xi</sup> See [www.medium.com/generation-atomic/the-role-of-nuclear-as-recognised-by-un-environment-eeeb6a34ca85](https://www.medium.com/generation-atomic/the-role-of-nuclear-as-recognised-by-un-environment-eeeb6a34ca85) and [www.iaea.org/topics/climate-change/the-iaea-and-cop/cop28/nuclear-mythbusting-n4c](https://www.iaea.org/topics/climate-change/the-iaea-and-cop/cop28/nuclear-mythbusting-n4c)

<sup>xii</sup> See F. Präger et al, *Evaluating nuclear power's suitability for climate change mitigation: technical risks, economic implications and incompatibility with renewable energy systems*, Frontiers in Environmental Economics, Vol. 3, April 2024, [www.frontiersin.org/journals/environmental-economics/articles/10.3389/frevc.2024.1242818/full](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/environmental-economics/articles/10.3389/frevc.2024.1242818/full); and J. W. Storm van Leeuwen, *Can nuclear power slow down climate change? An analysis of nuclear greenhouse gas emissions*, [www.stormsmith.nl/Resources/nucl%26climate2015.pdf](https://www.stormsmith.nl/Resources/nucl%26climate2015.pdf)

<sup>xiii</sup> A. Guterres, *Secretary-General's special address on climate action "A Moment of Truth"*, 5 June, 2024, [www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2024-06-05/secretary-generals-special-address-climate-action-moment-of-truth%2%20A0](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2024-06-05/secretary-generals-special-address-climate-action-moment-of-truth%2%20A0)

<sup>xiv</sup> Efforts to eliminate greenwashing practices include the policy of the organizers of the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference which prevented NGOs from participating in its Green Zone if they failed to meet certain criteria, [www.web.archive.org/web/20240106033719/https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign/#Minimum-criteria-required-for-participation-in-the-Race-to-Zero-campaign](https://www.web.archive.org/web/20240106033719/https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign/#Minimum-criteria-required-for-participation-in-the-Race-to-Zero-campaign) and the work of Science Based Targets, [www.sciencebasedtargets.org](https://www.sciencebasedtargets.org)