Houston Area Model United Nations
Standard Committee

OPEC+



Chair | Ahsan Aziz
Topic B: The Future of Oil Production Through Sustainability
Houston Area Model United Nations 52
February 4 & 5, 2027

Chair Letter

Delegates,

Welcome to HAMUN, and more specifically, OPEC. My name is Ahsan Aziz, and I will be your chair for this year's Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries!

I am currently in my sophomore year at the University Houston studying Electrical Engineering under the Cullen Engineering Honors Program. Throughout my Model UN career that began in 2022, I've participated in a total of six conferences and this will be my first conference as chair though i've Vice-Chaired before, including right here at HAMUN. Since I've begun, MUN has always had a special place in my heart, playing a major role in my ability to look at a problem and genuinely ask myself why someone in a completely different situation, with completely different pressures and priorities, would approach the same problem in a different way than others would. That way of thinking has altered my perspective on a lot of things. In the way I currently understand today's world and absorb fresh knowledge. When used effectively, Model UN offers a perspective that enables you to see multiple points of view.

I chose to staff OPEC because I love the dynamic this committee brings. It's specialized enough that the debate stays focused and substantive, but the nature of the topics means there's real room to dig into the nuances of each country's position and motivations. Given that most of you aren't new to this, I'm expecting the debate to reflect that, and I think it will.

You're going to hear this a lot from me, your teachers, and other HAMUN staff, but the most important part of this conference is to enjoy it and make a memorable experience for yourself. We're all here to help y'all grow and prosper. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me!

Ahsan Aziz
Chair of OPEC+
m.ahsanaziz28@gmail.com



Committee History

Created on September 24, 1960 by founding members Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, OPEC aimed to establish petroleum policies between member states to ensure equitable opportunity and a stable supply to consuming countries [1]. It is key to note that OPEC's structure was formed during an era of rapid economic and political change, resulting in usage of force and eventual decolonisation.



First OPEC Conference, September 10-14, 1960 (1)

In the 1950s, petroleum surpassed coal in becoming the main source of energy within the industry [2]. Not long after, Western forces such as the United Kingdom and the United States utilized military strength to maintain control over global access to this resource. In retaliation, petrostates [3](countries heavily dependent on oil extraction and exports) pushed back against the west to maintain permanent control over their own natural resources, thereby fostering economic development over their countries [4].

Following the decolonisation of the oil market, OPEC member states worked together in the 1970s to play a more influential role in the oil industry, calling for the cooperation of international relations in addressing poorer nations to ensure fair economic stability and development. This resulted in the implementation of the OPEC Fund for International Development, which focused on financing infrastructure, basic needs (water, energy, sanitation, etc.), and creating equitable opportunities for the poor to "Build resilient and equitable societies" [5].

Committee History

In the 1980s, demand for oil fell due to a market crash as a result of the oil glut, which drove oil prices to a staggering $35 per barrel, causing non-OPEC countries to shift the way they produced oil, producing a massive influx of crude oil. OPEC's share of the oil market and revenue dropped significantly, causing economic instability in member states (1). In the later half of 1980, OPEC implemented stricter quotas and reduced the posts per barrel of oil, and eventually recovered from the market crash by the early 1990s.

OPEC continued its efforts to strengthen the oil market, becoming a prominent player in ensuring the market remained stable. OPEC's summits in 2000 and 2007 worked to establish steady energy markets, and focused on sustainable development for the environment.

By the mid-2000s, OPEC had developed a long-term strategy that entailed in-depth research to support cleaner oil-based fuels and mitigating climate change through new technologies, such as CO_2 sequestration (6).

As of 2016, OPEC has worked alongside strong, non member oil-producers to further stabilize oil prices and revenue, by this point controlling roughly 44% of worldwide oil outputs [7] to maintain a steady global energy market.

The COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the oil market and economy significantly as the 2020s marked a new decade. Oil demand saw a global decline, storage filled up rapidly, and millions of industry jobs throughout the world were threatened, or lost entirely. In April of 2020, OPEC and their partners worked to restore the security of the market, which led to a direct shift in production. These efforts were recognized globally; not only were the oil industry and economy restored, but OPEC's reputation was uplifted as well [1].

TOPIC CONCEPTUALIZATION

Petroleum has long been a major source of energy in the United States, accounting for the largest share of overall energy consumption. It is widely used in powering transportation, heating homes, and producing electricity. Beyond its role as an energy source, petroleum is also an important raw material for the industrial sector. The petrochemical industry relies on petroleum to manufacture plastics, polyurethane, solvents, and a wide range of other products used in everyday life. Although petroleum makes modern life easier, extracting, producing, and exporting it has many negative effects on the environment.

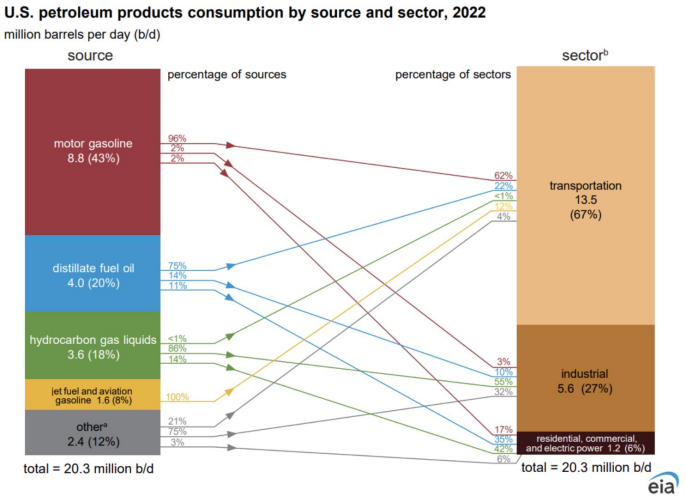


Diagram of U.S. Petroleum Products Consumption by Source and Sector, 2022 [11]

Sustainability in oil production refers to the ability to continue producing and utilizing petroleum resources while reducing the environmental damage associated with extraction and processing.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF OIL PRODUCTION

Although global development has relied on the usage of oil to evolve various technologies and has played a factor in strengthening states' economies, oil production remains a major threat to natural habitats and our o-zone. Hydraulic fracturing is a quicker process used to extract natural oil by injecting high-pressure liquid into deep rock formations. Fracturing rock utilizes large amounts of water, as well as hazardous chemicals that can be released into marine habitats. Improper handling of fracturing can lead to spills in bodies of water from the surface, more commonly known as oil spills. Left untreated, spills can contaminate soil and water, which can lead to environmental disasters. [10]

Additionally, oil production leaves a significant ecological footprint that can pose a danger to our natural atmosphere. As oil demand continues to skyrocket– reaching 104 million b/d (barrels per day) in 2026 [12], the dangers only increase.

A study by Adewale S. Hassan of the University of Johannesburg suggests that existing legislation among OPEC member states aimed at mitigating environmental degradation is limited by governments' ability to effectively enforce these regulations [12]. Hassan's research finds that while stronger institutions can reduce the environmental damage associated with oil

production, weak governance and limited enforcement can prevent environmental policies from being fully effective.

He concludes that improving institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms is essential for OPEC member states to balance continued oil production with environmental sustainability [12]. As for the member states that have more economic freedom, Hassan suggests implementing clean energy efforts.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE FOR MEMBER STATES

Sustainability does not necessarily require OPEC member states to abandon oil production in the immediate future. Because many member states rely heavily on petroleum revenues, an abrupt reduction in production could create significant economic challenges. Instead, OPEC may consider a gradual approach that combines responsible oil production, environmental regulation, technological innovation, renewable-energy investment, and economic diversification. This approach recognizes both the continuing importance of petroleum and the need to reduce its environmental impact.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

Ultimately, the central issue facing the committee is not simply whether oil production should continue, but how oil-producing states can balance economic development, energy security, and environmental protection. Delegates should consider the different economic circumstances and institutional capacities of OPEC member states when developing solutions.

UN PAST ACTIONS

- UN Commission on Sustainable Development (2006): In 2006, the UN hosted the 14th Conference on Sustainable Development. OPEC participated in this discussion, advocating for carbon capture and storage as the more realistic solutions to promote cleaner efforts within oil production. OPEC also stated that higher industrialized nations should take the lead in ensuring sustainability within oil production, and should take roles in funding large carbon capture and storage development projects. [13]
    - OPEC has maintained a similar stance throughout the years, calling for a balance of three main pillars when considering sustainability: economic development, social progress and environmental protection.
- COP28 Opposition to Fossil Phase-Outs (2023): 80 countries emphasized the importance of phasing out fossil fuel usage. However, Secretary General Haitham Al-Ghais urged member states to focus on reducing carbon emissions rather than ending the usage of oil and gas production. [14] OPEC received support from nations like India and China, who agree that boosting renewable energy is an important factor in this issue. In contrast, OPEC also received a significant amount of backlash for this perspective, with other nations arguing that carbon capture technology cannot totally replace the reduction of fossil fuel usage worldwide. [14]

TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does “sustainable oil production” realistically mean for OPEC, and what measurable goals should the organization establish to achieve it?

2. What mechanisms could OPEC establish to measure and monitor the environmental performance of its member states?

3. How can OPEC improve the enforcement of existing environmental regulations within member states?

4. Should OPEC establish common environmental standards for its member states, or should individual countries determine their own sustainability regulations based on their economic circumstances?

TOPIC B APPENDIX & SOURCES

Abnett, Kate, et al. "*COP28 Clashes over Fossil Fuel Phase-Out after OPEC Pushback.*" *Reuters*, 9 Dec. 2023, *https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/opec-members-push-against-including-fossil-fuels-phase-out-cop28-deal-2023-12-09/.*

"*Brief History.*" *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, 2023, *https://www.opec.org/brief-history.html.*

Hassan, Adewale Samuel. "*Oil Production and Ecological Footprint in Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC): The Moderating Role of Institutions.*" *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy*, *vol. 6, no. 4, Dec. 2024, pp. 311–326, https://doi.org/10.36096/ijbes.v6i4.508.*

"*International.*" *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, *https://www.eia.gov/international/data/world.*

Lefèvre. "*Yesterday's Energy: The History of Oil.*" *Sirenergies*, 12 Mar. 2026, *https://www.sirenergies.com/en/article/history-of-oil-yesterday.*

"*OPEC Fund for International Development: Strategic Framework.*" *OPEC Fund for International Development*, 2026, *https://opecfund.org/what-we-do/strategic-framework.*

"*OPEC Was First Formed as a Challenge to Western Energy Dominance.*" *Jacobin*, Sept. 2023, *https://jacobin.com/2023/09/opec-founding-decolonization-oil-production-western-imperialism.*

"*Petrostate.*" *Wikipedia*, 3 Jan. 2022, *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrostate.*

"*Press Releases.*" *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, *https://www.opec.org/pr-detail/242-20-sep-2005.html.*

"*Speeches and Statements.*" *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, *https://www.opec.org/speech-detail/305-11-may-2006.html.*

HAMUN

TOPIC B APPENDIX & SOURCES

U.S. *Energy Information Administration. "Oil and the Environment."* U.S. *Energy Information Administration*, 1 *Aug.* 2022, *https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/oil-and-petroleum-products/oil-and-the-environment.php.*

USA*Facts. "What Kinds of Energy Does the US Use?"* USA*Facts*, 5 *Sept.* 2024, *https://usafacts.org/articles/what-kinds-of-energy-does-the-us-use*

Copyright Notice

The contents of this document and any supplementary material are the sole intellectual property of Houston Area Model United Nations.

It may not be reproduced, republished, or used without the express written permission of Houston Area Model United Nations. Please email staff@houstonareamun.org with any questions.