MAHAMAYA MODEL UNITED NATIONS

UNEP

STUDY GUIDE

Introduction to the United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global authority in tackling issues pertaining to the environment holistically. UNEP seeks to promote sustainable development of the environment within the UN system. Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya the UNEP seeks to carry out their mission by informing, educating, inspiring and providing the tools for environmental development for nations and peoples around the globe, for them to enhance their quality of life while avoiding the compromise of future generations. Their environmental governance has been further facilitated by their six regional offices in Bangkok, Mexico City, Kingston, Bahrain, Geneva and Athens. The UNEP categorizes its work into seven broad thematic areas: climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, chemicals and waste, resource efficiency, and environment under review. UNEP has been successful in hosting a plethora of multilateral agreements which has enabled the unification of many nations in one body in tackling environmental issues that humankind faces at present and will do so in the future.

Remarks from the Head Table

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

We - the Head Table of the United Nations Environment Programme - would like to warmly welcome you to the Mahamaya College Model United Nations Conference 2023 (MMUN 2023).
We present you with this study guide as a starting point for your research. Debate is not limited to the topics that are listed below and delegates have the freedom to discuss numerous things that fall under the scope of our mandate.
Therefore, we expect delegates to have done comprehensive research and draw attention to matters that you believe are of relevance to our topic. We look forward to seeing detailed solutions, accurate foreign policy representation and an interesting mix of constructive and destructive debate, which would reflect your knowledge and understanding of the topic.

We wish you all the best for conference!!

Sincerely,

Timothy Shankar, Ryan Hettiarachchi and Kaashyapa Kalusinghe (Head Table of UNEP)

Conference Topic:

Analyzing the consequences of pollution on climate change with special emphasis on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Overview

Environmental pollution is the introduction of pollutants to the natural environment which causes disastrous effects. Climate change refers to a change in average weather conditions or in the time variation of weather in the context of longer-term average conditions. It has been proven that climate change is related to some major forms of environmental pollution (e.g. - air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, etc.). Today, this has become an international issue where individuals, states and different organizations have started discussions regarding this issue.

The time to act on climate change is now, as we are already experiencing unfathomable changes to our climate and planet. The pollution of air and the poisoning of water has resulted in the death of plants, animals, and fellow human beings. In 2019, the average global temperature was 0.95°C above the twentieth century average, rapidly approaching the 1.5°C mark that climate scientists describe as a point of no return, and a point that some places have already surpassed. Our response, or lack thereof, to this increasingly insurmountable problem will undoubtedly shape our future. Though this is a challenge the whole world faces together, it is not one which affects communities equitably.

Climate change and its impacts are predominantly felt by poor communities and states, exposed to not only the effects of climate change more strongly than those in privileged positions, but are more predisposed to damage and an inability to get back on their feet. With economies and livelihoods largely based on agriculture, food security and economic stability are already at risk in areas plagued by famine and economic underdevelopment, a threat that will grow with climate change and carbon emissions catalyzed by pollution. Rising sea levels, desertification, and extreme temperatures will inevitably displace millions of people and create a climate refugee crisis exacerbated by poverty and existing inequity, and the health of billions of people will be at risk with diseases and conditions becoming more severe.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) stands at the core of the action in the fight against climate change. The UNEP tackles the climate crisis in various ways including transition to low and zero carbon emission in key sectors such as energy, agriculture, buildings, forestry, industry, and transport.

Topic Breakdown

Types of Pollution

We would like delegates to focus on mitigation efforts and possible courses of action for the following types of pollution:

Air Pollution

The issue of air pollution has been known to widely affect developing nations, such as China and India. The bioaccumulation of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) can have disastrous consequences on human health and the environment, especially since these chemicals are resistant to biodegradation. In 2017, pollution of both water and air resulted in the deaths of over 2.3 million people in India alone, a toll that reached 8.3 million people worldwide and represented 15% of all deaths that year. Many of these premature deaths due to pollution can be found in places where both air and water quality are not well maintained or maintained at all, thus harming the people who contribute the least to the problem of excess greenhouse gas emissions.

Water Pollution

The fundamental cause of water pollution is agricultural waste, due to the use of fertilizers and pesticides, that seeps into groundwater stores and surface stores. Water contamination and diseases linked to water, such as malaria and water borne diseases, are preventing billions from experiencing their right to health, and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) recognizes that “the continuing contamination, depletion and unequal distribution of water is exacerbating existing poverty.” Warming water temperatures and increased ocean acidification has arisen from rising levels of carbonic acid mixed with the effect of global warming leading to the bleaching of coral reefs, endangering the marine communities that rely on them for their basic survival. Another pertinent issue that needs to be addressed is marine plastic pollution with emphasis on microplastics, particularly with the recent X-Press Pearl maritime disaster that occurred on the coast of Sri Lanka.

Soil Pollution

Soil pollution has now become a widespread problem due to the improper management of industrial and agricultural waste. Anthropogenic soil pollution is due to the release of dangerous chemicals such as heavy metals, hydrocarbons found in petroleum, and pesticides. There is an increased need to find methods to regulate the use of pesticides and develop concrete national action plans to prevent contamination of the soil environment. Food security, which is outlined in the 2nd SDG, Zero Hunger, is heavily threatened by pollution and climate change. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines food security to be a “situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” One mechanism through which this

will occur is increased food prices brought on by the decreasing availability of food, due to lower crop yields, particularly affecting low income consumers who are already stretched too thin financially. With 90% of those who face malnutrition living in developing countries, it becomes clear that poverty and malnutrition are inextricably linked where malnutrition is both a consequence and a reinforcer of poverty.

Disposal of Waste

Improper waste disposal has been the cause of damage to ecosystems due to exposure to hazardous waste material through shipping and careless treatment of waste products. Waste disposal is an issue that needs to be regulated, as the go to destination of the majority of hazardous and plastic waste products are less economically developed countries (LEDCs). The Basel Convention and Stockholm Declaration try to lessen these impacts; however, illicit waste disposal continues to ensue. Research and Development (R&D) plays a huge role in the discovery of POPs although there is a lack of funding directed towards these attempts. Furthermore, there also remains the question of feasible methods of radioactive waste disposal with geological disposal facilities being the most comprehensive solution as of yet.

Effect on Health

Diseases and death that arise as a result of air and water pollution are also expected to worsen with climate change. As temperatures continue to rise, so will the amount of ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog that can blanket entire metropolitan areas such as New Delhi, India where breathing the air is equivalent to smoking 50 cigarettes a day on the health of your lungs. Discrimination and racism also play a big role in who gets exposed to the worst of air and water pollution. Altogether, climate change and public health are inextricably linked, and their entanglement ranges from heat-aggravated illnesses to tick-borne diseases and from healthcare infrastructure to discrimination against low-income and non-white communities as it relates to pollution exposure.

2030 Sustainable Development Goals

The 13th Sustainable Development Goal calls for urgent action to be taken to combat climate change and its detrimental impacts. Considering the issue of waste management and pollution, the head table would like delegates to have a comprehensive understanding of zero waste concepts, such as in a circular economy (which is directly tied into SDG 12 regarding responsible consumption and production). Delegates should also keep in mind the 14th and 15th SDGs which concern the effects of pollution and climate change on organisms both above land and below water when carrying out their research.

Points to Consider

The Head Table believes that researching on the following points would provide useful information for debate.
This is not an exhaustive list.

● The international legal and policy framework regarding transboundary pollution and waste disposal, such as, the Basel Convention, the Rotterdam Convention, and the Stockholm Convention
● Issues on completing sustainable development goals 2030 as a result of climate change due to pollution.
● Integrality of the research conducted on climate change and the effect of pollution towards it.
● Procedures on avoiding negative impacts on some necessary human activities in taking actions against pollution.
● Effectiveness of the systems that contribute towards making citizens aware on climate change and pollution, and the percentage of the current population which possesses an understanding.
● Methods of combating pollution with the advancement of the modern technology.
● Validity of beliefs on pollution and climate change relationships which are considered factual in society.
● Analyzing the viability of alternate methods of waste disposal
● Discussing grassroots level solutions to the prevention of pollution with special emphasis on recycling
● The concepts of a circular economy and net zero carbon emissions
● The protection of populations most vulnerable to public health hazards catalyzed by pollution as a result of poverty, discrimination, unequal access to healthcare, and other pre-existing conditions
● Ensuring the protection of the four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization, and stability with special emphasis on soil pollution

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