UN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM
Background:

The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was founded at the 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Rights and the Environment in Stockholm. The Stockholm Conference ended with the declaration that earth’s natural resources are limited thus humans regulation is crucial. It was the first committee to officially recognized and addressed environmental concerns.

The UNEP’s Earth Watch is a distinguished element of the organization. It was implemented in order to monitor and facilitate to exchange of environmental information among governments. Since implementing, Earth Watch, a cohesive information collection system for the planet, information can be equally distributed and collected through a neutral party.

The UNEP fights on many fronts such as reducing climate change initiatives, ecosystem management, chemicals, and waste reduction and minimizing environmental threats in conflict-torn areas.

Mission of The UNEP:

Our shared mission at UNEP is to provide “leadership and encouragement” to the international community in order to ensure that the quality of life on earth does not worsen for future generations. “The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.”

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1https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Environment-Programme
2http://www.un.org/earthwatch/
3https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment
Achievements:
The UNEP has made many strides in the fight for a less polluted planet. Some of the most monumental conferences as highlighted by the UNEP 2017 report are the legally binding The Minamata Convention on Mercury and The Convention on Biological Diversity, along with the Montreal Protocol.4

On August 2017 the Minamata Convention on Mercury came into effect. The Minamata disease was first discovered in Minamata, Japan in 1956. Many died as a result of mercury poisoning others were gravely ill. The convention produced a global treaty that vows to protect human lives and the environment.5

The Convention on Biodiversity came into effect in December of 1998. There are currently 193 participating nations. The convention is viewed as instrumental for sustainable development since it protects the diversity of “ecosystems, animals, plants, fungi, microorganism, and genetic diversity.”6

Lastly, The Montreal Protocol of 1987 has over 200 nations as signatories. The convention addressed the depletion of the Earth’s ozone layer caused by man-made gases that would lead to increased skin cancer and cataracts rates.7 The urgency of this committee steams from fundamental reality that when the environment is weakened human lives are jeopardized thus proper guidance is essential. This is committee has a commitment to continue being a catalyst for change.

Goals for this Committee:

5https://www.unenvironment.org/annualreport/2017/index.php
7https://www.state.gov/e/oes/eqt/chemicalpollution/83007.htm
The UNEP tackles a wide variety of environmental concerns through innovative initiatives. Collaboration among nations is the only way to effectively fight the threat of pollution. This committee should have the shared goal of implementing, strengthening, and expanding environmental protections in order to preserve global equity through environmental sustainability efforts. The UNEP “promotes international cooperation on environmental issues.”

The responsibility of this committee is to pass resolutions. Diplomatic language and discussions are required.

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Topic A: Promoting Ecological Sustainability in Conflict Zones

Background:

The quality of life in economically prosperous and politically stable regions has been steadily inclining. Yet in conflict-torn areas, they lack suitable development initiatives which threaten the well being the environment. In January of 2016, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in the 2015 UN summit. The UN defines sustainable development, “As development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future for people and planet. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.”

This committee will focus on building environmental protections efforts in conflict-torn areas highlighting goal 16 of the UN’s sustainable development agenda.

The Problem:

The ecological well-being of areas in which parties are or were engaged in conflict are uniquely at risk because issues of human survival and military necessity take precedence over conservation efforts. The destruction of buildings, vehicles, and industrial structures such as oil wells release harmful toxins into the air, soil, and water. In some cases vegetation is used as a means of cover by belligerents thus the natural environment itself becomes a target with strategic value. The negative effects of warfare are not constrained to zones of active combat. Areas where military exercises are undertaken are also put at risk, as well as those where previous combat has reduced the infrastructure needed for responders to clean up debris/hazardous waste.

Cases:

10 https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/
In 1991, ~11,000,000 barrels of oil were spilled into the Persian Gulf from Iraqi-occupied Kuwait in what was one of the worst oil spills in history. During the following invasion of Kuwait hundreds of oil wells were set ablaze resulting in an immediate region-wide decrease in air quality.\textsuperscript{12} The same scorched-earth policy that resulted in the disastrous oil fires and spillage in Kuwait has recently been employed by Isis militants on the retreat in the north of Iraq.\textsuperscript{13}

One of the most visible instances of environmental destruction was the use of defoliant chemicals during the Vietnam War. In this case, environmental degradation was not a side-effect but a strategic objective. The compound, which takes decades to fully break down, has since poisoned millions of Vietnamese civilians across generations. The effect on wildlife has been predictably negative due to habitat loss.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Current Issues:}

\textbf{Syria:} Since the outbreak of the civil war several areas of concern have arisen regarding Syria’s environmental health. The war has caused a breakdown of the country’s waste management, water management, and electric infrastructures. Resulting from this, those living in the urban areas, already overcrowded with refugees, have resorted to burning whatever vegetation is available for charcoal. Syrians have also resorted to the unregulated dumping and burning of waste.\textsuperscript{15} Further contributing to the lowering of Syria’s air quality are oil fires set by ISIS.

The poor water management leading up to the war became critical when the conflict started. Lack of irrigation led to large agricultural areas being abandoned leading to dustbowl-like conditions. In 2015 a dust storm swept through Iraq and Syria that was caused by soil erosion.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{12}] http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/01/03/sproject.irq.kuwait.oil.fires/
  \item[\textsuperscript{13}] https://www.climatechangenews.com/2017/08/23/photos-reveal-iraq-oil-fires-burning-behind-isis-retreat/
  \item[\textsuperscript{14}] https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/agent-orange-1
  \item[\textsuperscript{15}] reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/pax-report-amidst-the-debris-syria-web.pdf
  \item[\textsuperscript{16}] https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-scientists-syrian-war-was-one-of-causes-for-dust-storm-1.5406082
\end{itemize}
**Congo (DR):** A characteristic of the Second Congo War, also known as the African World War, was large-scale poaching and the plundering of natural resources to fund the war effort. The exploitation of diamonds, cobalt, gold, and other minerals was investigated by the UN in 2001, resulting in sanctions being placed on neighboring nations involved in said exploitation. The displacement of large numbers of people has also had negative environmental consequences for the Congo. Since the formal end of the war, over 2.4 million people have been displaced and fled to refugee camps. The expansion of areas settled by refugees, sometimes within the boundaries of national parks, has encroached on the habitats of wildlife; a peak of 89 hectares of forest were cut down each day for fuelwood harvesting. Resettlement of refugees has also contributed to unplanned urban growth, resulting in waste management problems.

**Columbia:** During the conflict between the Colombian government and FARC guerrillas there were several instances of sabotage of oil pipelines that caused severe damage to wetlands ecosystems. Despite the negotiation of peace between FARC forces and the Colombian government, other guerrilla groups have continued bombing oil pipelines.

**Previous Actions:**

The First UN resolution addressing wartime environmental conservation was implied by the 1949 4th Geneva Convention protection of property. Environmental protections would be expanded in more explicit language in the 1972 World Heritage Convention that prohibited “any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments”. The designation of natural World Heritage Sites included “superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance”, “outstanding example[s] representing major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features”, “is an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems, and communities of plants and animals”, and “important and significant natural habitats for in-
situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation”.  

In 1992 the UN General Assembly passed resolution 47/37 which “Urge[d] States to take all measures to ensure compliance with the existing international law applicable to the protection of the environment in times of armed conflict”. In 2016 the UNEP passed resolution 2/15 which reinforced Res. 47/37 in addition to “Emphasiz[ing] the need for raising greater international awareness of the issue of environmental damage during armed conflicts and the need to adequately protect the environment when it is affected by armed conflict”. In 2016 the UNEP passed resolution 2/15 which reinforced Res. 47/37 in addition to “Emphasiz[ing] the need for raising greater international awareness of the issue of environmental damage during armed conflicts and the need to adequately protect the environment when it is affected by armed conflict”.  

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21 https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/  
22 http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r037.htm  
23 http://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/11189?show=full  
24 http://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/11189?show=full
Questions to Consider:
1. What concert measures can be done to combat environmental destruction resulting from armed conflict?
2. What institutions should be strengthened/created to monitor environmental concerns in conflict zones?
3. After conflict torn areas are stabilized, what resolutions can the UNEP pass to help repair and clean up the environmental damages?

Additional Resources:

UNEP:
https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/disasters-conflicts/why-do-disasters-and-conflicts-matter
www.un.org/zh/events/environmentconflictday/pdfs/int_law.pdf

Red Cross:


UNGA Res 47/37:
http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r037.htm

ENMOD:

Agent Orange:
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/incoming/last-ghost-of-the-vietnam-war/article1057457/?page=all
http://www.trwn.org/un-passes-first-ever-resolution-on-conflict-pollution/
Topic B: Coordinating Strategies to Reduce Public Waste

Background: What is Public Waste and What are the Concerns?

Public waste is any solid waste that the public disposes of. The Environmental Production Agency defines solid waste as waste that consists of “any garbage, refuse, sludge from a waste treatment plant, water supply treatment plant, or air pollution control facility and other discarded material including solid, liquid, semisolid, or contained gaseous material resulting from industrial, commercial, mining, and agricultural operations, and from community activities.” The UN Environment explains that solid waste is being disposed of at highly alarming volumes which puts the ecosystems and human health at serious risk. They specifically states that “Every year, an estimated 11.2 billion tonnes of solid waste is collected worldwide and decay of the organic proportion of solid waste is contributing about 5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.”

The UN Committee of the Environment Programme states that insufficiency and inconsistency of waste management systems around the world cause damages to the ecosystems and induces human health risks. These systems range from being non-existent to ineffective which results in air pollution as well as water and soil contamination. “Open and unsanitary landfills contribute to the contamination of drinking water and can cause infection and transmit disease.” Ecosystems are affected from the “dispersal of debris” which pollutes the atmosphere and “dangerous substances from electronic waste or industrial garbage puts a strain on the health of urban dwellers and the environment.”

Pollution

The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme released a report on December 2017 after the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet.” The causes of pollution are discussed

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26 United Nations Environment Programme. “Solid Waste Management.” UN Environment,

27 United Nations Environment Programme. “Solid Waste Management.” UN Environment,

28 United Nations Environment Programme. “Solid Waste Management.” UN Environment,
in the report as well as its repercussions to human health and the environment. Pollution, as defined in the report, is “the introduction of substances or energy into the environment with impacts that endanger human health, natural resources and ecosystems.”

Pollution comes in various forms, some are more transparent such as contaminated water or poor air quality, while other forms may be conspicuous such as chemicals that infect our drinking water, pesticides in our food, and substances that consume the ozone layer. The World Health Organization released data that 23% of the deaths worldwide in 2012, which is approximately 12.6 million people, had environmental related causes. This proves the detriments of pollution. The serious and various threats of pollution to human life, health, and ecosystems are depicted in the chart below.

![Impacts of types of pollutants on human health and ecosystems](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-02/documents/soliddef.pdf)


30 https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1708347e.pdf
There are several causes for pollution which includes but are not limited to: the abundance of waste that fills dumps and landfills, technology for industrial processes, and the packaging for products. A prime example of packaging the causes pollution is plastic. Pollution and debris not only harms human life, but wildlife and ocean life as well. Plastic is a primary example of how pollution threatens life on earth. Plastic contaminates and clutters the world’s land and oceans. Forbes addressed this issue in an article and referenced a study that predicted “that, by 2050, the mass of plastic in the world’s oceans will exceed the mass of all the fish that live there.” Plastic trash is found in the stomachs of “more than 90% of the world’s sea birds” and “more than half of the world’s sea turtles.” The majority of plastic is not biodegradable and therefore breaks down into small pieces, where it is then consumed by small animals and cannot be digested. This non-biodegradable product pollutes soil and air with toxins and can cause earthquakes through “fracking.” “It creates underground cavities that collapses into sinkholes, and it raises pressure in underground rock formations, destabilizing them and leading to earthquakes, even in places where earthquakes are uncommon.”

**Goals and Initiatives**

The excessive waste that continues to decay the environment and leads to pollution also results in the well-known issue of climate change. Climate change has become a heavy-weighted concern for the United Nations. UN Environment released a statement that the UN is looking “to reduce its environmental footprint.” Isabella Marras, the Coordinator of the Sustainable United Nations Team said, “UN Environment is committed to supporting the UN system in improving the environmental performance of its facilities and performance.”

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31 [https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1708347e.pdf](https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1708347e.pdf)


excessive waste being disposed that is deteriorating the earth’s ecosystem. Such solutions include the “minimization of waste” and, for waste that cannot be avoided, recycling and the remanufacturing of the waste into useful resources.  

The United Nations Environment Programme released a quarterly report on September 28, 2018 that examined the various steps that have been taken on a global scale to improve environmental conditions. One of which is “World Environment Day” that is annually organized “by UN Environment Programme [and] established under UN General Assembly Resolution A/RE 2994(XXVII).” The 2018 World Environment Day held the “Beat Plastic Pollution” theme to focus on the reduction of plastic waste. With the host country, India, pledging to terminate single-use plastic by 2022. There are ongoing contributions around the world, from the UN peacekeeping mission to convert plastic into paving stones in Goma and Rwanda to Malaysia creating what is known as the Bio Region food processing machines. These machines are meant to compost waste and reduce the quantity of trash going into landfills. They transform the waste into bio-liquid soil enhancers by grinding it with water and microbial solution.


37 http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25971/Executive%20Director%20Report%20to%20143%20CPR.pdf?sequence=21&isAllowed=y

38 http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25971/Executive%20Director%20Report%20to%20143%20CPR.pdf?sequence=21&isAllowed=y


Different initiatives have been taken as well, such as the increase trends of wind and solar power technology. This conversion from using fossil fuels for energy to utilizing renewable sources will address the issues of climate change and associated health risks.\footnote{https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1708347e.pdf}

There have been different projects created for an ocean clean-up. Boyan Slat, who was a Dutch high school student at the time, saw that “there were more plastic bags than fish.”\footnote{https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/blogs/remember-kid-who-invented-way-clean-ocean-plastic-hes-back-and-its-happening} As a result he worked on his own ocean cleanup project that did not involve nets that picked up waste in the ocean, along with the marine life. He created his “garbage-collecting booms” which are “massive floating booms that sit on top of the water and act like a mini-coastline... the boom can passively gather plastic waste and pull it to its center.”\footnote{https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/blogs/remember-kid-who-invented-way-clean-ocean-plastic-hes-back-and-its-happening} About once a month, a boat can collect the waste. There are also a number of companies who are joining in to clean up the ocean by recycling fishing gear and fish nets in their products. “Adidas, Interface, Volcom, Bureo, and now Pokonobe Associates—have created consumer products from recycled nets.”\footnote{https://www.worldoceanfest.org/new-blog/2017/6/9/the-impact-of-abandoned-ocean-fishing-nets-on-marine-life} Even the Jenga brand created a game out of recycled fish nets as well called Jenga® OceanTM.9.
Questions to Consider

1. What could a resolution from the UNEP address to reduce public waste?
2. What initiatives can countries take to reduce the use of non-biodegradable plastic waste?
3. What policies can the council adopt to protect wildlife around the world?
4. What can the council do to address the issue of recycling?
5. What key resolutions has the UNEP adopted in regards to the preservation of wild life and combatting public waste and pollution?

Additional Resources:

Exceptional and Rapid Accumulation of Anthropogenic Debris on one of the World’s most Remote and Pristine Islands
https://www.pnas.org/content/114/23/6052

Five Cities Beating Pollution

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch Isn’t What You Think

The Impact of Abandoned Fishing Nets on Marine Life

Ocean clean up

UN 50 anti-pollution actions:
http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/report-executive-director