

## **Message from the Director of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)**

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the XXV Dayton Model UN Conference! My name is Porter Lyons and I will be your Director for the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) during the 2018 DAYMUNC.

UNEA was established in June 2012 during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development as a way to bring light and prominence to the environment and all the issues that begin or are worsened through climate change. This assembly recurrently evaluates the needs of the planet in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, most recently including themes revolving around land, marine, water and air pollution, and the responsible management of chemicals and waste. In addition, poverty, health, and peace typify the broader development goals UNEA hopes to achieve. Embodying all 193 Member States, the assembly promotes comprehensive conclusions and resolutions at each subsequent meeting.

The following background guide is an introduction to the topics we will cover in this year's conference, and should be used as only a supplement to your research. In preparation for the conference, I recommend you thoroughly investigate the official policy of the Member State to which you are assigned, and consider your state's priorities. Your many accomplishments during the conference should align with your findings, and contribute to the overall goals of the international community.

The topics before the UNEA are:

1. Restoring the Sustainability of Earth's Oceans, Seas and Freshwater Ecosystems
2. Protection of the Environment in Areas Susceptible to Displacing Persons

Above all, this is a learning conference, meant to aid personal growth and understanding of global issues and affairs. I look forward to working with you all in committee.

Sincerely,

**Porter Lyons**

Director of UNEA

DAYMUNC XXV

## **Topic 1: Restoring the Sustainability of Earth's Oceans, Seas and Freshwater Ecosystems**

### *Introduction*

The question of water has occupied numerous topics of discussion within the United Nations (UN), from its use as an economic resource and to its status as a basic, human necessity. More specifically, the UN Environment Assembly has accorded water attention throughout its short tenure as a body of the UN.<sup>1</sup> Access to water is vital to the survival of any Member State, whether it is due to their dependence on the ocean for providing seafood or clean drinking water from nearby rivers. For several centuries, the water surrounding Member States have appeared to be an unlimited source of nourishment and even a space for unwanted waste. However, several rivers and lakes have become too polluted to drink from, marine ecosystems are becoming drained of wildlife, and litter abundances have endangered the existence of several aquatic species. In order to reduce the likelihood of conflict over scarce water resources, or even the extinction of marine wildlife, it is vital for the international community to take steps to restore sustainability to the abundance of resources that water provides.

### *Existing Framework*

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) is the primary body through which most work concerning the restoration of water resources has been distributed. Through aims such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Clean Seas campaign, UNEP has brought the use and treatment of water to the frontline of their program. UN Environment has two areas of focus, namely adaptation and mitigation, to ensure the world's ecosystems are more resilient and that Member States are taking steps to enforce and promote those measures that do.<sup>2</sup>

To meet the needs of the 2030 Agenda, UN-Water has launched the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, building on and expanding the experience and lessons learned during the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) period. Bering this in mind, UN-Water objectives are to develop methodologies and tools to monitor SDG 6 global indicators, to raise awareness at national and global levels about SDG 6 monitoring, to enhance technical and institutional country capacity for monitoring, and to compile country data and report on global progress towards SDG 6.

The United Nations World Water Development Reports (WWDR) provide a mechanism for monitoring changes in the resource and its management and tracking progress towards achieving targets, particularly those of the MDGs and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Its primary focus is on different strategic water issues each year as well as it is a comprehensive review that gives an overall picture of the state of the world's freshwater resources and aims to provide decision-makers with the tools to implement sustainable use of our water. Although it offers a broad global picture, it particularly pays attention to the situation in developing countries, where the need for better infrastructure and water governance are the highest.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.unep.org/about/cpr/resolutions-adopted-un-environment-assembly-its-second-session>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unep.org/climatechange/>

WWF maintains a notable position within the international community as an advocate for environmental conservation, focusing on six areas of concern. Oceans fall under one of these areas. WWF specifically focuses on the creation of sustainable fisheries, innovative technologies, and maintaining and restoring sustainable marine ecosystems.<sup>3</sup> The International Maritime Organization (IMO), while primarily concerned with trade routes and shipping, has accomplished some work dealing with the impact oil has on the pollution and damage to the world's oceans. The 1954 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil (OILPOL Convention) has been an example of enduring pollution prevention and control on behalf of the IMO, regularly mitigating the effects of oil pollution.<sup>4</sup>

UNEA has devoted substantial work toward the sustainable reproduction of water resources, including the adoption of resolutions pertaining specifically to oceans and seas, sustainable management of coral reefs, and reducing plastic litter and micro-plastics.<sup>5</sup> Among these topics the General Assembly, in its work relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, developed A/RES/70/1 that reaffirms the importance of eliminating debris and other harmful substances that impede marine and inland water ecosystems ability to generate nutrients. This resolution also examines the impact that pollution and litter can have especially on freshwater sources, which receive substantially less attention at meetings of the UNEA.

The Manila Declaration on Furthering the Implementation on the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities takes into account the need for broader global attention toward land-based pollution that runs into marine and water ecosystems. Part of restoring sustainability to our water resources in large part comes from the international community's ability to respond to worsening conditions for land pollution. As states continue urbanization efforts, pollutants like oils and heavy metals are discharged into rivers and lakes, and eventually into oceanic environments. Delegates are encouraged to discuss environmentally safe development efforts in relation to urbanization and the construction of infrastructure, like roads, railroads, and pipelines.

### *Conclusion*

Restoring sustainability and efficient utilization of Earth's marine ecosystems is of the utmost importance for the global community to take calculated and tactical moves. The size of UNEA is helpful in that Member States are able to account for the successes and failures of past policies and initiatives. Member States have a unique opportunity to discuss constructive solutions to questions that would normally evoke issues of border disputes and resource allocation. Furthermore, the question of the growing instability of Earth's oceans affects every Member State, even those that are considered land-locked.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldwildlife.org/initiatives/oceans>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/Pages/Default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unep.org/about/cpr/resolutions-adopted-un-environment-assembly-its-second-session>

Questions to Consider for Future Research:

Delegates should consider the following questions when preparing their position papers and discussion points for committee session:

1. What forms of water pollution does your Member State struggle with? Be sure to research any national and/or regional initiatives your Member State has engaged in to not only combat water pollution, but also any restoration efforts.
2. How can the international community increase its attention toward coral reefs and other marine wildlife, especially in terms of sustainable fishing practices and preventing run off? Utilize what UNEA has discussed thus far in both of its assembly gatherings.
3. In what ways can UNEA improve upon monitoring mechanisms inside the WWDR, simultaneously increasing transparency and reporting measures from particularly damaging factions, such as oil companies in the private sector?

## **Topic 2: Protection of the Environment in Areas Susceptible to Displacing Persons**

### *Introduction*

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), one person has been displaced from their home every second, since 2009, due to environmentally related hazards.<sup>6</sup> Phenomenon such as deforestation, water contamination and scarcity, and even tropical storms worsened due to the effect of climate change have all contributed to the displacing of persons worldwide. The International Organization of Migration estimates that by the year 2050, the world will have 200 million displaced persons.<sup>7</sup>

While the issue of climate change concerns and impacts every Member States, some areas of the world are more prone to environmental displacement than others, such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and several regions in Africa. The vulnerabilities of these areas are extensive, such as lack of access to proper infrastructure or disaster response teams, but the worsening environment will continue to contribute to the hazards brought on by natural disasters like flooding, drought, or storms. Moreover, the deteriorating environment lessens the amount of resources available, such as food, and can initiate conflict over scarce resources, further adding to the amount of displaced persons. Therefore, Member States and the international community should look toward ways to better protect the environment in these areas specifically prone to the detriments of climate change.

### *Existing Frameworks*

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), one person has been displaced from their home every second, since 2009, due to environmentally related hazards.[i] Phenomenon such as deforestation, water contamination and scarcity, and even tropical storms worsened due to the effect of climate change have all contributed to the displacing of persons worldwide. The International Organization of Migration estimates that by the year 2050, the world will have 200 million displaced persons.[ii] While the issue of climate change concerns and impacts every Member States, some areas of the world are more prone to environmental displacement than others, such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and several regions in Africa. The vulnerabilities of these areas are extensive, such as lack of access to proper infrastructure or disaster response teams, but the worsening environment will continue to contribute to the hazards brought on by natural disasters like flooding, drought, or storms. Moreover, the deteriorating environment lessens the amount of resources available, such as food, and can initiate conflict over scarce resources, further adding to the amount of displaced persons. Therefore, Member States and the international community should look toward ways to better protect the environment in these areas specifically prone to the detriments of climate change.

The international community has showed great progress in terms of aiding particularly vulnerable areas, such as Africa, by adopting A/RES/71/229 to combat desertification in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, which strongly contributes to the

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<sup>6</sup>[https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/17614/Background%20note\\_Environment%20and%20Displacement-%20Root%20causes%20and%20implications.pdf?sequence=28&isAllowed=y](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/17614/Background%20note_Environment%20and%20Displacement-%20Root%20causes%20and%20implications.pdf?sequence=28&isAllowed=y)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.iom.int/complex-nexus>

matter of environmental migration. It notes that combating desertification, land degradation and drought, including through sustainable land management, can contribute to easing forced migration flows influenced by a number of factors, including economic, social, security and environmental concerns, which can, in turn, reduce current and potential fighting over resources in degraded areas and the mass movement of people.

The arrangement of the first African Drought Conference in Windhoek from 15 to 19 August 2016, which adopted a common strategic framework for a drought-resilient and prepared Africa and the Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa, demonstrates how seriously African states have taken the issue, however, further and collective action is needed by UN Member States. A/RES/71/228 recalls the implementation of a milestone accord in terms of protecting the environment, the Paris Agreement, and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to recognize them as primary intergovernmental platforms for further discussion in the issue area of climate change and environmental degradation. The UN General Assembly has adopted numerous resolutions in recent years to combat the causes of environmental migration. Since climate change and disaster displacement lead to major migration movements, these are also concerns to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the agency's Environmental Guidelines serve as a standard baseline for States regarding refugee protection. The UNHCR further suggests that the risk of climate-related displacement can be reduced through the integration of effective adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and development planning. Measures to better protect, assist, and find durable solutions for internally displaced persons in disaster contexts are also important elements of addressing displacement more generally.

Rather than calling for a new binding international convention on cross-border disaster-displacement, UNHCR supports an approach that focuses on the integration of effective practices by States and (sub-) regional organizations into their own normative frameworks and practices in accordance with their specific situations and challenges. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN's science advisory board, projects an increase in the number of displaced over the course of this century. The majority of the people of concern to UNHCR are concentrated in the most vulnerable areas around the world that are also mostly developing nations. Climate change will force people into increasing poverty and displacement, exacerbating the factors that lead to conflict, rendering both the humanitarian needs and responses in such situations even more complex.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) helps countries and communities prepare for crises as well as deploy technical experts after crises to identify acute environmental risks, and supports efforts by peacekeeping and humanitarian actors to reduce their environmental footprint. The organization specifically focuses on disasters and conflicts to aid countries faced by an environmental emergency that often requires technical support in order to respond effectively, minimize negative impacts, and recover quickly and sustainably.

The 2017 Environment and Emergency Forum (EEF) was held in Nairobi, Kenya with the main objectives to generate partnerships for strengthened environmental emergency preparedness and response, to promote commitment and actions to integrate environment in humanitarian action, to serve as a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas and best

practices, and to agree on key actions to mitigate risk and strengthen resilience. The conference heavily focused on readiness for environmental emergency response, integrating environment in humanitarian response, and environment in conflict settings with the expectation of increased understanding of the role of current and emerging environmental risks in crisis and disasters and the identification of concrete actions to develop national and regional capacities to manage environmental emergencies and to integrate environment in humanitarian action.

### *Conclusion*

Protecting the environment in areas considered specifically vulnerable to the effects of climate change will indefinitely assist in mitigating the atrocities that environmental hazards can cause. Until the international community can significantly reduce pollution worldwide, delegates should focus on those immediate, short-term hazards that persist across vulnerable populations. Delegates should also be sure to focus their attention on the protection of the environment in these areas, and not stray into issues relevant to this topic that other UN bodies ultimately should discuss.

### *Questions to Consider for Future Research:*

1. Consider the multitude of ways that a Member State can contribute to protecting the environment within its own borders, or those of another Member State. In what ways can your Member State engage in disaster reduction or infrastructural improvement utilizing improvements in these spheres of technology?
2. The effects of climate change are far-reaching, and while developing states are more susceptible to the more damaging effects, developing states are also not immune. Consider ways in which the international community can promote and develop preventative techniques and programs for any state that could be environmentally vulnerable to displacing persons.
3. This topic can be closely tied to the issue of food security, a matter that is drastically worsened by long droughts or periods of torrential rain. How can your Member State contribute to the discussion of building resilient agricultural sectors that would decrease the odds of forcibly displacing people?