COP28 – A “transition away” from fossil fuels is not sufficient!
Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. calls for a fair energy transition that is regulated, participatory and sustainable.

The much-anticipated negotiations about the future use of fossil fuels as a source of energy resulted in one of the 28th World Climate Conference’s (COP28) main conclusions in the form of an agreement by all COP28 participants to “transition away” from fossil fuels. Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. (SoH) welcomes the attention to this urgent discussion – however, SoH argues that “transitioning away” is not sufficient to contribute to climate justice and calls for a fair energy transition that is regulated, participatory and sustainable.

With a track record of over four decades of implementing and supporting human rights, humanitarian aid, and development projects in over twenty countries worldwide, Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. has extensively witnessed and responded to the injustice and the suffering caused by the negative consequences of climate change on the world’s most vulnerable populations. In South Sudan, SoH has uncovered, documented and unveiled how the extraction of fossil fuels can result in severe human rights violations and catastrophic environmental destruction.¹

While advocating for the phasing out of fossil fuel as a source of energy, SoH is concerned about the lack of awareness on the risks behind alternative energy sources² which can have an equally harmful and destructive impact respectively on human rights and the environment and hinder progress towards climate justice.

Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. urges the German government to take on a leading role to enable and implement a fair energy transition. It should ensure the integration of such a fair transition in national policies and politics in as much as internationally, in bilateral agreements with countries of the Global South and through its soft power over relevant international decisions, such as at the world climate conferences.

In order to phase out of fossil fuels and into renewable energies in a fair manner, specifically in the extraction of raw materials that are instrumental to these alternative energies, SoH calls on the German government to consider the following recommendations:

1. **The German government must continue to promote strong and far-reaching legal frameworks that protect human rights, the environment and the climate.**

Comprehensive legal frameworks are crucial to address and prevent human rights violations, environmental degradation and climate impacts in the context of renewable energy. Legislation, such as the recently introduced German Supply Chain Act (2023), sets ethical and responsible sourcing standards and obligations for the procurement of materials for the energy transition. Such laws must, however, be accompanied by mechanisms to hold actors³ accountable if they fail to

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² The term alternative energy sources and renewable energy sources are used interchangeably in this policy brief.

³ Actors include German companies, energy supply companies, and energy producers.
meet these standards and fulfill these obligations. The German government should ensure that access to complaints mechanisms, justice and compensation is available and accessible to all right-holders protected by these laws. At the European and international level, it should support and play a leading role in facilitating ongoing and future efforts to develop, adopt and implement related legislation or directives.

2. **The German government must ensure any deals related to the energy transition systematically include local communities and indigenous peoples.**

Consideration and protection of the human rights of members of local communities and persons belonging to indigenous peoples must be part of the transition to renewable energies. Indeed, access to renewable energy and the extraction of raw materials necessary for some renewable energy sources is often associated with many human rights violations and the destruction of the livelihoods of local communities. Particularly at risk of being violated by governmental and corporate actors of the energy transition are, among others, the right to clean water, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to healthy environment. The German government should ensure that any deals, investments, bilateral agreements, etc. related to the energy transition have gotten free, prior and informed consent of members of local communities and persons belonging to indigenous peoples. All German interests in the energy transition should go through transparent, inclusive and participatory decision-making processes involving communities, giving them the right to reject projects that threaten their human rights, their livelihoods and the environment. Moreover, when implementing projects such as mineral extraction, planning, implementation, evaluation, and closure processes must include the active participation of representatives of local and indigenous communities.

3. **The German government must guarantee that renewable energies are generated in line with environmental and social sustainability standards.**

While German companies and energy producers must conduct the extraction of raw materials for renewable energy technologies in accordance with standards of environmental and social sustainability (ESS), the German government should enforce regulations, conduct monitoring and make compliance mechanisms available to ensure abidance to ESS standards. This means minimizing the environmental impact and ensuring that biodiversity is protected during the extraction process. It involves implementing responsible mining practices at all stages of the extraction processes: Reducing the use of harmful chemicals during extraction and decommissioning and rehabilitating mining sites after the extraction is complete to avoid any long-term negative impact on the health and livelihoods of the local communities and on the environment.

Germany should not drive the energy transition unilaterally: In order to achieve climate justice, cooperation must unfold across all stages of a fair energy transition. A bilateral transfer of knowledge, technology and resources must take place. Germany should pay particular attention to these countries most vulnerable and already severely affected by the effects of climate change in accordance with their individual possibilities and needs.