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United Nations Environment Assembly Background Guide 2020

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2020 National Model United Nations Conference in Washington, DC (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). This year's staff is: Director Katie Conti and Assistant Director Vikram Sakkia. Katie holds a B.A. in International Relations, Public Communication, and Geography from Syracuse University. She currently works with Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C. on the implementation of public diplomacy and international exchange programming for the U.S. Department of State. Vikram holds an B.Sc. in Computer Engineering and is currently a graduate student at the New York University pursuing an M.Sc. in Computer Engineering.

The topics under discussion for UNEA are:

- I. Environmental Sustainability in the Textile and Fashion Industries
- II. Halting Biodiversity Loss

As the governing council of the UN Environment Programme, UNEA is the world's highest-level decision-making entity on matters concerning the environment. Since its creation at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), UNEA has held universal membership with 193 Member States. UNEA meets biennially to prioritize and tackle environmental challenges through developing international environmental policies and fostering partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Delegates of UNEA must work to understand these challenges to preserve and rehabilitate the environment, fulfilling the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a position paper. Guidelines are available in the NMUN Position Paper Guide.

The NMUN website has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide, which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The NMUN Rules of Procedure, which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory NMUN Conduct Expectations on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretary-General Emma Ogg at usgemma.dc@nmun.org or Secretary-General Daniel Sweeney at secgen.dc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,

Katie Conti, Director
Vikram Sakkia, Assistant Director



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Committee Overview

Introduction

Twenty-eight years after the adoption of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992), the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) called for the strengthening and upgrading of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), so that it could better execute its mandate.¹ In 2013, the Governing Council of UN Environment adopted resolution 27/2, which expanded the Governing Council to universal membership and requested the General Assembly to change its designation to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which it did with resolution 67/251 the same year.² UNEA is the governing body of UN Environment and is the international community's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters.³ UNEA's universal membership strengthens the role of UN Environment in international affairs and is designed to increase the responsiveness of Member States in developing environmental policy.⁴ UNEA meets biennially and has held four regular sessions, the most recent was held in March 2019 and its theme was "Innovative Solutions to Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production."⁵

UN Environment was a result of a concerted effort made during the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden.⁶ Subsequently, the General Assembly established UN Environment as the official body concerned with environmental issues within the United Nations (UN).⁷ Since 1972, the UN Environment has played a significant role in coordinating environmental policy across the UN system.⁸ UNEA governs and sets policy for UN Environment, whose mission is to "provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment" in order to develop environmental-friendly practices and policies in the UN system.⁹ UN Environment is a UN Programme that encourages international, regional, and local coordination for environmental issues, while also ensuring various other UN entities take environmental impacts into account when executing their missions.¹⁰ UN Environment reports both to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹¹

UN Environment served as the secretariat and was a main contributor for the planning and execution of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, the outcomes of which included the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and *Agenda 21*.¹² These landmark documents revolutionized the international community's approach to environmental issues and provided further guidance and renewed support for UN Environment's role in international cooperation on environmental protection.¹³ UNCED marked a turning point for international collaboration to preserve biodiversity and the climate, with the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (1992) and the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992) both opening for signature at the summit.¹⁴ The *Convention to Combat Desertification* (1994), another major agreement, was adopted two years later.¹⁵ While the three Rio Conventions are

¹ UN General Assembly, *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*, 2012, p. 18.

² UNEP, *About the UN Environment Assembly*.

³ UNEP, *UN Environment Assembly and Governing Council*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNEP, *Fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly*.

⁶ United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1)*, 1972.

⁷ UN General Assembly, *Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation (A/RES/2997(XXVII))*, 1972.

⁸ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2017-18*, 2017, pp. 256-257.

⁹ UNEP, *About UN Environment*.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 256.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 256.

¹² Johnson, *UNEP The First 40 Years: A Narrative*, 2012, pp. 127-128.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 137-139.

¹⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity, *The Rio Conventions*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

each administered by their own secretariat, UN Environment assisted in negotiating the conventions and was tasked with promoting their implementation through *Agenda 21*.¹⁶

Governance, Structure, and Membership

In 2013, UNEA became the designated policy-making body, superseding the Governing Council with an initial membership of 58 UN Member States, with a universal membership of 193 UN Member States.¹⁷ Those with Permanent Observer status are invited to attend UNEA regular sessions.¹⁸ UNEA meets biennially to set priorities for global environmental policy, discuss developments for environmental legislation, and assist in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹⁹ The UN Environment Secretariat is responsible for supporting UNEA and consists of a rotating President, three Vice-Presidents, and a Rapporteur.²⁰ The Bureau is elected during the final meeting of a regular session to oversee the general conduct of business of the UNEA.²¹ The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) is the subsidiary inter-sessional organ to the UNEA and meets at least four times a year.²² The CPR performs functions, also strengthened by Governing Council Decision 27/2, such as: (a) contribute to the preparation of the UNEA agenda, (b) hold an advisory role in policy matters within the UNEA, (c) monitor the implementation of its decisions, (d) hold thematic and/or programmatic debates, (e) promote the inclusion of non-resident members of the Committee, and (f) perform any other functions delegated by the UNEA.²³ CPR is composed of all accredited Permanent Representatives to UN Environment and is led by a five-member bureau that is elected for two years.²⁴

UN Environment relies on three main financial sources to facilitate its agenda; Earmarked Funds, the Environment Fund, and the UN Regular Budget.²⁵ Earmarked Funds or earmarked contributions are funds appropriated for specific projects, themes or countries aimed to expand and/or replicate the UN Environment's work and its results in more countries and with more partners.²⁶ The Environment Fund through the approval of UN Environment's membership, aides in maintaining the capacity, balance, and efficiency needed for UN Environment to function.²⁷ When contributing to the Environment Fund, Member States are encouraged to make financial contributions to the fund based upon the Voluntary Indicative Scale of Contributions (VISIC), which considers their respective socio-economic background to determine the predictability of a continued financial contribution.²⁸ The UN Regular Budget supports the functions of the Secretariat and its respective Governing Bodies, as well as the coordination of the UN Environment with the UN system and cooperation with global scientific communities.²⁹ From 2018 to 2019, About 80% of UN Environment's income was comprised of earmarked contributions, while the Environment Fund made up about 15% and the UN Regular Budget made up about 5%.³⁰ Earmarked contributions and the Environment Fund are contributed voluntarily, hence 95% of UN Environment's income is received on a voluntary basis from Member States.³¹

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 155-156.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UNEP, *Directory: Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UN Environment*, 2019, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² UNEP, *Committee of Permanent Representatives*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ UNEP, *Funding Facts*.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ UNEA, *Environment Fund*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

With the adoption of General Assembly resolution 2997 of 1972 on “Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation,” UN Environment was created with a mandate to “promote international and regional environmental cooperation, develop environmental policy, highlight global and regional problems, facilitate the transfer of scientific knowledge, assist developing Member States in environmental matters, review reports of the Executive Director, and approve the annual program on the allocation of the Environment Fund.”³² The first expansion of UN Environment’s mandate came after the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992) via *Agenda 21*, which outlined a list of priority areas for UN Environment’s future work and called for the program to gain “access to greater expertise and...adequate financial resources,” as well as closer collaboration with the rest of the UN system to fulfil these new tasks.³³

During its 19th regular session, the Governing Council of UN Environment held a discussion on the future role of the Programme which came as a result of adopting the *Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme* (1997).³⁴ As the 19th special session of the General Assembly was scheduled to address the implementation of *Agenda 21* later that year, the *Nairobi Declaration* represented a call to the UN system and its Member States to acknowledge UN Environment’s role.³⁵ The General Assembly endorsed the *Nairobi Declaration* (1997), which reaffirmed and established UN Environment’s mandate “as the leading global environmental authority.”³⁶

UN Environment’s authority was further affirmed by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan who advocated for the reforming and strengthening of its role as “the focal point for harmonization and coordination of environment-related activities.”³⁷ In October 1998, the General Assembly reported a set of recommendations that further modified UN Environment’s mandate, as per recommendations made by the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements.³⁸ As a result of one of the recommendations, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) was created, with the Executive Director of UN Environment serving as its chairperson.³⁹ A key purpose of the EMG is to coordinate information-sharing and facilitate discussion on essential priorities in order to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective allocation of resources.⁴⁰

Additionally, amidst the Fourth Industrial Revolution, UNEA has taken a modern technological approach backed by robust scientific evidence, especially through issue-focused initiatives like those from the UN Science, Policy, and Business Forum.⁴¹ As the governing body of UN Environment, UNEA develops international environmental law and policy that serves as a catalyst for intergovernmental action through the practice of multilateral agreement.⁴² Under UNEA’s guidance, UN Environment assesses the global environment on a global, regional, and national scale, and uses that information to hold relevant stakeholders accountable in developing proper action.⁴³ As the UN recognizes climate change as the predominant issue in its global-civic efforts, UN Environment continues to partnered with various stakeholders to highlight the complexity of environmental issues in terms of conflict, disaster, security and

³² Ibid.

³³ UN Conference on Environment and Development, *Agenda 21*, 1992, par. 38.21-38.23.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 155.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 155.

³⁶ UN General Assembly, *Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (A/RES/S-19/2)*, 1997, par. 123 ; Governing Council of UN Environment, *Proceedings of the Governing Council at its Nineteenth Session (UNEP/GC.19/34)*, 1997, pp. 52-56.

³⁷ UN General Assembly, *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform (A/51/950)*, p. 58.

³⁸ UN General Assembly, *Environment and human settlements: Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/463)*, 1998.

³⁹ Ibid, 1998.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 1998.

⁴¹ UNEP, *Science, Policy and Business Forum*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ UNEP, *Programme Performance Report 2016*, 2016, p. 57.

education.⁴⁴ UNEA often hosts intersessional events and forums with these stakeholders to foster rapport for UN Environment initiatives.⁴⁵ UNEA also has the ability to create ad hoc committees and subsidiary bodies to implement specific environmental objectives when necessary.⁴⁶

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

The fourth and most recent regular session of UNEA took place in March 2019, and was entitled “Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production.”⁴⁷ The fourth regular session emphasized on three thematic priorities: “(a) Environmental challenges related to poverty and natural resources management, including food systems, food security and halting biodiversity loss; (b) Life-cycles approaches to resource efficiency, energy, chemicals and waste management; and (c) innovative sustainable business development at a time of rapid technological change.”⁴⁸ A key outcome of the fourth regular session was the *Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly (2019)*, that made 19 key actions which exemplified a concerted effort to address environmental challenges by Member States.⁴⁹ A few of these actions entail improving global resource management strategies, the promoting and sharing of innovative knowledge sharing, and the engagement of environmental research and relevant stakeholders.⁵⁰ By continuing to foster sustainable development as an integrated effort, UNEA agreed to continue its mandate in overcoming common environmental challenges by: distinguishing innovative solutions, promoting the use of environmental data and its sharing, along with the engagement of pertinent stakeholders, such as civil society members, those from academia, and the private sector.⁵¹

The fifth regular session will take place from the 22 to 26 of February 2021 and its theme will be entitled “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”⁵² At the fifth session, UNEA will continue to mobilize Member States and stakeholders to implement and achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a conscious focus on nature-based solutions.⁵³ The theme calls for a concerted effort in enhancing the protection and restoration of nature, but the main goal of the fifth session will aim to consolidate global environmental action and highlight the eradication of poverty and “sustainable patterns of consumption and production”.⁵⁴ The Bureau of the Assembly and CPR decided the fifth session’s theme at a joint meeting held on 3 December 2019.⁵⁵ Chair of CPR, Fernando Coimbra acknowledged the importance of choosing a theme for the fifth session, especially after considering UNEA President Ola Elvestuen’s “thought-starter”, which aimed to guide discussion for the joint meeting and propose objectives for the fifth session.⁵⁶ Amongst three of the tentative thematic areas Elvestuen proposed for further consideration was titled “Scaling-up/Implementing Nature-based Solutions for a clean Environment and Sustainable Development.”⁵⁷ Elvestuen states nature-based solutions should support societal infrastructures, while enhancing “the resilience of ecosystems, their capacity for renewal and the provision of services.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, nature-based solutions can have lasting socio-economic effects where tens of million jobs are created, which added an

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 32.

⁴⁵ World Animal Net, *United Nations Environment Assembly: A Guidance Document for Animal Protection Organizations*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ UNEA, *Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session: Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production (UNEP/EA.4/HLS.1)*, 2019.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² UNEA, *Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly*.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ UNEA, *Theme for the 2021 UN Environment Assembly*.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

additional US\$2.3 trillion in productive growth to the global economy, lifting billions of people out of poverty.⁵⁹ Elvestuen also notes key international events and processes that would define the scope of the fifth session theme, such as the Secretary-General's Climate Summit held in September 2019, which called for heightened intergovernmental measures for a rapidly changing climate.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The reform of UN Environment at the start of the 1990s redefined its thematic role within the UN system.⁶¹ UNEA's inception represents a key step in UN Environment's mission to ensure the work of all UN entities, its Member States, and respective stakeholders aim to be environmentally sustainable and align with international laws and policies concerning the environment.⁶² The establishment of an international authority for environmental issues with a universal membership, reflects the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach for environmental protection.⁶³ Since its creation, outcome documents like the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, has held its mandate accountable and guided its membership's action as a decision-making body.⁶⁴ The *Ministerial Declaration* will elicit further global effort to meet a multidimensional environment, but will also aim to address capacity building and pivot on socio-economic enhancement for sustainable development.⁶⁵ Moreover, a retroactive assessment of nature-based solution will reaffirm the necessity of a healthy ecosystem.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, as the world continues to face alarming climate change, UNEA continues to be a key leader in achieving global sustainable development.⁶⁷

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In this informational note delivered to the High-Level Segment of UNEA-2 (2016), UNEP's Executive Director outlines the strategic vision of the Programme for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. According to UN Environment's assessment, at least 86 of the 169 SDG targets are immediately concerned with environmental sustainability. The note presents a detailed overview of the links between UN Environment's agenda and the SDGs and suggests several overarching principles and concrete measures to ensure that the Programme contributes to the success of the 2030 Agenda. Through this resource, delegates can acquire a better understanding of UN Environment's role in the 2030 Agenda, including its institutional connections within the UN system.

United Nations Environment Assembly. (2019). *Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session: Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production (UNEP/EA.4/HLS.1)*. Retrieved 21 April 2020 from: <http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/28463/K1901029.pdf>

This declaration is the primary outcome document of the most recent session of UNEA, held in March 2019. It highlights the priority areas that emerged from the session and the efforts necessary to influence these areas. The declaration discusses how Member States, CSOs, the private sector, local communities, and academia can promote more sustainable uses of resources and more responsible production and disposal of these

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid; United Nations Climate Action Summit, *Opening Press Release*, 2019.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 155.

⁶² World Summit on Sustainable Development, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (A/CONF.199/20)*, 2002.

⁶³ UNEA, *Delivering on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda: Information note of the Executive Director (UNEP/EA.2/INF/4)*, 2016.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

resources. Delegates can find the current priorities and talking points of the UNEA within this document.

United Nations Environment Programme. (n.d.). *About the UN Environment Assembly*. Retrieved 22 April 2020 from: <http://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/about-un-environment-assembly>

This website provides a basic overview of the Assembly and its role within the UN Environment's governance structure, including its history and mandate. The resource represents an entry point for delegates to begin their research on the committee, as it provides an overview of the body's functions, as well as links to the documentation of past sessions and current thematic priorities of the Assembly. It is also here that preparatory material for the upcoming session of the Assembly is collected. This website should help delegates to easily distinguish between UN Environment and the Assembly and understand how they are connected to each other.

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I. Environmental Sustainability in the Textile and Fashion Industries

“Fashion doesn’t perceive sustainability as a limitation to fashion, but rather a trigger for bringing real creativity and passion into the industry.”⁶⁸

Introduction

The current state of development in the fashion industry has resulted in adverse environmental and social impacts.⁶⁹ According to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the industry encompasses the supply chain management from the production of raw materials and manufacturing of garments, accessories, and footwear, to their distribution, consumption, and disposal.⁷⁰ The textile industry produces 1.2 billion tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions annually, which amounts to more than the yearly emissions of all international flights and maritime shipping combined.⁷¹ The fashion industry not only contributes to pollution but also utilizes large amounts of water and non-renewable fossil fuels to produce natural and synthetic fibers.⁷² Additionally, the fashion industry has rapidly expanded, with its value approaching 2.5 trillion USD and employing over 75 million people worldwide.⁷³ The United Nations Alliance on Sustainable Fashion (UN Fashion Alliance) defines fashion as clothing, leather, and footwear, made from textiles and related goods.⁷⁴

Sustainability of the industry encompasses social issues, “such as improvements in working conditions and remuneration for workers, as well as environmental ones, including the reduction of the industry’s waste stream, and decreases in water pollution and contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.”⁷⁵ Fashion and textile companies, including producers or raw materials, manufacturing, distribution, sales, and disposal units, have a critical role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 11, on “Sustainable Cities and Communities.”⁷⁶ The industry has fundamental production processes and consumption patterns that result in social and environmental concerns.⁷⁷

International and Regional Framework

The SDGs were established by the United Nations General Assembly via the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and provide a platform to encourage sustainable development in the fashion industry.⁷⁸ SDG 11 emphasizes the sustainable growth of cities and communities, a goal required while addressing the concerns of the expanding fashion industry.⁷⁹ SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production directly influences the fashion industry as it continues to grow.⁸⁰ SDG 13 on global climate action is a primary concern of the UNEA. With increasing greenhouse gases, SDG 13 is a crucial goal towards achieving the sustainable development of the fashion industry. SDG 14 and 15 look towards supporting environmental sustainability of life below water and on land, and both are directly affected by the release of microplastics into bodies of water and the release of toxins into the atmosphere by the fashion industry.⁸¹

⁶⁸ UNEA, *UN Alliance For Sustainable Fashion addresses damage of ‘fast fashion’*, 2019.

⁶⁹ UN ECE, *UN Alliance Aims to Put Fashion on Path to Sustainability*, 2018.

⁷⁰ UN Fashion Alliance, *What is the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion?*, 2020.

⁷¹ UNFCCC, *Fashion Industry, UN Pursue Climate Action for Sustainable Development*, 2018; UN Conference on Environment and Development, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 1992.

⁷² Ocean Generation, *From Seaweed to Fish Skin, How Can We Change the Fashion Industry?*, 2018.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; Gardetti & Muthu, *The UN Sustainable Development Goals for the Textile and Fashion Industry*, 2020.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

UN Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was established in 1992 upon adoption of the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, worked with fashion industry stakeholders in 2018 to identify actions for the fashion industry to take on climate action.⁸² In 2018, the creation of the *Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action* detailed these collaborative efforts towards achieving net-zero emissions throughout the industry by 2050.⁸³ Working Groups including relevant stakeholders, experts, and initiatives in the fashion industry aim to share knowledge and collaborate upon plans of action towards decarbonization, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and waste management.⁸⁴

Parties of the UNFCCC formed the *Paris Agreement* (2015) as part of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21) to the UNFCCC, to combat climate change and to accelerate actions within multiple industries, including fashion, that are needed to ensure a low carbon future.⁸⁵ The leaders of COP 21 also implemented the *Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action* at COP 22 to strengthen the collaboration between governments, including initiatives aimed towards user-friendly fashion as detailed by.⁸⁶

Role of the International System

The UN committed itself to changing the path of fashion by encouraging the industry to reduce its negative social and environmental impacts to meet the ultimate desired outcome of full implementation of the SDGs.⁸⁷ The fourth UN Environmental Assembly in 2018 launched the UN Alliance on Sustainable Fashion to encourage private organizations and governmental entities to work together towards achieving the SDGs.⁸⁸ UNEA approaches this topic through the UN Alliance on Sustainable Fashion in an effort to amend the development of the fashion industry, reduce its negative environmental and social impacts, and, in turn, drive the fashion industry to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).⁸⁹ For example, the UNEA has made recommendations towards reducing microplastics and greenhouse emissions for the fashion industry.⁹⁰

The UN Global Compact, a special initiative of the UN Secretary-General, is a program that calls upon companies to align their operations and strategies to adhere to universal human rights, labor laws, environmental, and anti-corruption laws.⁹¹ In 2012, the UN Global Compact launched the first industry-specific sustainability initiative for fashion by publishing a Code of Conduct for the fashion industry.⁹² The UN Global Compact encourages companies to make sustainability a priority across their entire organizations.⁹³ The Compact is working with apparel companies on water, supply chain sustainability, and health issues, among others.⁹⁴ The UN Global Compact also provides materials, initiatives, and business practices on supply chain sustainability.⁹⁵

The UN system includes organizational bodies working towards protecting arable land that might be in danger of harm from pollution and other negative environmental effects of the fashion and textile industries.⁹⁶ The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in conjunction with the Food and

⁸² UNFCCC, *Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action*, 2018.

⁸³ UNFCCC, *About the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action*, 2018.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ COP 21, *Paris Agreement*, 2015; UNFCCC, *What is the Paris Agreement?*, 2020.

⁸⁶ COP 22, *Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action*, 2016.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ UNEP, *Putting the brakes on fast fashion*, 2018.

⁸⁹ Ibid; UNECE, *Fashion and the SDGs: what role for the UN?*, 2018; UN Sustainable Development Goals, *Milestone Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action Launched*, 2018; UN Sustainable Development Goals, *United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP*, 2016.

⁹⁰ UNEP, *Fashion's tiny hidden secret*, 2019.

⁹¹ UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, *UN Global Compact*.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ UN Global Compact, *Supply Chain Sustainability*, 2020.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Agriculture Organization (FAO) established the Forests for Fashion Initiative which aims to utilize underutilized forest materials to develop fashion requiring less energy and water to produce.⁹⁷ UNECE and FAO work towards regulating the origination of these materials, as the forests need to be sustainably and ethically managed.⁹⁸ In 2018, the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development highlighted the role the Forests for Fashion initiative could play in contributing to the SDGs.⁹⁹ The FAO also supports small scale fishing and aquaculture communities, as ocean-sourced materials could also serve as an innovative yet sustainable future material for the fashion industry.¹⁰⁰

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is taking several steps towards increasing the sustainability of trade within the fashion and textile industry.¹⁰¹ UNCTAD focuses on addressing climate change implications by promoting climate friendly trade and production strategies.¹⁰² UNCTAD recently incorporated sustainable fashion principles into a celebratory event for International Women's Day in 2019.¹⁰³ This event included a debate on voluntary sustainability standards (VSS), which are used to assess whether a product is sourced, produced, and processed in a sustainable manner that addresses and mitigates environmental concerns.¹⁰⁴

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has also taken an active interest in this topic via the establishment of an action research program on women's employment within the fashion industry.¹⁰⁵ The ensuing report indicated the social issues existing within the industry and outlined challenges faced within the case studies of Bangladesh and Mexico.¹⁰⁶ The fashion and textile industry demand is growing at an exponential rate, but the industry has not developed a sustainable plan of action in order to support it, thus resulting in social and environmental issues, such as the growing "fast fashion" mindset, deforestation, and increased greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰⁷

The International Trade Center also introduced the Ethical Fashion Initiative which was designed to connect marginalized artisans to the larger international fashion industry.¹⁰⁸ This was initially put in place to try and help the local growing communities of low-income areas, but has recently shifted its focus towards providing an environmental protected product to compete with the existing fashion market.¹⁰⁹

Water Pollution by the Fashion Industry

Almost 20% of global wastewater is produced by the fashion industry.¹¹⁰ Each time certain types of clothes are washed, fabrics shed microfibers that end up in oceans and account for around 500,000 tons of pollution annually.¹¹¹ This amounts to an estimated 1.4 million trillion plastic fibers in the ocean.¹¹² The phenomena occurs because approximately 60% of all clothing is made from plastic materials including polyester, acrylic, and nylon textiles.¹¹³ Most water treatment plants are not mandated or designed to capture microfibers.¹¹⁴ These microfibers make their way through the food chain via ingestion by aquatic

⁹⁷ Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, *Forests for Fashion Initiative*, 2020.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ UNECE, *Fashionable Forests at the High Level Political Forum*, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Ocean Generation, *From Seaweed to Fish Skin, How Can We Can Change the Fashion Industry?*, 2018.

¹⁰¹ UNCTAD, *International Women's Day: A Celebration of Fashion and Sustainability*, 2019.

¹⁰² UNCTAD, *Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development*, 2020.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ UNCTAD, *Sustainable African Design in Focus on Women's Day*, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ UN Research Institute for Social Development, *Women's Employment in the Textile Manufacturing Sectors of Bangladesh and Morocco*, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ ITC, *Ethical Fashion Initiative*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

life and may contain contaminants that can cause starvation, endocrine disruption, stunted growth, and indigestion to humans.¹¹⁵

A recent study found that microplastics, in the form of microfibers and other forms, have impacted more than the oceans.¹¹⁶ Microplastics have been found within tested humans and in over 90% of all table salt brands tested.¹¹⁷ The amount of polyester used within the textile industry is on the rise and has been since 2007.¹¹⁸ There have been multiple recommendations to minimize amount of polyester used by making changes within the supply chain for designers and manufacturers adapt production techniques and materials.¹¹⁹

Apart from reducing the use of polyester, the UNEA recommends several techniques to be applied through different stages of the production and consumption of the fashion supply chain.¹²⁰ Multiple procedures of coating, and reduced brushing, and laser cutting could limit the microfiber released by clothing.¹²¹ Technologies to capture microfibers during washing existing clothing are undergoing research and could be developed in the future.¹²² Consumers might also help the issue by following techniques to reduce microfiber shedding, such as washing clothes less frequently, utilizing specialized filters for washing machines, and using specialized washing bags.¹²³

Fast Fashion and Climate Change

The average consumption of clothing has gradually increased and each item of clothing has been kept half as long, according to the UN.¹²⁴ This has resulted in a fashion system model of “fast fashion”, including the release of new clothing items at frequent intervals throughout the year, far more often than the traditional seasonal fashion approach.¹²⁵ UNFCCC Secretariat and Member States have consulted with global brands such as Hugo Boss, Adidas, Puma, and H&M, exploring environmental practices, online platforms to exchange information, best practices to combat climate change, and new business models driving environmental sustainability.¹²⁶

Several leading methods of overcoming fast fashion waste include clothing rental programs for fashion companies, reusing clothes by swapping or selling them to other consumers, and recycling clothing material to manufacture new clothes.¹²⁷ Recycling, however, is often considered an energy-and-resource-intensive process that does not address all the problems arising from the rapidly spreading fast fashion culture.¹²⁸ Since recycling textiles involves establishing a recycling stream (collection system, transportation, and a separation system) for the material, recycling plants that produce enough energy to process all the clothing result in further environmental problems of sourcing energy and resources.¹²⁹

The sourcing of raw materials is a concern resulting in multiple issues for companies within the fashion industry.¹³⁰ Deforestation often occurs due to the need for croplands and animals to grow and produce

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Kim et al, *Global Pattern of Microplastics (MPs) in Commercial Food-Grade Salts: Sea Salt as an Indicator of Seawater MP Pollution*, 2018.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, *Fast fashion: Response to changes in the fashion industry*, 2010.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Westervelt, *Can Recycling Be Bad For The Environment?*, 2012.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the raw materials needed for textile and fashion industries.¹³¹ Energy consumption is heightened by the production of synthetic fibers.¹³² Synthetic fibers are also largely derived from non-renewable fossil fuels, which is an unsustainable resource for the raw materials of textiles.¹³³

The fashion industry produces 10% of global carbon emissions.¹³⁴ States parties to the *Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action* are committed to achieving a target of 30% GHG emission reductions by 2030 and a thorough analysis for a decarbonization pathway in the fashion industry, drawing upon methodologies suggested by the Science-Based Targets Initiative.¹³⁵ These targets hope to ensure the fashion industry acts to combat climate change and sets an example to other industries around the level of commitment required to meet the demands of the climate challenge within the industry.¹³⁶ UNEA, through the actions of the UN Alliance on Sustainable Fashion, has promoted improved collaboration amongst agencies by analyzing agency efforts in making fashion more sustainable, identifying solutions and gaps in agency actions, and presenting findings to governments to trigger policy changes.¹³⁷

Conclusion

As the fashion and textile industry continues to grow, the trends of water pollution and fast fashion push the future of fashion towards unsustainability.¹³⁸ UNEA continues to combat the issue and works towards the sustainable development of the industry.¹³⁹ Entities such as UNFCCC and the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion continue to build frameworks to mitigate environmentally damaging practices of these industries and move the industry towards attainment of the SDGs through dynamic partnerships.¹⁴⁰ The UNEA actively combats the issues of water pollution, climate change, and fast fashion, with all efforts leading towards achieving a sustainable fashion industry.¹⁴¹

Further Research

Delegates should consider questions such as: How can greenhouse gas emissions be limited in the industry? How can Member States implement changes towards achieving the sustainable development of the industry? How can the impact of microplastics be contained? Is recycling the only solution, or how can other strategies work towards addressing “fast fashion” and textile waste concerns? How can consumers be made more aware of the impact of fast fashion? What is the role of international organizations and large companies within the issue?

Annotated Bibliography

Gardetti, M. & S. Muthu. (2020). *The UN Sustainable Development Goals for the Textile and Fashion Industry*. Retrieved 28 May 2020 from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8787-6>

Muthu and Gardetti are experts in the field of sustainable fashion and textile development. This report links the SDGs to the sustainable development of the fashion industry, as the fashion industry has a growing impact on multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The reports highlights the issues of sustainable consumption and production to deal with SDG 12, water pollution for SDGs 6 and 14, and climate change to deal with the environmental factors as outlined in SDGs 13 and 15. Delegates

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid; Ibid; Ibid.

will find this resource particularly helpful when researching the link between the SDGs and changes in the fashion industry.

United Nations Climate Change. (2018). *Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action*. Retrieved 28 May 2020 from:

<https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Industry%20Charter%20%20Fashion%20and%20Climate%20Action%20-%202022102018.pdf>

The Charter for Climate Action was established by the UN Climate Change in 2018. The Charter was created in order to ensure a universal vision to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. It identifies ways in which the textile, clothing, and fashion industry could make a commitment to climate action. Delegates can find 80 supporting organizations of the charter that work to deliver the principles in the document on sustainably developing the fashion industry to support the growth of the industry.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2019). *Fashion's Tiny Hidden Secret*. Retrieved 28 May 2020 from: <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/fashions-tiny-hidden-secret>

This article details many statistics relating to the fashion industry and fast fashion. The article highlights how multiple launches, rapidly changing styles, and a propensity to utilize new technology to achieve fastest results are environmentally damaging. Among the issues the article considers is the lack of consumer awareness of microfibers and microplastics that end up in the ocean. Delegates will find this article helpful when researching current trends in the fashion industry.

United Nations Fashion Alliance. (n.d.). *What is the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion?*. Retrieved 28 May 2020 from: <https://unfashionalliance.org/>

The website of the UN Fashion Alliance provides an overview of the organization's work and priorities. The Alliance encourages businesses to practice sustainable production, dispersal, recycling, and disposal for textiles and fashion industry companies. The website is a great starting point for delegates in their research, as it establishes the topic clearly and defines the topic in terms of the current environment.

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. (2002). *Women's Employment in the Textile Manufacturing Sectors of Bangladesh and Morocco*. Retrieved 28 May 2020 from:

[http://unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/8E4D52B2473D993DC1256C4C004D6341/\\$file/textile.pdf](http://unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/8E4D52B2473D993DC1256C4C004D6341/$file/textile.pdf)

The UN Research Institute for Social Development is an autonomous research institute within the UN that conducts interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on development issues. This document outlines various past issues and also identifies the gender inequalities within the industry, providing an insight into the problems faced and what steps could help. These steps address the social issues concerning the topic promoting environmentally sustainable economic growth and productive work in the process.

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II. Halting Biodiversity Loss

“The health of the ecosystems on which we and other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide... We have lost time. We must act now.”¹⁴²

Introduction

There has been unprecedented loss in biodiversity over the past century as a result of actions taken by humans, such as industrialization, carbon emissions, and man-made habitat loss.¹⁴³ The loss of biodiversity threatens many aspects of human life, from sources of wood and paper products, medicines, and energy to food supplies and opportunities for recreation and tourism; which ultimately affects human quality of life.¹⁴⁴ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) discusses biodiversity and ecosystems at the international level and works to build integrated solutions to preserve them.¹⁴⁵ Biodiversity loss also interferes with essential ecological functions, such as oceanic currents and the destruction of natural habitats.¹⁴⁶ Planet Earth has seen five mass extinctions throughout geological history, each major events that shaped global biological diversity over time.¹⁴⁷ The current extinction rate could continue to rise in the coming decades without halting biodiversity loss, threatening up to one million species.¹⁴⁸

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, outcome documents defined biodiversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources, including... terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part: this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.”¹⁴⁹ One component of halting biodiversity loss is conservation, which is the, “active management of the biosphere to ensure the survival of the maximum diversity of species and the maintenance of genetic variability within species.”¹⁵⁰ The two main umbrellas of conservation strategy are in-situ conservation and ex-situ conservation.¹⁵¹ In-situ conservation is specifically the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats by maintaining and recovering viable species populations in a natural habitat.¹⁵² Ex-situ conservation, on the other hand, is the conservation of different components of bio-diversity outside a natural habitat, including within a zoo, wildlife sanctuary, or other research centers.¹⁵³ Another method of mitigating biodiversity loss is by establishing Protected Areas, which, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2008, are a clearly defined geographical space that is recognized, dedicated, and managed with a goal to achieve long-term conservation of nature, ecosystems, and cultural values.¹⁵⁴ Ecosystem Services was defined by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment as, “the benefits people obtain from ecosystems,” including provisioning services, such as food, water, and timber; regulating services, such as disease control, water purification, and carbon storage for climate regulation; cultural services, such as spiritual enrichment, tourism, and creative inspiration; and supporting services, such as soil enrichment and water and nutrient cycling.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴² Watts, Human Society Under Urgent Threat from Loss of Earth’s Natural Life, *The Guardian*, 2019.

¹⁴³ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity, *International Day for Biological Diversity - 22 May, 2020..*

¹⁴⁵ UNEP, *About Ecosystems*, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, Human Society Under Urgent Threat from Loss of Earth’s Natural Life, *The Guardian*, 2019.

¹⁴⁸ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Summary for Policymakers*, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ UN Environment, *Biodiversity A-Z, 2020*; Convention on Biological Diversity, *Chapter 2: Terms*, 2006.

¹⁵⁰ World Resources Institute et al., *Global Biodiversity Strategy*, 1992.

¹⁵¹ UN Environment, *Biodiversity A-Z, 2020*.

¹⁵² Convention on Biological Diversity, *Chapter 2: Terms*, 2006.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ International Union for Conservation of Nature, *About*.

¹⁵⁵ Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Ecosystems and Their Services*, 2005.

In 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya, UNEA-4 addressed biodiversity loss, building on the work already done by the long-standing Global Programme for Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities, highlighting the need to continue to address how human activity ultimately affects biodiversity due to loss of habitats, overfishing, and other activities.¹⁵⁶ Biodiversity efforts were given much needed support through the work of Aichi Biodiversity Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as the land degradation neutrality (LDN) target in the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), post-2020 which also highlighted the continued need for Member States to continually engage in the development of a strong post-2020 biodiversity framework.¹⁵⁷

International and Regional Framework

One of the major outcome documents of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro was the *UN Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD), a binding treaty.¹⁵⁸ The CBD acknowledges previous conservation efforts to protect species and their habitats, such as the 1963 *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES), the 1983 *Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals*, and the work of the UNEP Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on Biological Diversity in November 1988 that led to the ultimate creation of the CBD Secretariat.¹⁵⁹ The CBD covers biodiversity at all levels (ecosystems, species, and genetic resources), acknowledges that humans will not cease to use elements of nature for economic benefits, and establishes that guidelines bind States Parties to use nature in sustainable and responsible ways that will not lead to severe loss of biodiversity in the long term.¹⁶⁰ The CBD requires States Parties to take action at both international and national levels towards the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of biodiversity, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits coming from biological sources, especially biotechnology.¹⁶¹ “The main mechanisms for implementation are the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) that, according to CBD Article 6(a), countries are required to prepare. To date, 171 CBD Parties, representing 89% of the Parties, have developed NBSAPs.”¹⁶²

The 10th Conference of Parties for the CBD in 2010 adopted the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020*, which guides international efforts to implement the CBD and combat biodiversity loss.¹⁶³ Additionally, States Parties to the CBD adopted the *Aichi Biodiversity Targets*, which incorporates economic and social drivers of biodiversity loss and endangerment into global solutions for sustainable ecosystems.¹⁶⁴ Together, the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020* and *Aichi Biodiversity Targets* provide a common international framework to promote biodiversity beyond biodiversity-related conventions, and engage the entire United Nations system and other international stakeholders in ecosystem management and biodiversity policy development.¹⁶⁵

Biodiversity is also a priority in the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).¹⁶⁶ SDG 14: Life Below Water and SDG 15: Life on Land articulate the importance of biodiversity and preventing its loss within the context of ensuring “life support” to ecosystems.¹⁶⁷ Several other SDGs include biodiversity-related

¹⁵⁶ Paul, *What did UNEA-4 do for the Environment?*, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity, *History of the Convention*, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity*, 2007; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, *What is CITES?*.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations, *Convention on Biological Diversity*, 2007.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Convention on Biological Diversity, *Assessment of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans* [via Aichi Targets newsletter], 2011.

¹⁶³ Secretariat of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Targets: Living in Harmony with Nature*.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, *Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/Policy Brief*, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

targets, such as SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and SDG 13: Climate Action.¹⁶⁸ Implementing other components of the SDG framework could provide the enabling conditions for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (such as SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and addressing the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss (such as SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production).¹⁶⁹

Biodiversity loss was prominent in discussions on the negative effects of continued climate change at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP 21, which produced the Paris Agreement.¹⁷⁰ The outcome document noted, “the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity,” however, it did not go into details about recommendations on how Member States might safeguard endangered species, despite rising temperature change.¹⁷¹

In 2016, UNEA adopted a series of resolutions addressing the need for work on biodiversity (specifically, resolution 17 from their second session in Nairobi, Kenya), understanding the need to enhance the work of UNEP facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions.¹⁷² Resolution 16 sought to mainstream biodiversity for well-being, underlining the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 as well as maintaining and sustaining the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the 2050 vision.¹⁷³

Role of the International System

The topic of Halting Biodiversity Loss fits within the UNEA mandate to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law.¹⁷⁴ Through its recent conference proceedings and publications, UNEA issued guidance and recommendations made by and for the international community to work together to strategize and put a stop to biodiversity loss.¹⁷⁵ Biodiversity was a key theme of the Fourth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) in 2019, where eight resolutions were adopted on biodiversity and ecosystems, including one which strengthened the long-standing Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) and laid a foundation for EU collaboration (UNEP/EA.4/L.12) and another on biodiversity and land degradation that requests UNEA take action on issues addressed in SDG 14 and SDG 15 by supporting Member States to strengthen resilience of ecosystems, build sustainable wildlife-based economies, explore innovative financing for ecosystem restoration, and take action to address sand and dust storms that negatively impact arid climates (UNEP/EA.4/L.11).¹⁷⁶ As UNEA’s acting body, UN-Environment contributes to halting biodiversity loss by implementing programs and conducting research projects in accordance with recommendations made by the Assembly.¹⁷⁷

In 2019, UNEA published the 6th edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO 6),¹⁷⁸ which featured a study on biodiversity, including discussion on main drivers of loss including land-use change, habitat fragmentation, overexploitation and illegal wildlife trade, invasive species, pollution and climate change.¹⁷⁹ This report pulled together scientific consensus that emphasized the global dangers of continued anthropogenic pressure (pressure caused by human sources) upon ecosystems.¹⁸⁰ It concludes that a

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Hance, *What does the Paris agreement mean for the world's other 8 million species?*, 2016.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² UNEA, *Enhancing the work of UNEP facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions (UNEP/EA.2/Res.17)(2016)*, 2016.

¹⁷³ UNEA, *Mainstreaming biodiversity well-being (UNEP/EA.2/Res.16)(2016)*, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ UNEA, *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Paul, *What Did UNEA-4 do for the Environment?*, 2012.

¹⁷⁷ UNEA, *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*.

¹⁷⁸ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

sixth mass extinction of species is imminent and could severely compromise the planet's ecological integrity and capacity to meet human needs.¹⁸¹

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) is the financial mechanism for the Convention on Biodiversity and provides resources and essential support to States Parties to ensure national actions translate to global benefits.¹⁸² UN-Environment's Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Unit works closely with GEF on projects to conserve ecosystems.¹⁸³ Projects range from small-scale efforts to help Member States make CBD National Action Plans and improve the sustainability within national parks systems to large-scale efforts, such as capacity building of regional systems for genetic resource sharing and traditional knowledge incorporation.¹⁸⁴ GEF and UN-Environment also collaborate on "Green Economy" efforts, such as the GEF-funded ProEcoServ project which built the capacity of Member States such as Viet Nam, Chile, Trinidad & Tobago, and South Africa to include ecosystem service assessment and environmental impact findings into national development plans and decision-making strategies.¹⁸⁵

Under the auspices of the UN Convention on Biodiversity, the international community is in the midst of developing a post-2020 plan on Halting Biodiversity Loss to follow up on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and update targets to current actionable items.¹⁸⁶ The process is fostering engagement of relevant stakeholders in a consultative process conducted by the CBD Secretariat with the Open-Ended Intersessional Working Group (OEWG).¹⁸⁷ The zero draft of this framework was published in January 2020, based on extensive consultations with governments, NGOs, scientists, indigenous peoples, and others, in direct response to the 2019 global assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) that warned over one million plant and animal species were in danger of extinction.¹⁸⁸

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)¹⁸⁹, led by its Species Survival Commission (SSC), publishes the *Red List of Endangered Species* each year, an indicator of the health of global biodiversity that details the species most at risk for extinction, in order to inform actions for policy change.¹⁹⁰ IUCN notes that "partnerships with Indigenous communities can ameliorate shortfalls in habitat protection for biodiversity conservation," as "indigenous-managed lands have equal-or-higher biodiversity than protected areas."¹⁹¹ There are a number of additional international bodies working to conserve biodiversity and collect data, including the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).¹⁹² These groups provide services that support States Parties to the CBD in creating National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions Plans (NBSAPs), which assess the state of biodiversity in each Member State and lay out needed actions in order to meet national-level needs.¹⁹³ Despite these NBSAPs, many Member States still fall short of their targets to curb biodiversity loss, often due to lack of funding or governmental institutions.¹⁹⁴ The Secretariat of CBD has

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Global Environment Facility, *GEF and the Convention on Biological Diversity*, 2016.

¹⁸³ UNEP, *Biodiversity Fact Sheet*.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Global Environment Facility, *Project for Ecosystem Services (ProEcoServ)*, 2017.

¹⁸⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity, *Pre Conference Information Note on the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework*, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ UN Convention on Biological Diversity, *Synthesis of Views of Parties and Observers on the Scope and Content of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework*, 2020.

¹⁸⁹ IUCN, *About: Species Survival Commission*.

¹⁹⁰ IUCN, *Background & History*.

¹⁹¹ Schuster et al, *Vertebrate biodiversity on indigenous-managed lands in Australia, Brazil, and Canada equals that in protected areas*, 2019.

¹⁹² UNEP-WCMC, *Tools & Methodologies*; Global Biodiversity Information Facility, *What is GBIF?*.

¹⁹³ Secretariat of the CBD, *National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)*.

¹⁹⁴ Georgigjoui, *Indigenous Lands Have Highest Biodiversity: "We Must Manage a Larger Fraction of World's Area in Ways that Protect Species"*, 2019.

also developed a number of online tools to support data management and implementation of NBSAPs, such as the Data Reporting Tool for MEAs (DaRT) and the Bioland Tool.¹⁹⁵

Addressing the Main Drivers of Biodiversity Loss: Land-Use Change, Invasive Species, Pollution, and Climate Change

As global population continues to rise, the human footprint is expanding and leading to land-use change that disrupts ecosystems.¹⁹⁶ In recent decades, urban population growth has necessitated infrastructure sprawl, often without sufficient planning to mitigate negative effects on the environment, such as deforestation and extensive ecosystem loss.¹⁹⁷ Road construction, for instance, often requires destruction of previously intact habitats, which may make areas more susceptible to invasive species and leave endangered species vulnerable to hunting and exploitation.¹⁹⁸ Unsustainable land-use methods such as uncontrolled livestock grazing, burning or suppression of natural fires, and large-scale industrial agriculture, logging, and livestock breeding can lead to further land degradation.¹⁹⁹ Changes in marine environment use by humans, such as dredging, unsustainable commercial fishing, or coastal development, can also drive biodiversity loss.²⁰⁰ One measure used to estimate the effect of land use change on biodiversity is the Biodiversity Intactness Index, which UN Environment's World Conservation Monitoring Center draws from the Projecting Responses of Ecological Diversity in Changing Terrestrial Systems (PREDICTS) database.²⁰¹

Invasive species also threaten biodiversity, whether they are newly introduced to an area or native species that overpower larger areas.²⁰² One common avenue for invasive species entry is shipping along international trade pathways, as non-native species are transported on trade goods, in shipping containers, in wood packaging, or in the ship's ballast waters and are accidentally introduced into a new, foreign environment.²⁰³ When organisms can no longer thrive due to changed environments or lost habitats, the areas they leave behind are more susceptible to invasive species.²⁰⁴ Invasive species could include plants that congest waterways, invertebrate species such as the zebra mussel that is impacting the North American Great Lakes, or insects such as city-sized locust swarms in Eastern Africa.²⁰⁵ In addition to driving biodiversity loss, invasive species can contribute to food insecurity, endanger human health, and adversely affect national economies by reducing agricultural production.²⁰⁶ In 2018, a coalition of international scientists formed the Invasive Species Special Group to launch the *Global Registry of Introduced and Invasive Species* (GRIIS), a global, open-source catalogue of invasive species that impact biodiversity at a country-by-country basis.²⁰⁷ GRIIS was established within the framework of the Global Invasive Alien Species Information Partnership (GIASI Partnership) of the CBD to support national governments to make progress towards achieving Aichi Biodiversity Target 9 by providing data that would enable setting up early warning and rapid response systems to mitigate biodiversity loss.²⁰⁸

Pollution in the air, such as industrial emissions of nitrogen and sulfur as well as ground-level ozone, may deposit into water systems or vegetation and contribute to acidification.²⁰⁹ Pollution in the ocean (as

¹⁹⁵ Secretariat of the CBD, *National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)*.

¹⁹⁶ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Poon, *Mapping the Conflict Zones Between Sprawl and Biodiversity*, 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Krishnadas, *Has Human Land Use Pushed Biodiversity Loss Beyond Safe Limits?* 2017.

²⁰² Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

²⁰³ Warziniack et al, *Global Trade and the Spread of Invasive Species*.

²⁰⁴ Zieren, *Invasive Species – A Huge Threat to Human Well-Being*, 2016.

²⁰⁵ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019; Herbling et al, *Locust Swarms Ravaging East Africa are the Size of Cities*, 2020.

²⁰⁶ Zieren, *Invasive Species – A Huge Threat to Human Well-Being*, 2016.

²⁰⁷ Pagad et al, *Introducing the Global Register of Introduced and Invasive Species*, 2018.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ UNECE, *Air pollution, ecosystems and biodiversity*.

marine litter and microplastics) is also a threat to marine biodiversity.²¹⁰ According to the UN, “51 trillion microplastic particles, 500 times more than [the] stars in our galaxy, litter our seas, seriously threatening marine wildlife.”²¹¹ Efforts to combat the negative impacts of pollution on biodiversity have been particularly successful at a regional level, such as through the United Nations Economic Commission on Europe (UNECE)’s set of International Cooperative Programmes that assess, monitor, and set regional targets for the reduction of pollution in forests, rivers and lakes, ecosystems, and on natural vegetation and crops.²¹² These programs, such as UNECE’s Europe-specific *Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution* and accompanying protocols ensure that international goals for pollution reduction (such as those included in the CBD) can be implemented in a way that takes into account the concerns and culture of this specific region’s biodiversity issues.²¹³ The Convention, from its inception in 1983, laid out the general principles for international cooperation on air pollutants, with its purview being expanded to encompass more pollutants, such as ground-level ozone, persistent organic pollutant, and others.²¹⁴

UNEA estimates that “climate change may be the most significant future pressure” on biodiversity, an effect of the increasing human footprint on the planet and its climate and environment.²¹⁵ Climate change manifests as significant variations from normal rates in both average climate (such as changes in global temperature, humidity, and crop yields) and frequency of extreme weather events (such as wildfires, hurricanes, or extended periods of drought).²¹⁶ Biodiversity loss happens mainly as a consequence of habitat stress due to these higher temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, or increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events and wildfires.²¹⁷ One estimate suggests that up to one in six species could be threatened with extinction by 2050 if current climate warming trends continue, with extinction events being the most likely and the highest occurring in South America, Australia, and New Zealand.²¹⁸ The actions and ideas of UNEA and UNEP will be further amplified in the near future as the UN launches the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in 2021, encouraging the international community to “scale-up nature-based solutions to protect biodiversity while combatting climate change.”²¹⁹

Conclusion

Biodiversity loss is happening throughout all of Earth’s biomes, driven by land-use change, invasive species, pollution, and climate change, among other phenomena.²²⁰ The specific needs of the diverse ecosystems within each area present challenges to making a one-size-fits-all approach.²²¹ In addition to continued action within the international system by stakeholders such as the IUCN and UNEP-WCMC, the forthcoming *Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework* will address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss on worldwide, regional, national, and local-level scales.²²² As UNEA considers ways that biodiversity conservation will move forward, the CBD Secretariat encourages actions that build upon existing international efforts for a sustainable future such as the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020*, Paris Agreement, and Agenda 2030.²²³

²¹⁰ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

²¹¹ van Sebille et al, *A global inventory of small floating plastic debris*, 2015.

²¹² UNECE, *Air pollution, Ecosystems and Biodiversity*.

²¹³ UNECE, *The Convention and its Achievements*; UNECE, *International Cooperation to Reduce Pollution*.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ UNEA, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019, Chapter 6 – Biodiversity.

²¹⁶ Nunez, *Assessing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity: is below 2 °C enough?*, 2019; Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

²¹⁷ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

²¹⁸ Urban, *Accelerating Extinction Risk from Climate Change*, 2015.

²¹⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *2020 International Year of Biodiversity and the role of integrated landscape management*, 2019.

²²⁰ Stoett et al, *Global Environmental Outlook 6*, 2019.

²²¹ UNEA, *Global Environmental Outlook - Key Messages*, 2019.

²²² Secretariat of the CBD, *Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: Discussion Paper, Note by the Executive Secretary*, 2019.

²²³ Ibid.

Further Research

Delegates should address the following questions as they begin research on their country's position on this topic: Which existing international efforts to combat biodiversity loss at a regional level might be taken up to scale and be used to approach biodiversity conservation in different environments? How can efforts to achieve the SDGs better address biodiversity concerns? What data management and best practice sharing platforms exist for biodiversity, and how can these support the implementation of national level biodiversity policy such as NBSAPs for the CBD? How can the *Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework* be inclusive of all persons, including indigenous persons, and address biodiversity concerns of populations whose livelihoods are particularly dependent on biodiversity, such as agriculturists?

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This document has been prepared by the CBD Secretariat and provides a comparative analysis of the initial views received from Parties and stakeholders on the scope and content of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that is currently being negotiated and will be decided upon later this year. Delegates will find this useful to learn the current prevailing viewpoints and ideas that will shape the future of this topic, to understand where key stakeholder groups' interests lie and to see an overview of what the eventual post-2020 action document could look like.

United Nations Environmental Assembly. (2019). *Global Environmental Outlook – Key Messages*. Retrieved 16 February 2020 from:

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/28774/GEO6_keymessages_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

As an outcome of the negotiation meeting of the summary for policymakers of the sixth Global Environment Outlook, held in Nairobi from 21 to 24 January 2019, the Bureau of the meeting finalized this "key messages" document explains concisely to ministers and other senior decision-makers the key messages that emerged from the main assessment report." Delegates will find this document helpful to understand the high-level findings of this report framed in a concise, action-driven messaging document.

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. (2019). *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Summary for Policymakers*. Retrieved 16 February 2020 from:

https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/inline/files/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers.pdf

The comprehensive IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is the first intergovernmental report of its kind and builds on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005, with innovative ways of evaluating evidence. The Report assesses changes over the last fifty years and provides a comprehensive picture of the relationship between economic development pathways and their impacts on nature. In addition to approximately 15,000 scientific and government sources, the report also draws on indigenous and local knowledge, particularly on issues relevant to indigenous peoples and local communities. Delegates will find this document useful as it offers a high-level, action-driven summary of a very technical report and the possible scenarios it outlines could happen over the next several decades.

United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre. (2020). *Biodiversity A-Z* [Website]. Retrieved 16 February 2020 from: <https://www.biodiversitya-z.org/>

This website is a helpful database of key terms surrounding biodiversity, as used by UNEP/UNEA. Delegates could find this useful in their research, both as a source for

concise and authoritative definitions of key concepts, but also to build a greater understanding of the history of certain key terms and how they came to be accepted by the international community.

Stoett, P., et al. (2019). *Global Environmental Outlook 6*. Retrieved 16 February 2020 from: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27659/GEO6_CH6.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=Y

The Global Environment Outlook is published frequently by the United Nations Environment Assembly; this sixth edition is the newest and most comprehensive so far. Chapter 6 of this report focuses entirely on biodiversity. Delegates will find this chapter especially useful as it provides an in-depth summary of main drivers of biodiversity, outlines stakeholders currently working on this issue, summarizes challenges unique to each global region, and includes current global responses to biodiversity loss.

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