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I. The effects of climate change on poverty

Introduction

Populations across the world are exposed to the growing and ravaging impact of climate change. These are devastating evidence of both a rapidly changing climate and an urgent need for solutions. It is hard to ignore the well-known fact that the resulting environmental impacts are disproportionately affecting our planet's most vulnerable people.¹ News displaying millions of people being displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption will soon be a daily occurrence, an indicator that climate change's greatest impact could very well be on human migration. No less than 200 million climate migrants are expected by 2050, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change². While climate change affects every Member State, its impacts are not felt and manifested equally. Families already burdened by poverty and a marginalized and oppressed groups often suffer the most from the consequences, while being the least able to cope.³ Their struggle to earn a living, feed their families and create stable homes is made more difficult every day the climate crisis continues. The increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, wildfires and droughts threaten lives in these communities, driving people from their homes and jeopardizing food sources, water sources and livelihoods. All these effects increase the issues of hunger and poverty.⁴ Every year more trees and soil are lost. Billions of people live on weak agricultural land, putting them at risk of hunger, poverty and displacement.⁵ Also, people already living in poverty rely mostly on agriculture and natural resources to survive.⁶ While everyone around the world feels the effects of climate change, the most vulnerable are people living in the world's poorest countries and who have limited financial resources to cope with disasters, as well as farmers, herders and fishers who depend on the climate and natural resources for food and income. Moreover, rising sea levels, extreme weather events and prolonged droughts force millions of people every year to lose or move away

¹ S.A., IFRC & WWF, (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), WORKING WITH NATURE TO PROTECT PEOPLE HOW NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS REDUCE CLIMATE CHANGE AND WEATHER-RELATED DISASTERS [en ligne], adresse URL: https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/IFRC_%26_WWF_V

² IOM international organization for migration, migration and climate change no13

³ S.A., IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>

⁴ S.A., United Nations foundation, (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), CLIMATE ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2023: TOWARD COP 28 AND FASTER, MORE URGENT CLIMATE ACTION [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://unfoundation.org/>

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid*

from their homes in search of food, water, shelter or jobs.⁷ Unpredictable weather patterns, shifting seasons and natural disasters disproportionately threaten already weakened populations, endangering their livelihoods and increasing their risk of poverty and hunger.

International and Regional Framework

Eliminating poverty and promoting human rights are interrelated objectives mentioned in many international treaties and regional frameworks, like the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office Management Plan, the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly and The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The persistence of extreme poverty and the recurrence of violations of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights are continuously reinforcing, especially with the omnipresent menace of the climate crisis⁸. A wide range of human rights standards are also relevant to environmental issues. *Articles 1 and 55 in the United Nations Charter (1945)* are the very first international for the protection of human rights as well as *articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*.⁹ Also, *the Paris Agreement*¹⁰ (2015) which is a legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by 196 Member States at the 21st Conference of the parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, whose goal is to limit global warming to below and increase of the global earth temperature of 2 degrees, preferably even 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 2018-2021 Office Management Plan aims at ensuring that: "International and national environmental and climate policies and plans increasingly are implemented in accordance with international human rights standards."¹¹ This framework indicates the responsibilities of Member States and all people to respect all human rights, including those caused by environmental degradation and climate change. OHCHR seeks to advance a human rights-based strategy to climate action in accordance with the

⁷ S.A., Amnesty International , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), Climate Change [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/>

⁸ S.A., United Nations foundation, (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), CLIMATE ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2023: TOWARD COP 28 AND FASTER, MORE URGENT CLIMATE ACTION [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://unfoundation.org/>

⁹ S.A., UDHR, (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), Universal Declaration of Human Rights [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>

¹⁰ S.A., United Nations , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), The Paris Agreement [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>

¹¹ S.A., United Nations Human Rights : Office of the High Commissioner , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), General Assembly of the United Nations : High-Level Meetings of the 77th Session [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change>

2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change. As a result, States are working globally on implementing comprehensive and efficient adaptation and mitigation strategies to include all populations and groups impacted by climate change. The plan identified what actions and measures would be implemented to achieve this goal, such as "collaboration with partners to integrate human rights in environmental laws and policies, support for the inclusion of civil society in environmental decision-making processes, access to information and effective remedies for victims."¹²

The 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly opened in 2022 aimed at “A watershed moment: transformative solutions to interlocking challenges”¹³, acknowledged and discussed global crises such as COVID-19, climate change and its effect on women and girls as well as the need for solutions, global sustainability and resilience.¹⁴ Like all crises, climate change and conflict have unique and disproportionate impacts on women and girls, such as economic fallout, heightened risk of violence towards women and girls and suffering.¹⁵ These crises heightened the slow advancement of women’s rights, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) role is addressing climate change and disaster-related displacement. UNHCR reiterated the importance for Member states to work together, to mobilize finance and adapt to protect communities, minorities, and natural habitats. UNHCR is urging all parties to combat the growing and disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis on the most vulnerable countries and communities, particularly those who are displaced, environmental migrants and refugees, because of the consequences of climate change.¹⁶ They encourage Member States to support vulnerable countries and communities in their efforts to rapidly scale up prevention and preparedness measures to avert, minimize and address displacement. "The climate crisis is a human crisis. It is driving displacement and makes life harder

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ S.A., United Nations , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), The Paris Agreement [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>

¹⁴ S.A., United Nations Human Rights : Office of the High Commissioner , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), General Assembly of the United Nations : High-Level Meetings of the 77th Session [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change>

¹⁵ S.A., UN women , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), Climate Change [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories>

¹⁶ S.A., UNHCR : The UN refugee agency , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), Climate change and disaster displacement [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

for those already forced to flee. UNHCR is providing protection and assistance to many refugees and other people displaced by the effects of climate change, as well as helping them increase their resilience to future disasters."¹⁷

Role of the International System

Without action to reduce exposure and vulnerability, climate change and weather-related disasters will cause unprecedented social, economic and environmental losses. Consequently, the international system, hence the United Nation, and its organs, like UNEA, are indispensable.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the main governing body for the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the world's highest-level environmental decision-making body, with universal membership of all 193 Member States. The fifth session of the UENA was held from February 22nd to March 28th. According to the United Nations Environment Assembly's fifth session (UNEA-5), we possess the necessary expertise, resources, and technology to transition to a future that is positive for nature and brings advantages for our health, economies, and future prospects. The fifth session tackled the world's population growth, the increasing climate catastrophes and its impact on populations, and landscapes deterioration. "Nature, when managed properly, may play a critical role in alleviating poverty, creating jobs, and fostering long-term economic prosperity."¹⁸ The UENA is currently planning its sixth session, which will take place from February 26 to March 1 in 2024, at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Program in Nairobi, Kenya. The Secretariat has suggested three potential themes for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6): Environmental multilateralism for the future: First, promoting healthy economies, societies, and the planet, second advancing the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and third, multilateral approaches to tackling climate change, nature loss, and pollution.

Another important body involved in the impact of climate change is the *United Nations International Organization for Migration* (IOM). The IOM, as the leading intergovernmental migration agency, has been actively working with Member States and partners, on operational and scientific, policy and advocacy to bring environmental migration to the center of international,

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ S.A., UN environment assembly , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), NATURE FOR POVERTY ERADICATION, JOBS AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/nature-poverty-eradication-jobs-and-economic-prosperity>

regional and national concerns.¹⁹ Since 2007, Member States have requested IOM within its governing bodies to work on migration, environment and climate change and thus recognize the necessity to intensify national, regional and international efforts to address human mobility challenges associated with environmental factors and climate change.²⁰ “IOM’s objectives concerning migration, environment and climate change are: to prevent forced migration that results from environmental factors to the extent possible, to provide assistance and protection to affected populations when forced migration does occur in situations of environmental and climate change, and to seek durable solutions to their situation and to facilitate migration in the context of climate change adaptation and enhance the resilience of affected communities.”²¹

1. The aftermath of extreme weather events on women in underdeveloped countries

It is a reality that weather disasters are gender neutral, yet their impacts are not.²² Disproportionate disaster outcomes are driven by the fact that women are more vulnerable to climate change and weather-related disasters and their impact.²³ Also confirmed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s secretariat in December 2008, it was formally recognized at the 14th Conference of the Parties: “the gender dimension of climate change and its impacts are likely to affect men and women differently.”²⁴ Due to their fewer income-earning opportunities and their larger share of agricultural work, women tend to be listed among the most vulnerable to climate change. In addition to that, by managing their household and caring for their family members, they are limiting their mobility and thus increasing their vulnerability to weather related natural disasters.²⁵ It is also worth mentioning the fact that women are more likely to rely on the environment for their employment. With agriculture being the most important economic sector for female employment in developing countries,²⁶ female farmers find themselves more vulnerable to

¹⁹ S.A., IOM : UN migration , (réf. du 3 janvier 2023), MIGRATION, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.iom.int/migration-environment-and-climate-change>

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*

²² UN Women (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), EXPLAINER: HOW GENDER INEQUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ARE INTERCONNECTED, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ UNFPA (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), FACING A CHANGING WORLD: WOMEN, POPULATION AND CLIMATE, [en ligne], adresse URL: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/state_of_world_population_2009.pdf

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ GIROUD, Axèle, HUAMAN, Salguero, Investment in agriculture and gender equality in developing countries, 2019, volume 26
adresse URL: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaeia2019d3a4_en.pdf

climate induced disasters. What's more, it has been proven that climate change in underdeveloped countries tends to cause an increase in gender-based violence. Women are often the ones expected to ensure the sufficiency in food for the family. According to Ines Smith, gender Advisor of Oxfam in the United Kingdom, the problems caused by weather events on farmers tend to increase the burden for women and girls, especially in low income countries.²⁷ According to a report presented by Caribbean UN women, women in coastal areas, where fishing is a big part of the country's economy, often have to find additional sources of income, such as working as domestic helpers for more affluent families, on top of their usual household chores, due to the harsh impact of climate change on the fishing industry.²⁸ The long standing gender inequalities have impacted women's decision-making abilities, their access to resources and training, mobility, etc. This inevitably puts women and girls at a greater risk when disasters hit. They tend to have a lesser chance to access relief and assistance which decreases their chance of survival and increases their chance of injury. This results in the creation of a vicious cycle of vulnerability to future disasters²⁹. Their limited access to services and health care and the constantly rising maternal risk is shown to be caused by climate change, which increases the spread of vector-borne illnesses, such as malaria, dengue fever, Zika virus, etc.³⁰ Drought and erratic rainfall force women to work harder to secure food, water, and energy for their homes. Girls drop out of school to help their mothers with these tasks. This cycle of deprivation, poverty and inequality undermines the social capital needed to deal effectively with climate change.

2. The impact of climate change on climate migrants

Climate refugees being a status not endorsed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees due to the definition of the status of refugee, being a person that has "crossed an international border due to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion,

²⁷ UN (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), WOMEN... IN THE SHADOW OF CLIMATE CHANGE, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change>

²⁸ Caribbean UN Women (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), GENDER INEQUALITY OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK IN THE FISHERIES SECTOR, [en ligne], adresse URL: https://caribbean.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Gender%20Climate%20Change%2008%20Fisheries_F.pdf

²⁹ Un Women (réf. du 5 janvier 2023),, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>

³⁰ Ibid.

nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”³¹ that was set in the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is more accurate to refer to those affected by climate change as “persons displaced in context of disasters and climate change”³². We have been encountering a rapid growth in numbers of persons being displaced due to disasters and climate change in the past decades³³. It is a ticking time bomb that many believe will soon be too late to stop. In 2001, The Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies have estimated the number of climate refugees to be at 25 million³⁴, with a prediction, at the time, of 200 million refugees by 2050. In 2022, the UNHCR stated that there is an average of more than 20 million people being relocated yearly due to extreme weather events³⁵. At this rate, the International Environmental Partnership’s predictions are now indicating an estimate of 1,2 billion displacements to be expected by 2050.³⁶ Changes such as an increase varying between 1,8°C and 4°C in the world’s average temperature, a difference in rainfall patterns causing droughts, storms and floods, impacting the agricultural industry and the melting of glaciers, which will have a great impact on the fishing industry, are the cause of these increasing numbers of refugees that our world is seeing. In addition to this, climate change has a direct impact on the conflicts occurring between countries. In 2020, according to the UNHCR’s report, 95% of all conflict displacements that occurred that year have taken place in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change³⁷. Climate change presents a threat when it comes to food access, and economic security that leads to potential conflict and migrations. It can also cause a shift in the power balances of an economy, therefore igniting tensions between groups. This relocation more often than not can cause loss of documentation, gender discrimination, the risk of being born without a nationality, etc.³⁸ In addition to that, climate refugees are often denied the status of

³¹ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

³² UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER DISPLACEMENT, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

³³ Ibid

³⁴ The 2001 World Disasters Report IOM international organization for migration. Migration and climate change no13

³⁵ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER DISPLACEMENT, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), GLOBAL TRENDS, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends2020>

³⁸ THE WHITE HOUSE, Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration, October 2021, adresse URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report-on-the-Impact-of-Climate-Change-on-Migration.pdf>

“refugee”, that is because they do not fit the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) definition, which is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”³⁹

Conclusion

There is work to be done to stop climate change and reduce the impact of climate-induced tragedies as much as possible. Our goal at the moment is to reduce gender inequality when it comes to the climate crisis and help women in need. Women in underdeveloped countries are being put at risk due to their lack of resources and their status in the family. By acting fast, we have a real chance at slowing down the climate crisis that’s been going on and we will be able to ensure the survival of future generations. As mentioned, our planet’s most vulnerable are forced to run away from their homes in order to survive. Those who do not have the possibility to run, are forced to live in the atrocious aftermath of the weather disasters. Farmers witnessing their life’s work drowned and villages dying of hunger due to drought, that is the real impact of climate change. Delegates are welcome to review and discuss the impact of climate change on women and on climate refugees, as well as to find solutions that would allow us to see a decrease in the numbers that are currently to be expected for 2050. Many ways to reduce the consequences climate change has on women and on refugees exist, our goal is to find the ones that are appropriate and benefit each and every Member State.

³⁹ UNHCR (réf. du 5 janvier 2023), WHAT IS A REFUGEE?, [en ligne], adresse URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>

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II. Management of Harmful Substances and Hazardous Wastes

Introduction

The United Nations (UN), through the *Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal* (1989)⁴⁰, established a transnational definition of the concept of hazardous wastes, which are qualified as harmful or radioactive substances or objects that are “disposed of or are intended to be disposed of or are required to be disposed of by the provisions of national law”.⁴¹ Among these hazardous wastes are clinical wastes, oils, distillation products, wastes from the production of ink, resin, latex, and many more.⁴² In order to combat the effects of hazardous wastes on people’s health, the UN adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) (2030 Agenda); its third goal is to “[e]nsure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”⁴³, and aims, through clause 3.9, to reduce the number of deaths and illnesses caused by chemical wastes.⁴⁴ Proper management of chemical wastes, i.e., their use, movement and disposal, can have significant effects on human health, as discussed by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) during its second, fifth, seventh, eighteenth and nineteenth sessions.⁴⁵ In fact, the management of harmful substances and hazardous wastes is of utmost importance. The effects caused by certain molecules and chemical compounds resulting from the decomposition of these synthetic substances can cause cancer, reproductive or birth problems, and change vital structures in certain deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) groups.⁴⁶ In sites where hazardous wastes have been illegally dumped, “severe acute health effects have been reported”.⁴⁷

Regarding the environment, as reported by the secretariats of the Basel, Minamata, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, hazardous wastes produce adverse effects directly influencing global

⁴⁰ *Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal*, 22 March 1989, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 1902, p. 416.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, art. 1-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, annex I.

⁴³ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1), 2015 p. 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Chemicals and waste*, <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/chemicals-and-waste>

⁴⁶ World Health Organization, *Dioxins and their effects on human health*, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dioxins-and-their-effects-on-human-health>

⁴⁷ WHO, *Waste and human health: Evidence and needs*, 5-6 November 2015, United Nations, WHO Meeting Report, p.19.

warming by accelerating the melting of Arctic glaciers, increasing drought and desertification, increasing the number of forest fires, and more.⁴⁸ Therefore, it is essential for Member States to take concrete actions in order to limit the use of these harmful substances which will be transformed, after use, into toxic wastes, as well as to increase worldwide vigilance regarding their disposal.

International Framework

The involvement of the international community in the management of harmful substances and hazardous wastes is essential. That is why the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) developed a policy framework which aims to ensure the proper management of chemical wastes and materials around the world: the *Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management* (2001).⁴⁹ The CSD, during its 19th session, also tackled the issue regarding chemicals and wastes.⁵⁰ Similarly, the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* (2002) re-insists on the implication of Member States in hazardous waste management to ensure a healthier future for both humans and the environment.⁵¹ These policies are largely based on *Agenda 21* (1992),⁵² which established an overall goal to reduce the amount of hazardous wastes generated by Member States and also better manage their movement and disposal. The 20th chapter of *Agenda 21* tackles the “environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes, including prevention of illegal international traffic in hazardous wastes”,⁵³ whereas the 21st chapter covers the “environmentally Sound Management of Solid Wastes and Sewage-related issues”⁵⁴.

In addition to the many frameworks which have been established throughout time to protect the world’s health by managing and reducing hazardous wastes, several conventions have also been adopted on the subject. The *Basel Convention* (1989) is a pioneer with regards to the management of these substances and its *Ban Amendment* (1995), which entered into force in 2019, prohibits all

⁴⁸ Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm Conventions and the Minamata Convention on Mercury, *Chemicals, wastes and climate change: Interlinkages and potential for coordinated action*, May 2021, UN Environment Programme, p.16. https://www.mercuryconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021-07/Climate_Change_Interlinkages.pdf

⁴⁹ Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, *Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management*, 29 October 2001. <http://www.saicm.org/About/Overview/tabid/5522/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁵⁰ Commission on Sustainable Development, *19th Commission on Sustainable Development*, 2 – 13 May 2011.

⁵¹ UN General Assembly, *Johannesburg plan of implementation*, 26 August-4 September 2002, par. 23.

⁵² UN General Assembly, *Agenda 21: programme of action for sustainable development*, 3-12 June 1992.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

exports of harmful chemicals listed in Annex IV of the Basel Convention to developing countries.⁵⁵ UNEP also held the fifth Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention in 1999,⁵⁶ during which the *Protocol on Liability and Compensation for damage resulting from transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal* (1999)⁵⁷ was adopted.

Additionally, the *Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade* (1998), the *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants* (2001) and the *Minamata Convention on Mercury* (2013) are of importance. The *Rotterdam Convention* forbids the export of certain chemicals and pesticides listed in its Annex III, unless the importing State has consented to it.⁵⁸ This treaty does not prohibit the use of the enumerated substances, but rather regulates their international trade by allowing States to prevent them from entering their territory. On the other hand, the *Stockholm Convention* banned the use of certain pesticides and industrial chemicals and restricted the use of others through transitional provisions that aim to progressively phase them out.⁵⁹ Finally, the *Minamata Convention* is aimed specifically at preventing the harmful effects of mercury emissions and releases through, inter alia, regulating the substance's life cycle, mining, export and import, storage and disposal.⁶⁰

Role of the International System

With 193 Member States, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) serves as the primary governing body for UNEP and is the most prominent and encompassing organization on the topic of environment. All decisions made by the UNEA are reported to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The UNEP Chemicals and Health Branch is leading UNEP's efforts on chemicals and waste; it serves as the UN system's primary catalyst for coordinated international action on their environmentally sound management.⁶¹ Its work reflects

⁵⁵ UN General Assembly, *The Ban Amendment*, 1995.

⁵⁶ UN General Assembly, *5th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP5) to the Basel Convention*, 6-10 December 1999, United Nations.

⁵⁷ UN Environment Programme, *Basel Protocol on Liability and Compensation for Damage Resulting from Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal*, 10 December 1999, United Nations.

⁵⁸ *Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade*, 10 September 1998, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 2244, p. 337.

⁵⁹ *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants*, 22 May 2001, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 2256, p. 119.

⁶⁰ *Minamata Convention on Mercury*, 10 October 2013, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 3202.

⁶¹ UN Environment Programme, *Emerging issues*, <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/emerging-issues>

the global objectives set by governments and other stakeholders, as well as the objectives pursued by its governing body, the UNEA.⁶²

A number of reports on chemicals and waste management were presented during UNEA's two-part 5th session.⁶³ The first session was held online in February 2021, and second session of was held online and in-person in Nairobi, Kenya the following year.⁶⁴ The session's overarching topic, "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," emphasized the crucial role that nature plays in our lives and in the pursuit of social, economic, and environmental sustainability.⁶⁵ Member States had the chance to exchange sustainable best practices in order to safeguard and preserve the environment.⁶⁶ Member States discussed emerging concerns including the improvement of the science-policy interface, and the assessment of current global issues of concern.⁶⁷ UNEA adopted by consensus the following resolutions: United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme resolution 5/2 (2022), resolution 5/5 (2022), and resolution 5/7 (2022).⁶⁸

Although various UN agencies are engaged on an individual basis, cooperation in this area is essential to reach the common objective of sound chemical and waste management. The Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) serves as the basis for this collaboration. Founded in 1995, IOMC is a forum for initiating and coordinating international efforts to increase their effectiveness and currently has nine participating organizations.⁶⁹ In addition to UNEP, these organizations are the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.⁷⁰ They contribute to the IOMC in order to encourage

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The United Nations Environment Assembly, <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The United Nations Environment Assembly, *Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly*, UNEA News, <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea5>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ UN Environment Programme, *Proceedings of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session* (UNEP/EA.5/28*), 8 March 2022, p. 13

⁶⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁹ WHO, Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, 2010.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

coordination of the policies and initiatives implemented, either jointly or individually, to achieve good management of chemicals in connection to human health and the environment.⁷¹

Impact on ecosystems and biodiversity

Harmful substances and hazardous waste have substantial negative effects on the environment due to improper management. Chemical pollution from industrial operations and poor waste management frequently leads to ecosystem degradation and consequent detrimental effects on biodiversity. In the third *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, published by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, pollution is identified as one of the five primary factors directly causing biodiversity loss.⁷² Since 1980, plastic pollution has multiplied tenfold with 300–400 million tonnes of industrial waste, including toxic sludge, heavy metals, and solvents, that have been dumped into the world's oceans annually.⁷³

On the other hand, fertilizer waste into coastal ecosystems has resulted in more than 400 ocean “dead zones” that collectively cover more than 245,000 km².⁷⁴ The influence of pesticides and fertilizers on biodiversity loss and land degradation is one of the primary concerns of common interest.⁷⁵ Modern industrial processes, such as agricultural practises have more than doubled the amount of reactive nitrogen given particularly the use of fertilisers.⁷⁶ Although nutrient contamination has leveled off in parts of Europe and North America, it is expected to rise in other areas, posing a serious danger to aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity.⁷⁷ Excess nutrients from sewage, industrial waste, agriculture, or aquaculture produce eutrophication, altering biodiversity, water quality, biomass, and oxygen levels, as emphasized in the inaugural *Global Wetland Outlook*.⁷⁸ This has a direct influence on wildlife availability and abundance, which is critical for

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² UN Environment Programme, *Assessment on linkages with other clusters related to chemicals and waste management and options to coordinate and cooperate on areas of common interest*, February 2020, p. 25.

⁷³ United Nations, *UN Report: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

⁷⁴ UN Environment Programme, *Assessment on linkages with other clusters related to chemicals and waste management and options to coordinate and cooperate on areas of common interest*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

attaining sustainable consumption and supporting lives, employment, and economies in many communities i.e., environmental security.

1. Environmental Security

Environmental security is “defined as the process of establishing the security of those environmental factors – water, soil, air, vegetation, biodiversity, climate and others – that are prime components of a nation’s environmental foundations that ultimately underpin all its socioeconomic activities, and hence its political stability.”⁷⁹ Environmental security is critical to national security because it encompasses “the dynamics and interconnections among the natural resource base, the social fabric of the State, and the economic engine for local and regional stability.”⁸⁰

One of the most harmful substances that undermines environmental security is mercury.⁸¹ It destroys sensitive species and damages ecosystems in a permanent and irreversible manner due to its high toxicity.⁸² It can circulate in the environment for generations after being emitted from industry and other man-made sources.⁸³ It will be several years or decades before reductions in mercury emissions have a discernible impact on mercury levels in the environment and the food chain.⁸⁴ According to the *Global Mercury Assessment 2013* report, emissions of the hazardous metal from artisanal gold mining have more than increased since 2005, owing in part to new and better knowledge, but also to growing gold prices, which are anticipated to rise further.⁸⁵ Among other findings in the study, UNEP emphasizes the growing levels of mercury in the Arctic animal species, where an estimated 200 tonnes of mercury are deposited each year, typically distant from its source.⁸⁶ Since mercury “bio-accumulates” in the food chain, larger species such as shark,

⁷⁹ African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, *Environmental security AMCEN/16/EGM/5*, 15 May, 2017 UN Environment Programme, p.1.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ UNEP, Annual Report 2012, 2012, p. 84.

⁸² UN Environmental Programme, *Promoting the sound management of chemicals and waste*, <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/promoting-sound-management-chemicals-and-waste>

⁸³ UN News, *New UN environment studies show rising mercury threat to people in developing countries*, 10 January, 2013, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/01/429592-new-un-environment-studies-show-rising-mercury-threat-people-developing>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

swordfish, tuna, and marlin typically have mercury concentrations that are particularly high.⁸⁷ High quantities of methylmercury, an organic chemical that builds up in fish bodies, may be ingested by people who consume a lot of seafood.⁸⁸ Indigenous peoples have experienced mercury poisoning by eating marine species in many different places of the world, particularly in the Arctic.⁸⁹ According to UNEP's *Global Mercury Assessment 2018*, per capita seafood intake in those communities might be up to 15 times greater than in non-indigenous people.⁹⁰ For sustainable development to thrive in its social, economic, and environmental facets, proper management of chemicals and waste is crucial and, within that context, industries have significant responsibilities to play.

2. The Management of Harmful Substances and hazardous wastes in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In its *2030 Agenda*, the UN General Assembly adopted a series of goals aimed at fighting for the well-being of the environment, such as its 3rd goal to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", which, through target 3.9,⁹¹ aims at decreasing the number of deaths and illnesses caused by the disposal of chemical and toxic wastes and by all the pollution that results from it. The *2030 Agenda*'s 6th goal aims to "[e]nsure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all"; target 6.3 is set up to improve water quality by asking concerned Member States to reduce the amount of hazardous wastes discharged into water and to increase the recycling of these substances.⁹² Through its 12th goal to "[e]nsure sustainable consumption and production patterns", target 12.4 invites the Member States concerned to "achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment"⁹³ by 2020.

⁸⁷ UN Environment Programme, *Why mercury is still a threat to human and planetary health*, 24 March, 2022, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/why-mercury-still-threat-human-and-planetary-health>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹² Ibid., p. 18.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 23.

Conclusion

Harmful chemicals and hazardous waste are an issue that is becoming increasingly significant due to the potential negative influence on the environment and humanity. It affects several areas such as industrial production, commerce, and economic development and growth, therefore threatening environmental security. UNEP works on this problem alone, but also collaborates with many other organizations to pool resources and build on existing accomplishments. With increased commerce and economic activity, the issue has become transboundary. This can include the transport of hazardous trash from one nation to another or the use of hazardous compounds in the manufacture of items that are subsequently sold in various countries. In exploring this topic, delegates should ask themselves questions such as: how can Member States keep track of the amount of hazardous and chemical wastes present on their territory? What are the effects of toxic waste on global warming and on climate migrants? How can the international community develop an effective health network to counter the harmful effects of hazardous waste? How can Member States less affected by this waste aid Member States more at risk? How can Member States ensure the safe movement of hazardous materials? How can we avoid the accumulation of waste in drop-off locations? How can Member States finance the protection of their territory?

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