



Waterloo Region High School

Model United Nations

**UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM**

Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

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United Nations Association in Canada
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HISTORY & OVERVIEW

The General Assembly (UNGA), established in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations, is the principal deliberative, policymaking, and representational organ of the United Nations. The combination of universal membership, including all 193 UN member states, as well as equal voting rights allows the UNGA to be a unique forum for multilateral negotiations and discussions. Relative to the Security Council, which has five permanent members – Russia, UK, US, France, and China – the UNGA is more democratic and representative of the UN as a collective body.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established as an outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which was held in Stockholm in 1972. Grounded in 26 principles on the human environment,¹ UNEP is the principal UN forum for the discussion of the global environment policy agenda. UNEP is governed by the UNEP Governing Council (now the UN Environment Assembly) consisting of 58 Member States which serve four-year terms based on the principle of equitable geographical.² In May 1985 the Governing Council created the Committee of Permanent Representatives which consists of all properly accredited Permanent Representatives to UNEP,³ and is responsible for providing guidance on environmental policy priorities and contributing to preparation of the agenda. In 2012, world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) called for UNEP to be enhanced. As a result, the Governing Council was converted into the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), with universal membership, an enhanced voice, and a clear mandate to craft the global environmental agenda to promote cohesive

¹ UN, Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, at 4-5, 29-31, online: <www.un-documents.net/aconf48-14r1.pdf>.

² UNEP, Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council, (New York: UN, 1988), annex, online: <staging.unep.org/download_file.multilingual.asp?FileID=11>; Make up: 16 African, 13 Asian, 13 Western European and Others, 10 Latin American and Caribbean, and 6 Eastern European States.

³ UNEP, Report of the Governing Council on the work of its thirteenth session (14-24 May 1985), online: <wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/12220/Governing%20Council%20Decision%2013-2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.



achievement of environmental policy goals.⁴ The first meeting UNEA-1 was held 23-27 June 2014, and the second UNEA-2 was held 23-28 May 2016, both at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

Matters that are put to a vote are decided by a majority of those present and voting.⁵ Though UNEA resolutions are non-binding, they have an important influence on state behaviour, and these recommendations will initiate action on a vast range of political, economic, and environmental issues under multiple bodies including the UNGA, as well as key multilateral environmental agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) among others.⁶

INTRODUCTION

Delegates will be representing their Member States within the UNEA, which deals with issues relating to environmental policy and sustainable development, including: climate change, ecosystem management, environmental governance, chemicals and waste, and resource efficiency.

Two key issues which UNEA deals with, **environmental governance** and **sustainable development**, are at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Formally titled *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and officially adopted on September 25, 2015, the SDGs mark a transition from the now expired Millennium Development Goals established in 2000. Reaffirming the priorities of the UN, the report states that “sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combatting inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet,

⁴ UN, United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) A/RES/66/288 “The Future We Want” (2012), para 88-89, online:

<<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20/futurewewant>>.

⁵ UN, Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP/EA.3/3, (May 2016), Rule 48-49, online:

<<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/14053/Revised%20RULES%20OF%20PROCEDURE.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>.

⁶ For additional information, please visit: <http://web.unep.org/unea/>



creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent.”⁷ Additionally, the participation of all UN agencies is welcomed.⁸ The interconnected nature of the SDGs is exemplified by the adverse effects of climate change, including water scarcity, land degradation, desertification, rising sea levels, and an intensification of extreme weather events such as flooding, droughts, and tropical storms.

While these examples relate to SDG goal 13 (Climate action) there are implications for other goals related to health, agriculture, food security, water, sanitation, energy, infrastructure and so on. It is ultimately impossible to achieve poverty eradication, sustainable development, and the overall achievement of the SDGs without a comprehensive and concerted international effort to address climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as decarbonisation and shifts to alternative sources of energy.

While the SDGs recognize the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the primary international intergovernmental forum for negotiating a response to global climate change, Member States within UNEA are nonetheless able to ensure the implementation of these responses. **Therefore, as delegates, it is your responsibility to draft an action oriented strategy aimed at addressing climate change related aspects of the SDGs as well as supporting the completion of a binding global climate treaty.**

HISTORY OF GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Combating climate change within the framework of SDGs demands the widest possible international cooperation, which requires delegates to engage with the outcomes and concepts associated with global climate governance and UNFCCC processes, which form the foundation for action oriented policies to address climate change.

Political and policy driven approaches to discussing and tackling global climate change at the global level emerged in the late 1980s. For example, the 1987 Brundtland Report, also known as *Our Common Future*, coined the influential term „sustainable development“ as

⁷ UN, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 70/1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” A/RES/70/1 (2015), para 13, online: <www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E>. [2030 Agenda]

⁸ Ibid, 2030 Agenda, para 70.



“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainable development is often divided into three main dimensions: **social wellbeing, economic development, and environmental protection.** Further, the World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere resulted in the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, which was tasked with gathering data and reporting on climate change. This momentum continued with the now famous 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), colloquially known as the Rio Earth Summit. An important outcome of the Rio Earth Summit was the creation of the UNFCCC, whose ultimate objective is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human induced) interference with the climate system.” The UNFCCC also established the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” where certain developed states have a greater responsibility to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions based on their historical responsibility for pollution and increased economic capacity to do so. Despite its non-binding nature which did not go as far as some had hoped, the UNFCCC importantly established a framework, aspirational goals, and annual meetings through a Conference of Parties (COP).⁹

Five years later, the Kyoto Protocol was agreed at COP3 on December 11, 1997 as the first major multilateral attempt by Member States to concretely reduce global GHG emissions. The Kyoto Protocol mandated legally binding emission reduction targets for twenty-five industrialized countries and thirteen transition countries (Annex I countries), with the goal of reducing overall emissions by five percent between 1990 and 2012. Importantly, Kyoto did not establish any mandatory targets or binding emissions reductions for developing countries (Annex II countries), instead opting for alternative methods such as green investment mechanisms. For example, one of these “flexibility” mechanisms for states to reach commitments included a carbon trading scheme where countries with lower emissions can

⁹ See generally: Hoffman, Matthew J. “Chapter 45: Climate Change.” In *International Organization and Global Governance*, edited by Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), 605-617; UN, “Our Common Future” (New York: UN, 1992), online: <www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>, UNFCCC, “First steps to a safer future: Introducing The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,” online: <unfccc.int/essential_background/convention/items/6036.php>.



profit by selling these surpluses higher emitting countries. However, underlying tensions between developed and developing states came to the fore, and two of the largest emitters in the US and China did not undertake binding emissions reductions.¹⁰

Since Kyoto, global climate governance has been largely forward looking, in its desire for a comprehensive and binding successor treaty. Many optimistically hoped this agreement would materialize at COP15 in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2009 since the meeting was attended by many heads of state. Yet this agreement ended with deadlock and a weak declaration where states submit their own climate pledges based on their own capacity and willingness. Many considered this as an example of politics trumping science, claiming these weak pledges would not be enough to prevent a 2 °C increase in global temperature. Since 2009, subsequent negotiations have been building towards the COP 21 conference in Paris in 2015, as the potential successor to Kyoto and the strong binding agreement that science demands. Yet similar concerns remain, as the SDG report notes, “with grave concern the significant gap between the aggregate effect of Parties” mitigation pledges in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with having a likely chance of holding the increase in global average temperature below 2 °C or 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.”¹¹

COP 21 saw establishment of the Paris Agreement (2015) which reaffirmed the 2 °C goal, and provided for Parties to put forward nationally determined contributions (NDCs) which will be progressively reviewed every 5 years. The role of both market-based and non-market-based measures were also noted as key contributing mechanisms to support achievement of the obligations under the Paris Agreement.¹² During COP 22, held in Marrakech, Morocco, progress was made to build on the momentum generated by COP 21 in Paris. Naturally, COP 22 mostly focused on the action items of the Paris Agreement in a variety of fields such as climate change adaptation, technology transfer, mitigation, and capacity-building. Among the main topics discussed was encouraging countries to adopt a low-carbon

¹⁰ See generally: UNFCCC, “Making those first steps count: An Introduction to the Kyoto Protocol,” online: <unfccc.int/essential_background/kyoto_protocol/items/6034.php>.

¹¹ 2030 Agenda, supra note 6, para 31.

¹² See generally: UNFCCC, “The Paris Agreement,” online: <unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php>.



economy. The ratification of the Paris Agreement was also another largely discussed topic in the months and days leading up to COP 22. The Agreement finally came into force on 6 November 2016, the day prior to the start of the Conference.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is “the leading global environmental authority” within the UN system “that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of environmental dimension of sustainable development within the UN system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.” Each year, UNEP reports its activities, and adopted resolutions to the UNGA. Following the report, the UNGA can introduce a resolution based on the recommendations made by UNEP in its annual report. During the 70th session, the UNGA also adopted resolution 70/205 titled “Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind.” This resolution serves as follow-up platform for the Paris Agreement and implementation mechanism for the main outcomes of COP 21.¹³

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Affirming that climate change is one of the most severe threats the world will face in the upcoming years is not a surprising fact. Indeed, it is well-known by the international community that failing to address this issue could result in global insecurity, environmental degradation, scarcity of resources, and forced displacement due to climate change. In the global discussions on climate change, the expressions “adaptation” and “mitigation” are often used as the two-step process to address the effects of climate changes. As UNEA delegates, it is imperative to fully understand the nature of those concepts and their contribution to the discussions on sustainable development and climate change. Topics which will be discussed include adaptation and mitigation.

Adaptation and the Adaptation Gap

In the context of global climate change, adaptation can be defined as “the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects in order to moderate harm or exploit

¹³ UN, Allocation of agenda items to the Second Committee A/C.2/71/1 (19 September 2016), online: <www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.2/71/1>.



beneficial opportunities.”¹⁴ In some cases, interventions might be necessary to adjust to the expected climate. Adaptation frequently built on national institutional capacities, planning, and other efforts to integrate climate change components and effects in development planning and ecosystems management.

Adaptation gap is another frequent concept used by climate change experts and consists of “the gap between actually implemented adaptation and a societal set goal, determined largely by preferences related to tolerate climate change impacts, and reflecting resource limitations and competing priorities.”¹⁵ The depth of the adaptation gap can be explained through a variety of factors which can be referred to as capacities. In the specific context of climate change, capacities are referred to as “the strengths, attributes, and resources available to an individual community, society, or organization which can be used to achieve established goals.”¹⁶

UNEP has identified in its 2016 *Adaptation Gap Report* main areas that need to be prioritize in terms of climate change adaptation: finance, technology, and knowledge.¹⁷ In its 5th report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that the actual cost of adaptation with universal access to electricity and clean fuels for cooking to be between USD 79 and 95 billion annually up to 2030.¹⁸ This cost is expected to significantly increase by the year 2050. Therefore, in order to reduce that gap, more funding must be made available for Member States in need of financial resources. UNEP has estimated that the Green Climate Fund (GCF) will have an important role to play on that manner.

¹⁴ IPCC, “Annex II: Glossary of Terms” in C.B. Field, et al. *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation: A Special Report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 555-564, at 556, online: <https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/special-reports/srex/SREX-Annex_Glossary.pdf>. [IPCC Glossary of Terms]

¹⁵ UN, “The Adaptation Gap Report: Executive Summary” (2014), online: <web.unep.org/adaptationgapreport/sites/unep.org.adaptationgapreport/files/documents/executive_summary.pdf>.

¹⁶ IPCC Glossary of Terms, *supra* note 13, at 556.

¹⁷ UNEP, *The Adaptation Gap Report* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2016), online: <web.unep.org/adaptationgapreport/sites/unep.org.adaptationgapreport/files/documents/agr2016.pdf>

¹⁸ IPCC, “Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report” (UNEP/WMO, 2014) at 109, online: <www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf>.



The GCF is expected to bring forward another major contribution to fill the technology adaptation gap between Member States. The technology gap refers to the gap between the technology needed by a country and its actual capacities to adapt to the effects of climate change within its own borders. Solutions such as technology transfer and diffusion of adaptation technologies have already been considered by the international community as the future path for climate adaptation.¹⁹

Finally, the knowledge dimension refers to missing or incomplete knowledge, gaps in knowledge integration, and limited information-sharing between decision-makers. Despite the fact that knowledge is difficult to quantify, it was identified as one of the main obstacles to climate change adaptation. One of the proposed solutions is to the creation of “a repository of adaptation options for specific regions and on different levels that could be integrated in development decisions.”

Mitigation

Mitigation has been defined as “A human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases.”²⁰ Mitigation can involve the use of technologies and renewable energy. In other words, it consists of “making old equipment more energy efficient, changing management practices, or consumer behaviour.”²¹

Mitigation is present through different spheres of urban planning and daily lives in general. A variety of sectors have been identified in which mitigation policies can be developed and strengthen: agriculture, forests, energy, manufacturing, transport, tourism, buildings, and waste management. Those different sectors reflect the pressing issue of growing and developing urban cities throughout the world, and the increasing demand for a variety of resources and needs to be fulfilled. An example of this emerging phenomenon is the escalating demand for energy resources that is increasing at the same pace as the world population.

¹⁹ See generally: UNEP, “Climate Change and Human Rights,” (Nairobi: UNEP 2015), online: <<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/9934/Climate-Change-Human-Rights.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>. [Climate Change and Human Rights, 2015]

²⁰ IPCC Glossary of Terms, *supra* note 13, at 561.

²¹ UNEP, “Low-Emission Growth: Promoting Renewables and Improving Energy Efficiency” online: <web.unep.org/climatechange/mitigation/>.



Transportation also plays a vital role in the urban daily life as they bring people to work or students to school every day. However, transportation accounts for more than 25% of GHG emissions. Additionally, international aviation and maritime transport which collectively account for 5% of global GHG emissions but which are expected to significantly increase, are actively working to implement mitigation and adaptations strategies. Under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Parties have adopted a “basket of measures” to achieve “carbon-neutral growth” which include: Green aircraft technology, Operational measures, Fuel efficacy and alternative fuel goals, and the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) – a market-based measure to offset carbon emissions.

Under the International Maritime Organization, measures have been developed to cap release of sulphur oxide (SO_x), nitrogen oxide (NO_x), and particulate matter (PM) from fuel, including establishment of four Emission Control Areas (ECAS), as well as the development of a NO_x Technical code putting in place guidelines depending upon the ships year of construction – Tier I (post-2000), Tier II (post-2011), or Tier III (post-2016). Additionally, Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI), and the Ship Energy Efficiency Management Plan (SEEMP) have been developed to establish energy efficiency standards for ship designs, as well as a mechanism to monitor and track vessel fuel efficiency and emission-levels through data-driven decision making. In order to drive the levels of change in the market necessary to foster sustainable consumption and production patters it is crucial to find and implement integrated strategies to effectively combat climate change and ensure sustainable development.

While implementing mitigation strategies, national governments need to consider the specific needs of vulnerable groups among their populations, especially indigenous people and women who are disproportionately impacted by climate related disasters. In doing so, Member States should ensure that negative effects on human rights are reduced to a minimal baseline. Additionally, specific attention should be paid to the particular challenges of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Land-Locked Developing Countries (LLDCs), with climate responses grounded in the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. National governments should hold public consultations with various stakeholders before undertaking any major project, with consultations guided by the



following principles: equity, responsibility, transparency, and burden-sharing. The Oslo Principles “contain a useful framework for conceptualizing states obligations in this context.”²²

CONCLUSION

As UNEP and many UN specialists have mentioned, climate change is one of the most serious threats facing the current and the future generations. While several international conferences, events, treaties, and conventions have reiterated the urge to act to protect the environment and reduce the effects of climate change, it is necessary to take sustainable actions on that manner that will respect the environment while considering social and economic development.

A UNEP report titled *Climate change and Human rights* underlines that climate change initiatives should be implemented with consideration for human rights. Specific rights to the case of climate change include, but are not limited to: Right to life,²³ Right to an adequate standard of living,²⁴ Right to food,²⁵ Right to health,²⁶ and the Right to water and sanitation.²⁷

The report recommends also some actions on the international and domestic level in order to fight climate change while respecting human rights. These actions constitute some interesting foundation for reflection on the topics: formally recognizing the link between human rights and climate change through implementation mechanisms, providing financial assistance to developing countries, implementing a platform of action for displaced people and migrants due to climate change, and creating an information-sharing platform.²⁸ Where market-based mechanisms, as envisioned under the Paris Agreement and the ICAO CORSIA,

²² Climate Change and Human Rights, 2015, supra note 18, at 24.

²³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966, 999 UNTS 171, 6 ILM 368 (1967), Article 6 (entered into force 23 March 1976). [ICCPR]

²⁴ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 19 December 1966, 993 UNTS 3, Can. TS 1976 No. 46, UKTS 1977 No. 6, Article 6 and 11 (entered into force 3 Jan 1976). [ICESCR]

²⁵ ICESCR, *Ibid*, Article 11.

²⁶ ICESCR, *Ibid*, Article 12.

²⁷ ICESCR, *Ibid*, Article 11(1).

²⁸ Climate Change and Human Rights, 2015, supra note 18, at 41-42.



offset credits should foster sustainable development outcomes and be based in a high quality emission credit standard.²⁹

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Delegates should consider the following questions in order to facilitate their preparation for committee work:

- 1) How does climate change affect your country? What are the biggest impacts that need to be addressed immediately or in the short-term horizon?
- 2) Does your country have any experience with adaptation or mitigation mechanisms or program (ex Renewable energy, emissions trading, setting of a carbon price, carbon offsetting)? What can be learned or how can the experience of your country inform future priorities?
- 3) What is the most pressing needs your country has identified in terms of resources and programs to combat climate change? What is your country's NDC under the Paris Agreement?
- 4) Did your country participate in the global negotiations or other events related to climate change? What was your most important contribution?
- 5) How does your country perceive the link between human rights, climate change and the environment?

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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²⁹ Markus Gehring and Freedom-Kai Phillips, "Intersections of the Paris Agreement and Carbon Offsetting: Legal and Functional Considerations" Policy Brief No. 88 (September 2016), online: <https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/pb_no.88web.pdf>.



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Front Picture: <http://www.ace-net.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/pollution.jpeg>