



UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME



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BACKGROUND GUIDE 2009



Official Welcome

Dear Delegates,

The staff of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) would like to welcome you to the 2009 National Model United Nations-DC Conference. This year's UNEP staff members are Director Rachel Johnson and Assistant Director Kristiana Moore. Throughout the year, the executive staff of the United Nations Environment Programme has been committed to creating a background guide that will help stimulate and foster discussion during the conference. We hope that it will be of significant use and that you will be able to use it as a catalyst and launching pad when starting to research your countries and topics.

The topics before the UNEP this year include promoting environmental governance in developing nations, the impact of climate change on humanitarian efforts, and water in a changing world: the need for urgent action. All three topics are of great interest to the global community. Environmental issues are not confined to specific regions of the world; rather, issues affecting the planet transcend borders between nations and truly affect us all. Global concerns require global responses. Please consider this when beginning your research and when representing your Member State at the Conference. Good luck in the coming weeks as you prepare for National Model United Nations. We look forward to meeting all of you and working with you at the conference.

History of the United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Programme is the primary environmental agency within the United Nations (UN) System. Its mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnerships to protect the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling Member States and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of the future generations. The objective of the UNEP is to develop environmental policy by monitoring the global environment and bringing emerging environmental issues to the attention of Member States and the international community. The mandate and key objectives of the UNEP were outlined in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) on December 15, 1972, as well as through subsequent amendments, including those codified at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, also known as the Earth Summit, the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the UNEP in 1997, and the Malmo Ministerial Declaration of May 31, 2000. The UNEP promotes and calls for the concerted efforts of Member States to adopt environmentally sustainable policies. Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit designated the UNEP as the primary UN body concerning the environment. The UNEP focuses on: climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, harmful substances, resource efficiency, and environmental law.

I. Promoting Environmental Governance in Developing Nations

- How can environmental governance be promoted in developing nations? What dilemmas do developing nations face regarding environmental governance and how can these issues be resolved? Do programs promoting environmental sustainability serve as an effective aid or as a hindrance to developing nations?

Clean air, fresh water, and fertile soils are vital to the health and well-being of all peoples. These resources prove to be especially significant to citizens in developing nations who must rely on them for their livelihoods. The majority of poor in the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs) draw much of their income from forests, pastures, fisheries, or farming. Deforestation, water contamination, and other environmental concerns can stunt the growth of LDCs, as they work to eradicate poverty and develop stable economies. Promoting environmental sustainability in LDCs is crucial. In fact, one can argue that environmental sustainability is essential in the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially regarding the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger. While the need to protect the environment is not disputed, the task of enforcing sustainable methods can often prove to be quite difficult. For example, "high-value" resources (such as hydrocarbons, minerals, metals, stones, and export timber) have the capacity to create potentially exploitive scenarios in LDCs, which can have damaging effects on the environment. Rapid depletion of wild life, rises in energy consumption, the lack of effective solid and toxic waste management-the list can go on and on. Indeed, the sheer magnitude of detrimental problems affecting the environment

is staggering.

In an effort to combat the myriad of environmental issues the world is facing, the UNEP has issued several reports and created many programs to promote environmentally sustainable methods for Member States on the path towards development. The concept of “sustainability” was first defined during the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 and further discussed in the ensuing report *Our Common Future*. The UNEP, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank all responded to this commission by emphasizing that all development projects must help sustain rather than harm the environment. Attempting to address issues relating to development and environmental sustainability, the UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and several other organizations collaborated to create the Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI). The PEI offers region-specific recommendations and technical assistance to encourage environmental sustainability. The UNEP is also active in supporting the goals of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) and co-sponsored the International Conference on Environmental Education (ICEE) alongside the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Another major facet of the UNEP is the promotion of international environmental law and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). MEAs require countries to engage in reporting, training, public education, and other activities addressing concerns regarding atmosphere, biodiversity, chemicals and wastes, land and oceans, seas, and water. Established in 1982, the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law provided a long-term framework for the UNEP’s approach to and implementation of environmental law and MEAs. The current program (Montevideo III) addresses financing actions to resolve environmental issues and the link between environmental degradation and poverty in developing nations. To raise awareness and understanding of environmental law in LDCs, the UNEP has authored several manuals and continues to sponsor government officials, judges, university professors, and students to attend conferences and training sessions. The UNEP manuals aim to clarify and provide input on how to implement MEAs for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and LDCs.

While much has been done to increase awareness of the issues we are facing, the reality is that there has been limited integration of environmental concerns into development decision-making. Yet, environmental degradation continues to threaten all aspects of human well-being. The programs and the numerous guides and reports written and created by the UNEP raise several questions. Is enough progress being made? How effective are the current programs in place? How can environmental law and precedents established by developed nations be adapted to the needs of LDCs? Does the UNEP require augmented jurisdiction to enforce appropriate levels of environmental governance?

II. The Impact of Climate Change on Humanitarian Efforts

- How can the UNEP curb the impacts and effects of climate change on humanitarian efforts? Who are the most vulnerable to these effects and how can the UNEP help them in the most effective manner?

As we have seen in recent years, climate change has a negative impact on the environment, evidenced by the increasing number of natural disasters throughout the world. In the coming decades, climate change is expected to significantly amplify the potential impact of natural disasters. Increased frequency and intensity of these disasters will likely create greater vulnerability in various regions of the world. Storms and floods are increasing in frequency, and long-lasting droughts can prevent communities from being able to have the capacity to prepare, respond, and rebuild after multiple cycles of these disasters caused by climate change. Other effects and impacts of climate change that will lead to the increased vulnerability of natural disasters include: public health capacities, disruptions in ecosystems, food security, and migration.

The people that are most vulnerable are those currently living in abject poverty, as their access to resources is already limited. People living in “disaster hotspots” – areas prone to flooding and in cyclone tracks – are exposed to repeated climatic shocks. The threat of extreme weather events in the future and the ensuing demand for disaster response can only rise, along with its costs. Many of the Member States that are already in need of humanitarian aid will face even greater risks due to the impacts of climate change.

The UNEP has developed three areas of policy in regards to disaster relief in the hopes of reducing the impact of disasters and conflicts. The implementation of its policies on disaster risk reduction, climate change, and environmentally-induced migration cannot be successful without the support and political will of Member States. The UNEP works to prevent and combat future environmental threats by utilizing early risk assessments, in which the Division of Early Warning and Assessment facilitates access to relevant environmental data for decision-making through monitoring, analysis and reports on environmental trends. The UNEP has been instrumental in providing support to Member States after disasters have occurred; after the May 12, 2008 earthquake in China, the UNEP provided technical support and training to help officials with the aftermath. The agency's climate change policies include: (1) the mitigation of climate change, which deals in particular the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), (2) consideration of adaptation by all parties involved in the new climate change protocol negotiations, (3) the sharing of technology, and (4) consideration for a new financial plan in order to implement the new protocol successfully.

In March of 2009 the UNEP released a report, "*From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*," which explains how environmental factors play a pivotal role during all the stages of the conflict spectrum – from the outbreak of conflicts to the collapse of peace and the return of violence. The conflicts that occur throughout the international community can be traced back to the depletion or degradation of natural resources. Exploitation of natural resources has played substantial roles in financing and sustaining conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and Cambodia. Environmental degradation plays a significant role in the ongoing conflict in Darfur, where water scarcity and the steady loss of fertile land have been and continue to be important underlying factors. Both the depletion and degradation of the environment can be associated with climate change, in which these realities are the consequences of the ever-changing climate of the earth. How can the UNEP minimize these impacts on vulnerable populations? Should the UNEP's focus be on preventing climate change or on addressing the aftermath of its impacts?

III. Water in a Changing World: The Need for Urgent Action

- What is the United Nations Environmental Programme currently doing to address global issues concerning water? Is water scarcity a viable threat to global security? How can the global community prevent future conflicts?

Only 2% of the planet's abundant water supply is readily available as drinkable water. Due to increased population growth, it is estimated that global withdrawal rates of surface water have the potential to reach more than 70% of the reliable runoff by 2025 and 90% if per capita withdrawal of water continues increasing at the current rate. Environmentalists also speculate that about 60% of the world's irrigation water is wasted due to faulty methods and systems. These facts are of great concern to the global community, as water shortages have the potential to affect both the health and security of all citizens in the future. Limited access to clean water is a major issue facing citizens of developing nations. Properly managing water resources is a crucial component of growth, social and economic development, poverty reduction, and equity – all essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

In order to address these issues, the UNEP works in conjunction with several other agencies on UN Water Programmes and Task Forces to provide the following assessment reports and monitoring programs: the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), the World Health Organization (WHO)/ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP), the UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC), and the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC). The UNEP also works with developing nations to provide training and aid regarding several issues relating to water including: integrated water resource management, freshwater assessment, ecosystem services, and training on waste-water management.

In regards to the possible threat to global security due to water scarcity, the UNEP maintains that treaties dominate the current international dialogue on water and this will prevent potential "water wars" of the future. Between 1948 and 1999, out of the 1,831 instances of interactions over international freshwater, 67% were cooperative, only 28% were conflictive, and the remaining 5% were neutral or insignificant. In those five decades, there were no formal

declarations of war over water. However, the UNEP also maintains that limited or threatened access to water could increase the risk of conflicts. Water can be linked to the crises of climate change, energy and food supplies and prices. As one can see, lack of access to clean water can affect all aspects of life. If water sources continue to be threatened, crises have the potential to intensify.

Case Study: India, Bangladesh and the Ganges

The sheer physical size of India and its vast population include diverse human and climatic conditions. Water resource issues vary from one region to the next. India possesses two primary international basins: the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Mengha (GBM) and the Indus. The GBM is also a significant resource to neighboring Bangladesh, which lies within the topographic boundaries of the GBM. The GBM receives some of the highest percentages of rainfall in the world. However, periods of rainfall last, on average, four months a year and fluctuating phases of droughts and floods continue to be a significant issue. These adverse environmental circumstances contribute to the dire economic situation of the region and are intensified by the fact that the majority of the citizens living in this region are stricken by poverty. Tensions between India and Bangladesh regarding access to the Ganges River first became evident with the completion of the Farakka Barrage in 1975. It wasn't until 1996 that the two countries were able to establish a long-term water sharing agreement on the Ganges. Despite the agreement, there are still disputes as Bangladesh attests that the dam cuts off their water supply and raises salinity levels in the water they are able to access.

Conclusion

The issues in the GBM are an example of a dispute over water access ending in a treaty that maintains peace and security in a region. However, the question remains whether or not these treaties will be able to sustain through long periods of predicted droughts and floods caused by climate change. Water scarcity and its effect on security need to be addressed. It is also necessary to take note of the many other problems the world is facing in regards to water. Are the assessments, reports, and training programs provided by the UNEP and other organizations sufficient or do they need to be modified? Does the global community need to provide a more concerted effort and greater attention to the issues created by water scarcity?

Annotated Bibliography

History of the United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. (2009). *Agenda 21*. Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/res_agenda21_38.shtml.

This provides a brief history about the UNEP and its role in promoting the environment for development. It outlines its mandate as authorized by the UN General Assembly and includes the areas for which the UNEP is responsible for implementing policy. This document gives a framework for the expanded and more defined role that the UNEP has taken on since the conclusion of the Earth Summit in 1992, as outlined in Agenda 21.

United Nations Environmental Programme. (2007). *Environmental law programme*. Retrieved July 26, 2009, from http://www.unep.org/Law/About_prog/introduction.asp.

This provides a brief history about the UNEP and its role in upholding and advocating the rule of law in regards to environmental law. It outlines the UNEP's mandate that was provided for by the UN General Assembly. It also discusses the areas for which the UNEP is responsible for upholding and implementing outcomes of environmental law policy. It also includes information on role the UNEP plays in creating international environmental law.

United Nations Environmental Programme. (2007). *Programme of work*. Retrieved July 26, 2009, from http://www.unep.org/law/Programme_work/index.asp.

This provides a brief history about the UNEP and its programme of work. These areas include technical legal assistance in regards to environmental law, training and other capacity building activities and development of International Environmental law. It outlines its work within these areas along with Member States.

I. Promoting Environmental Governance in Developing Nations

United Nations Environment Programme. (2007). *Environment for development annual report: Environmental governance*. Retrieved June 26, 2009, from http://www.unep.org/Documents_multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=67&ArticleID=5743&l=en.

This annual report focuses specifically on the effectiveness of programs implemented by the UNEP. With special regard towards development, a variety of environmental issues are discussed including ecosystem management, resource efficiency and environmental governance. Different sections of the report also highlight regional programs in both developed and developing nations. The environmental governance section is especially useful in researching the current legal capacities and limitations of the UNEP.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2009). *Environmental law programme: Montevideo Programme*. Retrieved July 24, 2009 from http://www.unep.org/law/About_prog/montevideo_prog.asp.

The first Montevideo Programme was adopted by the UNEP in 1982, establishing precedents for the scope of the UNEP involvement with international environmental law and agreements. The UNEP is now working to implement and address the Montevideo Programme III, which includes three main themes: effectiveness of environmental law, conservation and management and relationship with other fields. This Web site provides information on past and present Montevideo Programmes and further information on the relationship of the UNEP to environmental law.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2007). *GEO4 global environment outlook, environment for development: Summary for decision makers*. Retrieved July 25, 2009 from <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>.

Global Environment Outlook describes numerous environmental issues Member States are facing. Everything from ozone depletion to water scarcity is discussed. Region-specific issues and priorities are described and there is an emphasis that both rural and urban areas are affected by environmental degradation. Several environmental policy instruments to combat these issues are listed, including command and control regulations (permits and quotas, zoning), direct provision by governments (infrastructure, national parks), engaging the public and private sectors (decentralization, eco-labeling), using markets (removing perverse subsidies), and creating markets (property rights, green procurement).

United Nations Environment Programme and the Poverty Environment Partnership. (2005). *Environment for the MDGs: Investing in environmental wealth for poverty reduction*. Retrieved July 23, 2009 from <http://www.unpei.org/Knowledge-Management/publications.asp>.

According to the Poverty Environment Partnership (PEP), preventing further environmental degradation and improving environmental quality is central to all MDGs. This report references the "poverty-environment nexus" which describes the link between economic growth and environmental sustainability. The case is argued that environmentally sustainable development will be of long-term benefit to developing nations. There are in-depth analyses regarding the correlation between economic growth in developing nations and investing in environmental assets. This report also offers numerous statistics that help to measure poverty by region as well as sources of environmental incomes.

United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Development Programme. (2009). *United Nations poverty-environment initiative*. Retrieved from <http://www.unpei.org/>.

This Web site provides many resources for researching the more technical and tangible facets of the UNEP. There are links to specific regional program websites as well as numerous publications that thoroughly assess the link between environmental sustainability and economic development. Of particular note are the publications and reports written in collaboration with the UNDP.

United Nations. General Assembly. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future (A/42/427)*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>.

Our Common Future was the first UN report to define and discuss sustainability in regards to development. While this report was written in 1987, the themes addressed remain highly relevant to the world today. The

commission and the report both emphasize the need for collaborative, global action to protect the environment while promoting development.

II. The Impact of Climate Change on Humanitarian Efforts

ActionAid. (2009, July 11). *Climate change and reducing risk*. Retrieved July 11, 2009, from the ActionAid website at: <http://www.actionaid.org/main.aspx?PageID=188>.

This non-governmental organization (NGO) focuses on the vulnerable populations that are affected by the natural disasters caused by climate change. ActionAid's primary focus on the humanitarian effects of climate change is their work in disaster risk reduction through grassroots activism and work. They focus on enabling and advocating on behalf of the vulnerable population and their program emphasizes the importance of eradicating poverty. ActionAid views poverty as one of the key elements that must be addressed in combating climate change.

IRIN: Humanitarian News and Analysis. (2009, July 11). *In-Depth: Gathering storm – the humanitarian impact of climate change*. Retrieved from IRIN website at:

<http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=73&ReportId=78246>.

This provides an analysis of the humanitarian effects that are caused by climate change from the perspective of a developing country. This focuses on the economic loss and poverty developing nations face after experiencing disasters that affect agricultural production. IRIN news focuses on the vulnerable populations that have suffered through many disasters caused by climate change. These issues include: migration, food security, and loss of agricultural production due to climate change.

ReliefWeb. (2009, July 11). *Humanitarian implications of climate change*. Retrieved July 11, 2009, from the ReliefWeb website at: http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/hlp.nsf/db900ByKey/climate_change.

This outlines the impact climate change can and will have on humanitarian efforts. It primarily gives the basic effects that climate change will have, including: impacting public health systems, disruptions in ecosystems, food security, and migration. The vulnerability of certain populations is discussed, and those at highest risk are the populations that are already in need of humanitarian efforts. The issue of climate change is whether or not it will prevent humanitarian aid from reaching populations who will need it the most.

United Nations. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2009, July 11). *Climate change – Coping with humanitarian impact*. Retrieved July 11, 2009, from the OCHA website at:

<http://ochaonline.un.org/News/InFocus/ClimateChangeHumanitarianImpact/tabid/5099/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

This gives the specific impact climate change can have on humanitarian efforts. It provides information on the populations most vulnerable to the effects of disasters caused by climate change. These populations include those that have been devastated by extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, and environmental degradation. The OCHA promotes a multilateral effort to curb the impacts of climate change through partnerships with UN agencies, regional organizations, Member States, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector. The OCHA promotes a strategy that restrains the impact of climate change at all stages: from curbing climate change itself to providing the humanitarian aid to those in need after a natural disaster.

United Nations. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). (2009, July 11). *Disaster risk and climate change*. Retrieved from ISDR's website at: <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/risk-reduction/climate-change/climate-change.html>.

The ISDR examines the role that climate change has on the frequency of disasters. Climate change is expected to increase the severity and frequency of weather-related natural disasters such as storms, high rainfalls, floods, droughts, rising sea levels, and heat-waves. This will lead to more disasters in the future unless immediate action is taken. The ISDR estimates that from 1995-2004, a total of 2,500 million people were affected by disasters. This will only increase unless prompt actions are taken.

III. Water in a Changing World: The Need for Urgent Action

- Giordano, M. (2002). The geography of water conflict and cooperation: Internal pressures and international manifestations. *The Geographical Journal*, 168(4), 293-312.
Giordano discusses the geopolitical aspects of water disputes. This article highlights the historical and present day issues with water in three regions: the Middle East, South Asia, and Southern Africa. The author concentrates on the contrasting water dynamics across these geographic regions and the necessity of considering water events, both national and international, within larger political and historical contexts.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2009). *Water in a changing world*. Retrieved June 26, 2009, from <http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/wwdr/wwdr3/>.
Authored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), this publication serves as a lengthy guide to all present issues concerning water scarcity. Current water treaties and laws are comprehensively discussed as well as concerns regarding the impact climate change may have on the world water supply. The need for investing in water and the cost of water in various regions of the world are also discussed at length.
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2009). *From conflict to peacebuilding: The role of natural resources and the environment*. Retrieved July 24, 2009 from http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub_details_s.asp?ID=3998.
While this publication does report on a general correlation between conflict and all natural resources, the issue of water scarcity is discussed in detail. As the report shows, the lack of water in the region of Darfur, Sudan provides an excellent example of limited water intensifying an existing conflict. Delegates should also take note of the annexes to this report. Annex three provides a list of numerous United Nations documents concerning the environment, conflict and peacebuilding.
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2008). *Vital water graphics, an overview of the state of the world's fresh and marine waters*. Retrieved June 26, 2009, from <http://www.unep.org/dewa/vitalwater/>.
This report provides an excellent and up-to-date resource when researching the current state of the world's water supply. More than simply an ecological assessment, it also addresses political conflicts, current management techniques, and much more. The report does establish many alarming facts and figures; however, it can be used as a guide to determine the world's most pressing (and most current) needs in relation to water supply.
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2009). *UNEP-Freshwater*. Retrieved from: <http://www.unep.org/themes/Freshwater/Publications/index.asp>.
A major theme addressed by the UNEP is freshwater access and scarcity. The UNEP Web site offers links to download their various publications including several regional reports. Reports of particular interest include Groundwater Pollution in Africa; Dams and Development; and The Critical Connection: Water Security and Ecosystem Services.