



PMUNC 2014

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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Topic A: Global Warming and Rising Sea Levels

Introduction:

As the global population grows and societies worldwide increase manufacturing – and therefore output of harmful fossil fuels – to compensate for this continual expansion, the effects of global warming become more and more visible. Nowhere in the world are these effects more visible than in Southeast Asia. Amidst bizarre swings in temperature, extreme precipitation, drought, and other natural disasters we see the most problematic effect of all: rising sea levels. According to National Geographic, sea levels worldwide have been on the rise since the early 1990s by 0.14 inches per year. This staggering rate poses incredibly harmful threats to hundreds of island nations in the Southern Pacific, as well as virtually all

Southeast Asian nations. The possible consequences include the displacement of millions of Asian citizens, destruction of important agricultural and industrial infrastructure, food shortages, etc.

ASEAN must take a stand to combat these catastrophes and take well-thought out, comprehensive steps towards climate control.

Scientific Background:

As mentioned previously, there is overwhelming scientific evidence to support the fact that sea levels have been rising since the 1990's, and are continuing to rise today. What is causing this rise in sea levels, scientifically speaking? There are three main factors that cause rising sea levels: thermal expansion, the melting of glaciers and polar ice caps, and ice loss from Greenland and Antarctica. Thermal expansion, basically, is the idea that

when water heats up it expands, and thus newly warmer waters take up more physical space than they did before; Thermal expansion explains over half of sea level rise in the past century. In the normal glacial cycle the polar ice caps melt each summer but reform each winter back to the same level due to snows during the winter. Recently, however, global warming's higher temperatures have caused an imbalance, where the ice melts more each summer than it reforms each winter, leading to increasing sea levels. Similarly to the polar ice caps, the massive ice sheets of Greenland and West Antarctica are melting more rapidly each summer than they are able to reform each winter, compounding the situation and causing sea levels to rise even more dramatically.

To discover what is leading to these three roots of rising sea levels, we

need only look at the causes of global warming, as, at the end of the day, rising sea levels are only one aspect of global warming that particularly affects ASEAN's area of concern. Again, there is a substantial amount of scientific evidence showing that global warming does, in fact, exist, is serious, and has very specific causes beyond the earth's normal cycles of heating and cooling. The United Nations, our governing body, created a panel of leading scientists from around the world, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 to find out exactly what these causes were. The biggest causes they've found are greenhouse gases—essentially fumes emitted by humans that trap heat from the sun in the earth's atmosphere, thus warming our environment and contributing to rising sea levels. There are a wide variety of greenhouse gases

emitted in a variety of ways, from the carbon dioxide produced through the burning of fossil fuels in cars, factories, and electricity production, to methane from agriculture (the digestive system of animals) and landfills, to nitrous oxide from fertilizers. CO₂ is the biggest contributor to global warming and rising sea levels because it is, by far, the most common greenhouse gas in the atmosphere even though it doesn't have the highest heat-trapping capacity; one additional reason why there's so much CO₂ in the atmosphere is because trees, which normally absorb CO₂ during the photosynthesis process, are being destroyed more and more through the process of deforestation.

The amount of greenhouse gases released has been increasing throughout the years, thus increasing the effects of global warming and rising sea levels proportionally. According to an IPCC

study, "Since 1990, yearly emissions have gone up by about 6 billion metric tons of 'carbon dioxide equivalent' worldwide, more than a 20 percent increase." This is a substantial increase, and in order to deal with the problem of rising sea levels we must deal with these causes.

Consequences:

It should be clear to all delegates that this is a *very* important issue, especially to the nations we are representing in this counsel, but the consequences, both tangible and possible, should be discussed to provide extra motivation and insight. Three main consequences will be mentioned here, although there are many, many more that can and should be examined by our association.

The first important consequence of rising sea levels are the displacement

of people, both rural and urban. Every single one of our member states besides Laos has a substantial part of their nation bordering the ocean. With this increasing rise in sea levels, much of this ocean-bordering land will be lost and the people living there will be killed or displaced, and those ecosystems will be destroyed. In terms of urban displacement, many major Southeast Asian cities are at risk of major flooding and infrastructural damage: among the most pressing ones are Bangkok, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, and Yangon. According to the IPCC's fourth assessment of global warming, there exist around 250 million peoples living in poor, rural settlements along major low-lying river mega-deltas in Southeast Asia, in places like India, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, who can and will be affected by sea level rises by as soon as 2050. In Vietnam

alone, it is estimated that up to 7 of the 18 million people living along the Mekong river delta could be displaced by mid-century. Beyond this, so much land will be inundated by rising sea levels that up to 5.3% of Vietnam's total land will become submerged, and thus completely unusable.

This brings us to the next important consequence: the substantial loss of arable land. As the homes of millions of people will be destroyed due to rising sea levels, so will the farming areas they inhabit. Although thousands of hectares of agricultural landscapes will be submerged completely by water, the effects of rising sea levels on arable land go far beyond that. Seawater, with its high level of salinity, is encroaching on land and affecting the groundwater tables used to irrigate crops. Much of the soil and water supply is becoming too salty for humans and animals to drink, as

well as too salty for crops to properly grow. Rising sea levels also affect natural ocean currents, causing strange weather patterns: variable precipitation, frequent droughts and floods, shrinking glaciers that supply fresh water to deltas and thus to crops and animals, and more all will have an increasingly disastrous effect on the ability to engage in sustainable agriculture in the region. According to the Asia Foundation, “Arable land throughout low-lying deltas in South and Southeast Asia produces 88 percent of the world’s rice supply, much of which is slated for domestic consumption and much of which is under threat from rising oceans.” Rice is one of the most important foods, both in terms of production and consumption, in Southeast Asian cultures, and the three-season production of rice is vital for many economies of our member states. According to another study by the

United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, more than 2.6 million hectares (25 percent) of arable land in Vietnam alone will be affected by rising sea levels, reducing rice yields by 10 percent.

This brings us to the last important consequence that will be discussed in this background guide: the loss of billions of dollars by Southeast Asian economies. All these consequences mentioned previously have severe costs, in terms of deaths, loss of quality of life, and in economic terms as well. The destruction of all this arable land for rice farming and animal raising severely handicaps the economies of these nations, and the costs of increasing floods, typhoons, and droughts are substantial. According to an ADB (Asian Development Bank) study, “By 2100, the mean cost of climate change for Indonesia, the Philippines,

Thailand, and Viet Nam could be equivalent to losing 6.7% of combined GDP each year, more than twice the global average loss.”

Bloc Positions:

All member states of ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) have a strong stake in slowing down the rise of sea levels, as they are all at risk in the possible consequences. They are all individual nations with different resources, desires, and top priorities, thus there is definitely still room for debate amongst them, even regarding an issue they all deem important such as global warming and rising sea levels. Still, given this, ASEAN has historically been very cooperative in terms of creating new initiatives to counter climate change, and the majority of differences

between the nations is more on what should be the top priority. Additionally, much of the distinctions between priorities are grouped geographically, between nations on the mainland continent and island nations, which have slightly different concerns. More nuances between the stances of each member state can be made, but that will be up to the individual delegates to investigate for themselves, although your chair is here if you have any questions about where to look (hint: start at the works cited!).

Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma:

These nations, all with large urban cities on the coast as well as rural populations in danger of displacement, are very worried about rising sea levels. As was mentioned previously, Vietnam’s main concern is the flooding

of the Mekong river delta—which could displace millions of people and have a terrible impact on the region as a whole. These nations are all large producers of rice, and are very worried about what rising seas will do to their agricultural infrastructure and economy. These states, Vietnam in particular, have made it clear in the past that they are in favor of reducing carbon emissions and having stricter regulations on green house gas emissions. Of course, as growing countries and economies they want to make sure that all development going forward is sustainable and healthy to the economy as a whole, but they recognize the need for change. Besides this, they has also champion the concepts of green growth, and the development of new, renewable energy resources that can still keep up pace with growing economies and populations.

Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore:

These island nations, or basically island nations (Singapore), have very similar worries as do the continental nations, but have the additional concern of tsunamis and hurricanes. Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Phillipines, specifically, have been ravaged by natural disasters such as these in the past, and are concerned that with the ever-warming and ever-rising waters that these natural atrocities will occur more frequently, a scientifically supported claim. Therefore, while they are still very eager to find renewable energy resources, sustainable development, etc., they are also interested in finding new ways to both identify and limit the effects of these common natural

disasters on their countries, as they are very costly.

Laos:

Laos is the only member state of ASEAN not directly in contact with some form of the Pacific Ocean. Thus rising sea levels have less of an impact on them than on their neighbors. Obviously Laos isn't exempt from the effects of global warming and climate change—intense floods and draughts still devastate the agricultural capacity of the nation, but this has become the main concern. Because of this, one thing Laos has been looking into recently is the diversification of new food crops, such as lemons and sweet bamboo, which may be able to better withstand the changing environment.

Historical & Possible Solutions:

ASEAN has met multiple times in the past to discuss climate change and various issues related to it, and will probably continue to meet in the future on this topic, as it doesn't seem to be going away any time soon. In the past, some agreements made between the member states included creating a ASEAN Climate Change Initiative (ACCI), which is still in the works, promoting research and development that discovers new ways to adapt to the changing environment, promote public awareness of the issue, encourage the participation of NGO's and other international organizations. In terms of more concrete projects, from 2009-2013 ASEAN funded a US \$15 million regional project called the "Rehabilitation and Sustainable Use of Peatland Forests in Southeast Asia" that aimed to prevent peatland fires and maintain the biodiversity of the region.

In Jakarta in 2010 a workshop on “Risks and the Impacts from Extreme Events of (i) Floods and (ii) Droughts in ASEAN Communities” was held. Many other workshops, action plans, meetings, and resolutions have been held or created in the past ten years to help foster sustainable development and combat these rising seas, but more still needs to be done.

Additional possible solutions to help ameliorate the issue include: further encouraging the support of NGO’s and other international organizations (EU, etc.), more stringent caps on carbon emissions, resource allocation towards research and development of alternative energy sources, implementation of infrastructure designed to limit effects of rising sea levels (dams, dykes, etc.).

There is a lot of other information out there about rising sea levels, how they influence ASEAN

member states, and what we as a UN association can do to stop the terrible effects. As your chair I look forward to seeing what ideas you all come up with, and how fruitful our discussion can be.

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Topic B: Encroaching Chinese Territorial Claims

Introduction:

Southeastern Asia's relationship with China has always been a tense one, especially recently. In the past few years there have been numerous disputes between China and various other Asian countries, including Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and more. This powerful neighbor has been seen as overstepping its boundaries in order to expand territorial gains as well as incorporate new natural resources found in the area. Most recently, there have been extremely high tensions between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea, due to China's deployment of two oil rigs off the coast of the Paracel Islands, a disputed territory between the two nations. While Vietnam claims that this area is in its exclusive economic

zone (EEZ), China claims to have sovereignty due to its control of the Paracel Islands. Additional tensions between China and the Philippines have emerged recently due to China's alleged encroachment on the Philippines' western province Palawan, including arrests of boats and citizens from both nations. ASEAN must discuss these issues together, as bilateral discussions between China and Vietnam, as well as China and the Philippines, are not enough.

Historical Context

Chinese territorial disputes in Eastern and Southeastern Asia can be traced back for centuries, although modern disputes may have started around 1894 during the Sino-Japanese war. In the earlier half of the 20th Century, the majority of territorial disputes in the area were farther north,

concerning the Diaoyu/Senkoku Islands and Taiwan, but these set the scene for the debates spreading to the south. The Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed in 1895 by China and Japan, ended the Sino-Japanese war fought over control of Korea and ceded Formosa (Taiwan) to Japan. The treaty had other stipulations as well, but none mentioned the Diaoyu/Senkoku Islands. During World War II, Japan came to occupy a variety of islands in the South China Sea, including the Pratas Islands, the Spratlys, and more. In 1945, the US

assumed control over Japan and demanded that they return all territories won during war to China, however the status of many islands remained largely nebulous. Therefore, after World War II and Japan's defeat, in 1947 the Kuomintang government (the nationalist government in China, not the communist one) created a demarcation line in the South China Sea for their island claims called the nine-dotted line (in red), which is still used today by the PRC.



As you can see, China's red dotted line violates many Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's), although those were not introduced until the 1980's and will be discussed later. At this point in history (1940's & 1950's), while these islands were indeed disputed, they weren't seen as having a particularly large amount of value, and thus the debate over them wasn't that intense—that is, until oil was discovered. In 1968 and 1969, after

extensive geological surveys, the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East found “substantial energy deposits” in the South China Sea, making these islands *far* more valuable than they were previously. Various treaties were made and signed between the US, China, and Japan, and a deal was struck, hoping to smooth over already high tensions in the region caused by the Vietnam War, and relations between

China and Japan were relatively normalized.

Then, only shortly after the Paris Peace Accords (1973) that halted US involvement in Vietnam during the war, Chinese forces began to occupy a portion of the Paracel Islands, including a Vietnamese garrison. Vietnamese troops fled the islands and reestablished themselves on the Spratly Islands, the first permanent settlement there for Vietnam, while China built an airfield and harbor on the largest island of the Paracels. Today, China still holds about one thousand troops in the Paracels and Vietnam still claims them as their sovereign territory.

Fast forwarding to the UN 1982, UNCLOS was officially established after three decades of negotiations. UNCLOS, or the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, a resolution with vague wording that allows for Exclusive

Economic Zones (EEZ's). EEZ's basically state that while the territorial waters of a nation (what part of the ocean is owned exclusively by that nation) only extends out 12 nautical miles from shore, that nation still has special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources (energy from water and wind, oil, etc.) for 200 nautical miles. This means that while foreign ships can legally travel over this zone, they aren't allowed to legally harvest energy or resources from it—it's still very ambiguously worded in the resolution itself, but it has been ratified by China, Japan, and every ASEAN member (except Cambodia). China, later, created its own Law on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone, basically stating that China lays claim to all of the South China Sea, based on historical rights dating back centuries.

Throughout the rest of the last 20th Century and beginning of the 21st Century there are numerous offences between China and various ASEAN nations, mainly Vietnam and the Philippines; in 1988 the Chinese navy sunk 3 Vietnamese vessels, killing 74 sailors, in 1996 at Mischief Reef three Chinese navy vessels fought a 90 minute battle with a Philippine gunboat anchored in Filipino waters, etc. These various skirmishes create a new tension between various ASEAN member states and China, simultaneously drawing the US and Japan into the conflict and the area in general.

To give a more macro view of this conflict; claims to a variety of islands and shipping zones in the area changed and traded hands throughout the 20th Century as geopolitics shifted during World War II and the various Cold War battles in the region. Increasing

globalization and the interconnectedness world trade has brought intensified the scramble for exclusive economic zones, while the United States' "pivot to Asia" has exacerbated desires for these important maritime areas. More recently, China's growth in power, emergence next to the US as the center of world trade, and growing military capacity has led to increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea, much to the chagrin of many ASEAN and other Asian nations. China has had territorial disputes with many member states, including Brunei, Malaysia, and more recently the Philippines and Vietnam, along with non-member states such as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.

Recent Offenses

Clearly there's a lot of history behind all the more current disputes. In June of 2011 the Philippines expressed

to ASEAN its increasing concerns towards Chinese aggression and incursions on its territory—five different claims were cited by the Philippines of Chinese ships interfering in their EEZ, while only days earlier Vietnam had protested China’s harassment of Vietnamese oil exploration ships. Tensions mounted again in 2012 when a Filipino warship, in a shoal north of the Spratlys, confronted Chinese fishing boats. This led to a two-month standoff with economic consequences—as China quarantines Filipino fruit and warns against travel to the island nation, banana exports in the Philippines drop \$34 million. Not even two months later, Vietnam passed a maritime law asserting its sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel Islands (a conflict, you’ll recall, that has had quite the history). China rebuked the claim immediately, and in response unveiled a new city on the

Paracels that would supposedly administer the entire region.

Even more recently, in January of 2013, the Philippines started an international arbitration case against China under UNCLOS, citing contradicting Chinese claims of sovereignty over the Spratly Islands (there had been no resolution since the 2012 clashes). This was the first time a claim against China had been made by any country ever under UNCLOS, and China refused to participate in the process at all—making the whole case go on without Chinese participation.

Additional Considerations

While from this historical and more recent description of the various edicts, skirmishes, and communications between China and ASEAN states may leave you with a pretty clear thought that China’s in the wrong and must be

stopped, there are other factors to consider as well. China is *the* most important economy in Southeast Asia right now, and controls massive amounts of exports to its neighboring nations. Additionally, it is a very large country, both numerically and physically, and has a lot more resources than most ASEAN nations combined. It is an economic, military, and political powerhouse in Asia, and has a lot of swing at the UN as well—maintaining positive diplomatic relations with a Security Council permanent member certainly is something to consider before making any rash decisions or statements.

Bloc Positions

Unlike the previous topic, where most ASEAN nations are in relative agreement, this topic is quite hotly debated amongst the organization. In fact, in 2012 ASEAN, for the first time

in its entire history (45 years!) did not issue a communiqué after its annual meeting in Cambodia, due to an impasse over what to do in regards to China's claims in the South China Sea. This followed the standoff between the Philippines and China at the Scarborough Shoal, and was met with outrage by many nations (mainly the Philippines and Vietnam). Many blamed Cambodia, as it is a close nation to China and was the 2012 chair of the conference.

Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia:

These are the countries in ASEAN that have been directly affected by China's territorial claims and disputes. Vietnam and the Philippines are certainly the most vocal and fierce of this anti-China bloc, as they have had the most conflicts in this area, but Brunei and Malaysia still have had issues with

China's encroachment on their EEZ's (see picture from pages earlier). One distinction that can be made between these states is in their relationship to US. The United States is a *very* strong ally to the Philippines, and has been a large supporter and mediator of their fight with China in these disputes, while Vietnam is still a bit more wary of US involvement in the issue (there is still some lingering resentment from the Vietnam War). Brunei and Malaysia are both fairly neutral in this aspect.

Cambodia:

Cambodia is the furthest towards the other end of the spectrum from Vietnam and the Philippines. Cambodia hasn't had any issues with China in terms of territorial disputes, and Cambodia recognizes China's power in the region and would rather not be an enemy in this aspect. This can be seen through the 2012 ASEAN summit,

where Cambodia strongly voiced the opinion that ASEAN should not be involved in territorial disputes with non-ASEAN states. China holds this same opinion.

Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand:

This bloc is the most neutral on the topic. Laos is landlocked, without much to say regarding the issue. Myanmar, Singapore, and Indonesia haven't had any serious conflicts with China regarding international waters. Indonesia, in the past, has even stated that it'd be willing to serve as a mediator for negotiations between China and the Philippines, although China rejected the idea. Myanmar doesn't have very strong diplomatic relations with the United States, although they are improving, and thus do not really want to see the US involved in the issue.

Possible Solutions

There are many different ways a resolution could go regarding this issue. Clearly the anti-China block would like to see China fully accept and follow the UNCLOS treaty it signed and ratified, and wants the immediate withdrawal of all Chinese ships and facilities from what they see as their sovereign territory. They have shown a willingness to participate in a trial or UN referendum of sorts, especially the Philippines, and thus some have suggested that a trial before the ICJ would be applicable, but it is very unlikely that China would agree to participate in such an event. Cambodia, on the other hand, maintains its position, along with China, that ASEAN has no business in interfering with China's individual business with other states. The more independent countries would like to see the issue resolved, as the high tensions are not

conducive to peace or prosperity in the region, but also don't want to get on bad terms with China. In the end, it will really come down to the debate and research done by the delegates in our meeting—the chair looks forward to seeing them.

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