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Update for the United Nations Environment Programme

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Committee Overview

Recent Developments

As the leading international program and fund on the environment, the United Nations (UN) Environment Programme (UNEP) has been very active in fostering debate and framing concrete policies and actions on environmental issues in the last few months.¹ Although the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) did not meet in 2015, UNEP organized several events and programs, in addition to publishing a number of reports on topics such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the connection between climate change and human rights.²

At its Champions of the Earth Gala on 27 September 2015, UNEP awarded five environmental leaders from governments, businesses, the sciences, and civil society with the Champions of the Earth Award, the UN's highest environmental prize.³ Honorees including H.E. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, were present at the ceremony, which also marked the end of the Sustainable Development Summit that formed part of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly (GA).⁴

From 2 to 12 November 2015, UNEP, in cooperation with the University of Eastern Finland (UEF), held the Twelfth UEF-UNEP Course on Multilateral Environmental Agreements in Shanghai.⁵ The course, which is conducted annually and focuses on international environmental lawmaking and diplomacy, concentrated on climate change and contributed to exchanging knowledge between scientists and professionals on environmental governance and climate change.⁶ At the 2nd International Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Conference convened by UNEP and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), which took place in Singapore on 16 to 17 November 2015, more than 150 participants from governments, civil society, and international organizations discussed key aspects of environmental crime.⁷ Notably, conference participants emphasized the need to implement better intelligence mechanisms for identifying and prosecuting environmental crime and to improve general synergies between existing institutions and networks in this area.⁸

UNEP had a great impact on the process and outcomes of the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), which took place in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015.⁹ UNEP helped with preparations for the conference, provided information on climate change and the environment, and hosted side events to foster dialogue on combatting climate change between governments, civil society, and businesses.¹⁰ At the beginning of the talks in Paris, UNEP released the *Emissions Gap Report 2015*, which indicated that previously conducted and planned actions of Member States to mitigate climate change would achieve only half of the emissions cuts required to realize the maximum goal of limiting global temperature rise to 2° Celsius by 2100.¹¹ UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner and Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw asked governments to increase investments in sustainable innovations and infrastructure, south-south cooperation on climate change, and developing green economies around the world.¹² During the conference, UNEP

¹ Climate Action, *About SIF*, 2015; UNEP, *About UNEP*; UNEP, *Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP*, 2015.

² Climate Action, *About SIF*, 2015; UNEP, *Climate Change and Human Rights*, 2015; UNEP, *Events Details - United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)*; UNEP, *New UN Report Details Link between Climate Change and Human Rights*, 2015; UNEP, *UNEP Launches Environment and Trade Hub to Support Countries in Sustainable Development Goals*, 2015; UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2015*, 2015.

³ UNEP, *Five Inspirational Environmental Leaders Receive Champions of the Earth Award at Close of Sustainable Development Goals Summit*, 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNEP, *Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

⁶ UNEP, *My UNEA – About UNEA*.

⁷ IISD, *Summary of the 2nd International Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Conference*, 2015, p. 1.

⁸ UNEP Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, *Twelfth UEF-UNEP Course on Multilateral Environmental Agreements*, 2015.

⁹ Climate Action, *Sustainable Innovation in Sport*, 2015; UNEP, *Paris 2015 COP 21 – Events*, 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ UNEP, *UNEP Releases Full Version of Emissions Gap Report*, 2015; UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2015*, 2015.

¹² UNEP, *"Getting this done: The Inclusive Green Economy" - Speech by UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner at the Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of COP 21*, 2015; UNEP, *Speech by UNEP Deputy Executive Director*

reached a program cooperation agreement with the government of Norway, according to which Norway will contribute \$10 million, largely towards UNEP's efforts to improve its research capacity on correlations between poverty, the environment, and environmental crime.¹³

Adopted by the GA at the Sustainable Development Summit and officially launched on 1 January 2016, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a considerable focus on the environment that will significantly shape UNEP's agenda until 2030.¹⁴ In connection with the SDGs and in preparation for the next meeting of UNEA in 2016, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP met in Nairobi from 26 to 30 October 2015 for its Third Annual Subcommittee Meeting.¹⁵ The committee discussed measures for financing sustainable development, strengthening UNEP's regional presence, and promoting efficient use of strategic partnerships and alliances.¹⁶ On 14 December 2015, UNEP launched the Environment and Trade Hub to assist developing countries with using sustainable trade as they work towards building green economies and achieving the SDGs.¹⁷ In January 2016, UNEP introduced another instrument for achieving the SDGs and financing sustainable development through the "Year of Green Finance," holding events in Washington, D.C., and London.¹⁸

Moving into 2016, UNEP remains committed to discussing issues of environmental significance and fostering projects on sustainable development and protecting the environment.¹⁹ As one of UNEP's most important events in 2016, the second UNEA will meet from 23 to 27 May 2016 under the theme "Delivering on the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030."²⁰ In the High-Level Segment of UNEA 2, ministers from all Member States and heads of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will come together under the theme "Healthy Environment – Healthy People" to discuss tools for implementing the SDGs.²¹ The upcoming UNEA meeting, as well as the SDGs, COP21, and other recent activities, highlight the significance of UNEP's work within the international community.

Ibrahim Thiaw at the 2nd South-South Cooperation on Climate Change Forum, 2015; UNEP, "Why not?" - Speech by UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner at the Sustainable Innovation Forum in Paris, 2015.

¹³ UNEP, *Norway and UNEP sign \$10 Million Programme Cooperation Agreement*, 2015.

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015; UN DPI, *Unanimously Adopting Historic Sustainable Development Goals, General Assembly Shapes Global Outlook for Prosperity, Peace (GA/11688)*, 2015.

¹⁵ UNEP, *Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP*, 2015.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷ UNEP, *The UNEP Environment and Trade Hub*, 2015; UNEP, *The UNEP Environment and Trade Hub – Launch*, 2015; UNEP, *UNEP Launches Environment and Trade Hub to Support Countries in Sustainable Development Goals*, 2015.

¹⁸ UNEP, *UNEP Inquiry Kicks Off the Year of Green Finance*, 2016.

¹⁹ UNEP, *Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP*, 2015, pp. 2-3.

²⁰ UNEP, *My UNEA – About UNEA*; UNEP, *My UNEA*.

²¹ UNEP, *Path towards UNEA 2*.

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This press release gives a detailed overview of the SDGs, which were adopted by the GA in September 2015 and set out in GA resolution 70/1, “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” It further includes a great number of statements of government members from many different Member States, as well as representatives of international organizations on their view of the SDGs. Accordingly, it constitutes a useful introduction to the broad and complex discourse on the SDGs and helps to explain several countries’ positions on the Goals.

United Nations Environment Programme. (n.d.). *My UNEA* [Website]. Retrieved 2 January 2016 from: <https://www.myunea.org>

This comprehensive website contains the most recent information on the second UNEA, the governing body of UNEP, which will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 23 to 27 May 2016. In addition to explaining how UNEA is constituted, how its mandate is structured, and the role the SDGs will play at its next meeting, the website presents current news and developments on environmental issues. It further provides information on how civil society can be engaged in the conference through hosting side events and exhibitions. The website is an excellent resource for staying informed on the next session of UNEA and consequently the governance and agenda of UNEP.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *The Emissions Gap Report 2015*. Retrieved 2 January 2016 from: http://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/theme/13/EGR_2015_301115_lores.pdf

The Emissions Gap Report is a detailed analysis of Member States’ existing and intended national contributions towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and thus mitigating climate change. By evaluating historical greenhouse gas emissions, displaying the variance of global temperatures over time, and reflecting on Member States’ mitigation goals, the report not only provides relevant basic information on climate change, but also indicates which future actions are required to prevent the global temperature from rising above 2° Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. Therefore, the document is a valuable resource not only for governments seeking to evaluate their climate change policies, but also for everyone who wants to understand the current stage of climate change and mitigation efforts.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *The UNEP Environment and Trade Hub* [Report]. Retrieved 1 January 2016 from: [http://unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/15-12-11%20Environment%20and%20Trade%20Hub%20Proposal%20\(4-pg\)_final2.pdf](http://unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/15-12-11%20Environment%20and%20Trade%20Hub%20Proposal%20(4-pg)_final2.pdf)

This report explains the objectives, services, and focus areas of UNEP’s Environment and Trade Hub. The program is designed to assist developing countries with using sustainable trade and investment to achieve the SDGs. Through the hub, UNEP will offer capacity-building assistance to governments of developing countries who seek to trade and invest more sustainably. It thus constitutes a valuable and important tool for achieving the SDGs, since developing states are among the most important actors influencing the progress of the SDGs and the development of the entire international community.

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United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *The Emissions Gap Report 2015*. Retrieved 2 January 2016 from: http://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/theme/13/EGR_2015_301115_lores.pdf

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I. Corruption and Environmental Governance

Recent Developments

The international community has taken action on and further addressed corruption and environmental governance over the past few months. Examples of recent efforts include a joint meeting that the United Nations (UN) Environment Programme (UNEP) convened with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC).²² Furthermore, on 9 December 2015, the international community observed the International Anti-Corruption Day to raise awareness of corruption as a cross-cutting issue that affects many areas.²³ With the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in effect, preventing corruption is at the forefront of the global community's agenda, with many actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector, working to combat and prevent corruption.²⁴

INTERPOL and UNEP held their 2nd INTERPOL-UNEP International Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Conference on 16 and 17 November 2015 to focus on reducing environmental crimes through international cooperation and collaboration.²⁵ Attended by various Member States and NGOs, the conference fostered discussion on environmental crime, corruption, law enforcement, and combating illicit environmental activities.²⁶ It was recognized that environmental governance requires strong enforcement mechanisms that can ensure the success of laws put in place to eliminate environmental crime and enhance environmental security.²⁷

Improving environmental governance through “transparency of action and support” and preventing corruption have remained major global priorities under the UNFCCC, particularly in light of COP21, which took place in Paris, France from 30 November 2015 to 11 December 2015.²⁸ At COP21, over 190 parties to the UNFCCC met to negotiate an action plan targeting the reduction of greenhouse gases.²⁹ As COP21 was ongoing, organizations such as Transparency International advocated for an agreement that ensured the transparent distribution and use of climate funds, while also ensuring accountability, to prevent the potential for corruption.³⁰ These recommendations were well met within the final text of the outcome document from COP21, the *Paris Agreement*, especially within article 6.2, which identifies the need to prevent corrupt practices such as “double counting” to ensure “environmental integrity and transparency, including in governance.”³¹ To advocate for the proper global management of funds necessary to successfully implement the *Paris Agreement*, UNEP's Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System organized two events in January 2016 to share its findings on green finance, or finance used to promote sustainable development through secure and transparent processes.³²

Following the conclusion of COP21, the Chinese government created a high-level environmental protection inspection team to gather evidence of environmental violations, crimes, and corrupt practices, specifically those related to pollution.³³ The goal is to reduce and ultimately eliminate environmental corruption – as such corruption has resulted in higher levels of pollution – by increasing accountability and strengthening the rule of law.³⁴ Similarly, Zimbabwe also began fulfilling its commitments under the *Paris Agreement* after identifying a significant level of financial mismanagement and corruption in various government sectors, including the Environmental

²² IISD Reporting Services, *2nd INTERPOL-UNEP International Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Conference (IECEC-2)*, 2015; UNFCCC, *Adoption of the Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1)*, 2015.

²³ UN DPI, *International Anti-Corruption Day*, 2015.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ IISD Reporting Services, *2nd INTERPOL-UNEP International Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Conference (IECEC-2)*, 2015.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ UNEP, *INTERPOL-UNEP conference to tackle most pressing environmental crime issues*, 2015.

²⁸ UNFCCC, *Overview*, 2015.

²⁹ Climate Action, *Find out more about COP21*, 2015.

³⁰ Transparency International, *3 Conditions for Successful COP21 Paris climate agreement*, 2015.

³¹ UNFCCC, *Adoption of the Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1)*, 2015.

³² UNEP, *UNEP Inquiry Kicks Off the Year of Green Finance*, 2016.

³³ Teo, China Unveils Environment Inspectors, *The Straits Times*, 2016.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Management Agency.³⁵ To address the situation, the Zimbabwean government has created an oversight group to monitor the abuse of public funds and begin to fight the high levels of corruption within the country.³⁶

At the regional level, the African Colloquium on Environmental Rule of Law was convened from 14 to 16 October 2015 for the first time to advance development throughout the African continent.³⁷ In the *Nairobi Statement*, the outcome document from the Colloquium, it was recognized that environmental governance cannot be successful without the rule of law.³⁸ The statement also addressed the need for Member States to further develop and implement, at the national level, anti-corruption measures to further reduce the illegal wildlife trade, which is a serious detriment to the African people and environment.³⁹ As requested by the Colloquium, UNEP will continue to lead the way in assisting Member States to develop rule of law practices to combat corruption and promote successful environmental governance.⁴⁰

³⁵ Zinyuke, Govt sets up fight against corruption, *The Southern Times*, 2016.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ UNEP, *Environmental Rule of Law*, 2015.

³⁸ 1st Africa Colloquium on Environmental Rule of Law, *Nairobi Statement*, 2015.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

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1st Africa Colloquium on Environmental Rule of Law. (2015). *Nairobi Statement*. Retrieved 7 January 2016 from: <http://www.unep.org/delc/worldcongress/Portals/24151/Documents/nairobi-statement.pdf>

In October 2015, Member States attended the first ever Africa Colloquium on Environmental Rule of Law to discuss how to better enforce and address the rule of law as it relates to the environment. In the outcome document, titled the Nairobi Statement, 10 actions were developed to ensure the successful enforcement of the environmental rule of law, which could lead to a reduction in corrupt environmental practices. The document covers items from the inclusion of the judicial systems in prosecuting and enforcing these laws, to training local law enforcement on various types of environmental crimes. Despite being the first of its kind for the African continent, conferences focused on environmental governance are an example of the international community recognizing the significance of addressing corruption in the environmental sector.

Teo, C.W. (2016, January 7). China unveils environment inspectors. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved 7 January 2016 from: <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-unveils-environment-inspectors>

This news article clearly demonstrates how Member States are taking action following the conclusion of COP21 in Paris. By utilizing these inspectors as a way to fight environmental corruption, the Chinese government has created an approach that works towards improving environmental governance at the local level. Though this is a relatively new initiative for China, it serves as an example of an initiative that can be taken by Member States to promote good governance in the environmental sector.

United Nations, Department of Public Information. (2015). *International Anti-Corruption Day* [Website]. Retrieved 7 January 2016 from: <http://www.un.org/en/events/anticorruptionday/index.shtml>

This UN website highlights the significance of putting forth a unified international front to combat the many types of corruption, including environmental corruption. In 2014, the International Anti-Corruption Day was used to raise awareness and promote education in order to prevent corruption at the international, regional, national, and local levels. In 2015, the day was used to highlight the detrimental effects that corruption has on development and security in all sectors. Delegates should consider the ways in which the calls to action discussed in 2015 could transition to long-term results to promote transparent environmental governance.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2015, November 16). *INTERPOL-UNEP conference to tackle most pressing environmental crime issues* [News Article]. Retrieved 7 January 2016 from:

<http://unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=26854&ArticleID=35561&l=en>

This press release gives a detailed overview of the November 2015 conference hosted by UNEP and INTERPOL to discuss major issues related to environmental crime. The two-day conference focused on improving environmental security as the international community begins work to implement the Paris Agreement and the SDGs. Participants at the conference also discussed the link between sustainable development and environmental crime, as well as methods to increase the effectiveness of law enforcement personnel in response to illicit activities.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2015). *Adoption of the Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1)* [Draft Outcome Document]. Retrieved 7 January 2016 from:

www.undocs.org/FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1

The Paris Agreement is the most recent comprehensive international agreement relating to the reduction of greenhouse gases through the promotion of environmental sustainability. It calls for transparency when dealing with funds for environmental initiatives so that the funds are not diverted into the hands of corruption. Major topics covered within the agreement include mitigation, adaptation, finance, capacity building, technology, transparency and support, and compliance. Delegates can use the Paris Agreement to better understand the current global focus as it relates to climate change and how to ensure that climate change is addressed during discussions on environmental governance.

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II. Improving Sustainable Forest Management Practices

Recent Developments

In recent months, the international community has re-emphasized the importance of improving sustainable forest management practices and its commitment in doing so. Some key developments that have occurred include the United Nations (UN) 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) in Paris, and the expansion of the UN Collaborative Initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD) and REDD+, the latter of which includes the conservation and sustainable management of forests.⁴¹ Though the global community has seen some success with enhancing forest management, it remains important for Member States and communities to still address issues linked to deforestation and forest degradation.⁴²

In November 2015, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) published its annual *Emissions Gap Report*.⁴³ The report highlights individual climate mitigation efforts and takes into consideration financial, technical, and capacity building solutions to close the gap between expected and required levels of emissions.⁴⁴ It highlighted that the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of forests provides more than just stability in carbon markets, but also preserves biodiversity and natural resources such as clean water and timber.⁴⁵ Also in November 2015, REDD+ launched its successful REDD+ Academy online tool.⁴⁶ The Academy is designed to assist policymakers and communities gain knowledge about REDD+ and to assist developing countries in creating tools to implement REDD+ projects on the same level as other countries in order to fulfill global climate mitigation efforts.⁴⁷ As an example, in its use of REDD, Brazil has been able to hinder deforestation of the Amazon rainforest by 82% between the years 2002 to 2014 through various policies, such as increasing protected areas and incentives for landholders.⁴⁸

From 30 November to 11 December 2015, France chaired and hosted COP21.⁴⁹ At COP21, representatives of participating countries adopted a landmark agreement, the *Paris Agreement*.⁵⁰ This document provides insight on climate technology and information sharing, financial contributions for carbon sequestration programs such as REDD, and capacity building for climate mitigation and adaptation for developing countries.⁵¹ The *Paris Agreement*, in Article 5, addresses the need for the international community to work together to conserve greenhouse gas (GHG) sinks and reservoirs, “components of the climate system where a greenhouse gas or a precursor of a greenhouse gas is stored,” which includes forests.⁵² The Agreement also sheds light on the management of forests as being a key component in the overall goal of climate mitigation.⁵³ In order to achieve sustainable management of forest, representatives attending the COP21 expressed their support of the REDD framework as an instrument of change.⁵⁴

In relation to the applicable use of forest management practices amongst Member States, deforestation emissions are quite unstable and have a more unpredictable effect on the climate, as seen in Indonesia this past year.⁵⁵ Indonesia has had fires burning consistently throughout 2015 in their forests and peatland.⁵⁶ Global Forest Watch reported that

⁴¹ UN-REDD Programme, *About the UN-REDD Programme*, 2016; UN-REDD Programme, *About REDD+*, 2016.

⁴² Ferguson-Mitchell, *Forests and REDD+ recognized as key components of landmark climate deal agreed in Paris*, *UN-REDD Programme*, 2015.

⁴³ UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2015: A UNEP Synthesis Report*, 2015, p. ii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴⁶ UN-REDD Programme, *REDD+ Academy goes global: Launch of e-course and Learning Journals*, 2015.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2015: A UNEP Synthesis Report*, 2015, p. 49.

⁴⁹ UN Conference on Climate Change, *What was COP21?* 2015.

⁵⁰ UNFCCC, *Adoption of the Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1)*, 2015.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*; *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 1992.

⁵³ Ferguson-Mitchell, *Forests and REDD+ recognized as key components of landmark climate deal agreed in Paris*, *UN-REDD Programme*, 2015.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Lang, *COP21 Paris: REDD and carbon markets*, *REDD Monitor*, 2015.

⁵⁶ Lang, *Can REDD save Indonesia’s peatlands from burning?* *REDD Monitor*, 2015.

Indonesia had over 100,000 active fire detections over the past year.⁵⁷ An article from Global Forest Watch estimates that the emissions released by the burning forests exceeded the daily emissions of the United States, an economy that is more than 21 times that of Indonesia.⁵⁸

It is critical for policymakers to address the key drivers in deforestation globally, regionally and nationally.⁵⁹ The *Paris Agreement*, as the global plan of action against climate change, highlights the integral role that forest management plays in emissions reduction efforts through the REDD program. However, the recent Indonesian forest fires have shed light on the limited capacity of REDD activities to prevent deforestation. Moving forward, a stronger and better-defined commitment from Member States is needed to establish sustainable forest management practices that would help ameliorate climate change, as well as fully realize the social, economic, and environmental benefits of forests.

⁵⁷ Harris, et al., Indonesia's Fire Outbreaks Producing More Daily Emissions than Entire U.S. Economy, *Global Forest Watch*, 2015.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2015: A UNEP Synthesis Report*, 2015, p. 46.

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Lang, C. (2015, December 15). COP21 Paris: REDD and carbon markets. *REDD Monitor*. Retrieved 27 January 2016 from: <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2015/12/15/cop21-paris-redd-and-carbon-markets/>

Even as the Paris Agreement is accepted as a landmark decision for global action on climate change, many recognize the weaknesses of the agreed outcome and the key points it is missing, including its non-binding status. Delegates may find the perspective of this source's author perspective useful as they work to enhance their own plans of action to account for some of the issues the Paris Agreement fails to address. This source also interestingly compares and contrasts the UNFCCC to the Paris Agreement. This comparison can be useful for delegates because one of the critiques concerning the Paris Agreement is the wording that allows Member States to selectively pick participation. For the author, this is a fault of the Agreement because the UNFCCC on the contrary is a call to action that seeks to rally all parties.

United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries. (2015). *REDD+ Academy goes global: Launch of e-course and Learning Journals* [Website]. Retrieved 5 February 2016 from:

http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2291:launch-of-the-redd-learning-journals-and-redd-academy-e-course&catid=98&Itemid=749

The REDD+ Academy made its online debut in November 2015. This source is particularly useful for delegates because it is the same online tool that policymakers and global practitioners use to learn and assist in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. This resource can assist delegates with brainstorming practical measures for implementing REDD+ in developing countries and providing a means for financial support. Delegates are advised to take a deeper look into the practical applications of REDD+ Academy as useful examples for their work in committee.

United Nations Conference on Climate Change. (2015). *What was COP21?* [Website]. Retrieved 26 January 2016 from: <http://www.cop21.gouv.fr/en/learn/what-is-cop21/>

The 21st Conference of the Parties was a major development for sustainable forest management. The outcome document, known as the Paris Agreement, highlights forests as a critical component to combatting climate change. REDD was also a highly discussed topic at the Conference, and was made a primary tool to help combat climate change since it specifically deals with deforestation and degradation. This source will help delegates draft solutions to promote sustainable forest management practices.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *The Emissions Gap Report 2015: A UNEP Synthesis Report*. Retrieved 26 January 2016 from: http://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/theme/13/EGR_2015_301115_lores.pdf

The Emissions Gap Report is an annual publication of the UN Environment Programme that synthesizes information on the state of the gap between greenhouse emissions. It was first published in 2010, and the latest version was released in November 2015 ahead of COP21. It provides delegates with useful global carbon emissions data and gives them an overview of the actions that are taken to reduce or capture those emissions, including improved forest management practices. The report also addresses REDD+ implementation and provides insight on failures and potential improvements.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2015). *Adoption of the Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1)* [Draft Outcome Document]. Retrieved 16 January 2016 from: www.undocs.org/FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1

The Paris Agreement is a landmark document for global action against climate change, as it sets the goal to limit the overall average global temperature increase to below 2 degrees Celsius. The agreement also highlights the integral role that forests play in climate mitigation. The Paris Agreement is a source delegates should be well versed in while addressing this topic, considering the fact that it sets the framework for climate action until mid-century and beyond.

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- United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *The Emissions Gap Report 2015: A UNEP Synthesis Report*. Retrieved 26 January 2016 from: http://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/theme/13/EGR_2015_301115_lores.pdf
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III. Plastic Debris in the World's Oceans

Recent Developments

In recent months, the international community has continued to research, discuss, and develop initiatives to address the issue of plastic debris in the world's oceans. While research is still conducted to help understand the environmental impacts of marine litter, other efforts have centered on finding and assessing solutions to both remove plastics from marine environments and prevent the spread of more plastic debris. The United Nations (UN) Environment Programme (UNEP) has played a key role on this front, and the topic is bringing a large range of public and private actors together to design and develop innovative solutions to clean the oceans.

On 17 November 2015, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) celebrated its 20th birthday.⁶⁰ The event was marked by the release of a UNEP report on *Biodegradable Plastics & Marine Litter: Misconceptions, Concerns and Impacts on Marine Environments*, which intended to verify the argument that biodegradable plastics are helping to reduce the negative environmental impacts of plastic debris on the world's oceans.⁶¹ The report concluded that "the adoption of plastic products labelled as 'biodegradable' will not bring about a significant decrease either in the quantity of plastic entering the ocean or the risk of physical and chemical impacts on the marine environment, on the balance of current scientific evidence."⁶² This is mostly due to the rarely-if-ever-met conditions that are required for complete biodegradation of the plastics to occur in marine environments; the composition of such plastics; and the public's greater inclination to litter that results from labeling a product as "biodegradable."⁶³ GPA also commissioned a report on wastewater treatment, which provides a methodology for local policymakers to economically value the costs and benefits of wastewater treatment.⁶⁴ The report, published by UNEP in November 2015, emphasizes that adequate wastewater treatment can lead to significant health and environmental benefits, and can be a useful measure to reduce pollution in the world's oceans considering how marine and freshwater ecosystems are intrinsically linked.⁶⁵

The World Economic Forum, who held its Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, from 20 to 23 January 2016, also highlighted the economic and environmental impacts of plastic materials in a report entitled, *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*.⁶⁶ The document, released in advance of the meeting, reviews the role that plastics and plastic packaging play in our global economy and makes the case for a new plastic circular economy that would "achieve drastically better economic and environmental outcomes."⁶⁷ The world's oceans' pollution with plastic debris is identified as a major externality of the current plastic economy, and the report warns that the current leakage rate of plastics into the ocean could double by 2030 and even quadruple by mid-century.⁶⁸ The document presents a pathway to a more sustainable plastic economy that can be built through three processes: Strengthening after-use policies and processes, reducing leakage into water systems, and developing non-fossil sources of plastic production; each process has its own innovative efforts currently under development.⁶⁹

Concern has furthermore grown in recent years over the use of microplastics in consumer products: The Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, and Sweden pulled their efforts to call for the EU-wide prohibition of microplastics in house-cleaning and make-up products in December 2014, and in March 2015 the Canadian parliament voted for the government to add microbeads to the list of toxic substances under its Environmental Protection Act of 1999.⁷⁰ Most recently, the United States passed a law to ban microplastics from toiletries.⁷¹ The "Microbead-Free Waters

⁶⁰ UNEP, *Biodegradable Plastics Are Not the Answer to Reducing Marine Litter*, Says UN, 2015.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² UNEP, *Biodegradable Plastics & Marine Litter: Misconceptions, Concerns and Impacts on Marine Environments*, 2015.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ UNEP, *Our Planet: UNEP Publications*, 2015.

⁶⁵ UNEP, *Economic Valuation of Wastewater: The Cost of Action and the Cost of No Action*, 2015.

⁶⁶ World Economic Forum, *World Economic Forum Annual Meeting*, 2016; World Economic Forum, *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*, 2016.

⁶⁷ World Economic Forum, *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*, 2016.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *Dutch rally support for microplastic ban to safeguard their mussels*, EurActiv.com, 2015; Government of Canada, *Quarterly Index for Part I, Vol. 149, No. 31*, 2015, pp. 2138-2144.

⁷¹ United States of America, *H.R.1321 - Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015*, 2015; United States of America, *Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015*, 2015.

Act of 2015,” signed into law on 28 December 2015, defines microbeads as “solid plastic particle that is less than five millimeters in size and is intended to be used to exfoliate or cleanse the human body or any part thereof” and requires manufacturers to eliminate microbeads from rinse-off cosmetics by 2017.⁷² The bill was the outcome of bipartisan efforts in the U.S. Congress and received very limited opposition from the cosmetic industry that it was directly targeting.⁷³

The Ocean Cleanup project has also made significant progress in the last months of the year 2015. In October, the Array technology, currently under development, entered a new testing stage in a realistic environment in an offshore basin, under various current and wave conditions.⁷⁴ In December, the Ocean Cleanup team announced the deployment of a 100 meter-long barrier segment in the North Sea in the second quarter of 2016.⁷⁵ As a first test in open waters, the experiment will inform the future deployment of the Ocean Pilot, the first operational cleanup system off the coast of Tsushima Island in Japan.⁷⁶ The Ocean Pilot is expected for the second half of 2016, before a large-scale system is installed in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in 2020.⁷⁷ Another innovation was recently proposed to solve the problem of marine litter, even if not to the scale of the Ocean Cleanup project.⁷⁸ It includes an automated floating marina rubbish bin that collects floating debris while letting water flows through it.⁷⁹ The project was launched by two Australian citizens and is currently at the crowdfunding phase.⁸⁰

Marine plastic litter remains an issue of high concern for the international community, as seen in the many discussions, reports, and initiatives that have occurred recently. Beyond understanding the impacts of plastic debris in marine ecosystems, the past few months have seen increasing efforts to clean the world’s oceans and prevent future leakage of plastic materials. Public policies and technological innovations have created a momentum for action to address the issue of plastic debris in the world’s oceans, momentum that will continue in the coming months.

⁷² United States of America *H.R.1321 - Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015*, 2015; United States of America, *Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015*, 2015.

⁷³ Weissmann, *Why the Government Just Banned Those Plastic Microbeads in Your Face Wash*, 2015.

⁷⁴ The Ocean Cleanup, *Ocean Cleanup Array to undergo 3D testing at MARIN*, 2015.

⁷⁵ The Ocean Cleanup, *First Cleanup Barrier Test to be deployed in Dutch waters*, 2015.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ The Seabin Project, *The Seabin Project*, 2015.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

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The Ocean Cleanup project is the most prominent attempt to clean the world's oceans to this day. Founded in 2013 by Boyan Slat, a Dutch student, it is a concrete example of the innovations that can be put to use in order to deal with marine litter pollution, and delegates should find inspiration in such endeavors. The blog of the project's website provides a detailed account of all the latest developments in technology and testing, and is a useful source for delegates who wish to stay up-to-date on this topic and ongoing efforts.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *Biodegradable Plastics & Marine Litter: Misconceptions, Concerns and Impacts on Marine Environments* [Report]. Retrieved 6 January 2016 from:

<http://unep.org/gpa/documents/publications/BiodegradablePlastics.pdf>

This report was published by UNEP in November 2015. It sheds light on misconceptions that biodegradable plastics are helping to reduce the negative environmental impacts of plastic debris in the world's oceans, thus showing that there are no easy solutions to the problem at hand. It provides a comprehensive overview of the "biodegradable" failure, and can help delegates think about what other solutions could be developed.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2015). *Economic Valuation of Wastewater: The Cost of Action and the Cost of No Action* [Report]. Retrieved 6 January 2016 from:

http://unep.org/gpa/Documents/GWI/Wastewater%20Evaluation%20Report_LR.pdf

This report, also published by UNEP in November 2015, builds a case for better wastewater treatment policies at the local level by presenting a cost-benefit analysis for policymakers to consider. Effective wastewater management presents a large range of benefits to local communities and natural environments, including to marine ecosystems. By recognizing the close link between marine and freshwater ecosystems, delegates will be able to develop new solutions to prevent one source of pollution of ocean waters.

United States Congress. (2015). *Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015*. Retrieved 6 January 2016 from:

<https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1321/BILLS-114hr1321enr.pdf>

The Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015 was introduced as a response to growing concern over the use of microplastics in consumer products. It is the product of bipartisan cooperation in the United States Congress and the most recent effort by national public authorities to ban such material after Canada's similar efforts a few months previous. Such regulatory actions are good examples for delegates of the role that Member States can play in finding solutions to the marine litter problem and preventing the spread of plastic debris in the world's oceans.

World Economic Forum. (2016). *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*. Retrieved 29 January 2016 from: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf

The World Economic Forum is an international non-profit foundation for public-private cooperation focused on industrial, social, economic and environmental, as well as security issues. Every year the Forum gathers political, business and society leaders during its Annual Meeting and eight other regional/theme-oriented meetings. The foundation also publishes a number of reports targeting a large range of topics from the gender gap to electricity markets. On 16 January 2016, the Forum published a report on the "new plastic economy." It provides delegates with an overview of the negative impacts of plastic materials, but also with a pathway to a more sustainable plastic economy with enhanced economic and environmental outcomes.

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