

GOVERNMENT

COP27: Stella McCartney, Kering and H&M announce call to action

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COP27 puts fashion's role in the climate crisis under the microscope. Given China's share of global luxury consumption, can shoppers hold the industry to account? Image credit: Stella McCartney

By [Gemma A. Williams](#)

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For nearly 30 years, the United Nations Conference of the Parties, better known as COP, has served as the banner under which the world has gathered together to discuss and assess climate change.

This year's 27th edition (COP27) was widely considered **crucial** if the climate emergency is to be brought under control. More than 200 countries attended the summit, which ran Nov. 6-18 in Egypt's Sharm El Sheikh.

As a sector responsible for the razing of more than 3.2 billion trees a year, 10 percent of carbon **emissions** and 20 percent of global water **waste**, fashion ranks high on the agenda.

Numerous brands, suppliers, retailers and activists were among the 200-plus delegates in attendance. This year, Stella McCartney, Kering and H&M launched a call to action for the **transition** to sustainable fabrics by 2025.

Meanwhile, nonprofit organization Global Fashion Agenda **announced** the launch of its Fashion Industry Target Consultation to identify a more concrete approach to achieving net zero. And it was significant that Zalando, Germany's biggest fashion retailer, was also present.

Let us not beat around the bush here. The situation has surpassed the point of climate emergency. What we are facing is climate devastation.

According to the United Nations climate agency, even if the world meets current pledges for 2030, global heating levels would rise to a **catastrophic level**. This, and other equally pessimistic data such as that regarding **increasing** temperatures, means the values of the provocative event are, once again, being called into question.

COP27 has been skipped by the iconic environmental activist Greta Thunberg who described it as a forum for **greenwashing**.

Indeed, as global inflation rises, it has seen a vast **increase** in the number of attendees from the fossil fuel industries.

The global environmental nonprofit **Canopy** has stated that to achieve scale, commitments from the world's biggest fashion companies are needed immediately to make sustainable fashion more cost-effective. These have not been, on the whole, forthcoming.

Meanwhile, **Forest 500** has found that one-third of the world's most influential companies have yet to make a forest conservation commitment. This includes luxury companies. Maybe if there is a takeaway to be had from this event, it is simply that the sector is not up to the challenge.

LVMH and others can **save** a burning building in Paris, but the world? Can the sector even contemplate the level of commitment required to bring about radical change?

Meanwhile, in China, Kantar found that while 54 percent of those surveyed knew about the summit, a staggering **19 percent** admitted to not being aware of it. But despite this figure, maybe it is to the planet's biggest **polluter** that the world can look for hope.

In recent years, sustainability has become a growing **topic** in the country and citizens, especially Gen Z, are particularly attuned to this **issue**.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the mainland has experienced a number of environmental catastrophes, such as the flooding in **Henan** which led to 302 deaths and more than **\$17.6 billion** (125 billion RMB) of direct economic losses.

During COP26, Beijing unexpectedly announced **plans** to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, which the Climate Action Tracker projects will be met **comfortably**.

While the 20th Party Congress in October failed to deliver any new policy updates on climate, China's President Xi Jinping did **vow** to "basically eliminate" heavy air and water pollution and bring soil contamination under control.

China is on track to account for 30 percent of luxury consumption by **2025**, up from 25 percent.

Frankly, if labels want to be cynical, being ethical plays well with young Chinese consumers. And we have seen how impactful locals can be when it comes to boycotting, or speaking with their **wallets**.

Given the oversized role the county will now have in luxury spend, it is not hyperbole to say that if Chinese shoppers hold brands to account, it could have a considerable impact.

Granted, it will not end the crisis. But it could force companies, not only luxury ones, to begin taking it seriously.

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