

Committee: Environmental Commission (EC)

Issue: The issues of countries not signing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Hannah Clark, and I will have the honour of serving as the Deputy President of the Environmental Commission in the 4th session of ACGMUN. I am 16 years old and am a student at Campion School in Athens. This will be my third conference as a chair, and my fifth conference overall.

The Environmental Commission gives delegates a unique opportunity to learn more about current issues that affect the environment today. I trust that you will find these topics interesting, and I fully encourage you all to utilise this study guide and continue to further prepare for the conference through research of your own. Make sure you assess your own country's position on the matter at hand as much as possible, and try your best to familiarise yourselves with this topic.

I wish you all the best with your preparation and research, and I am very excited to meet you and to begin working with you. If you need any further clarification or have any questions you need to ask, please feel free to contact by email.

Best regards and good luck with your resolutions!

Hannah Clark

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Climate change has existed for millions of years, long before humans even existed. However, only within the past 30 years has it become a widespread problem, reaching, as scientists believe, a critical state, due to the increased burning of fossil fuels, carbon and methane emissions and deforestation that are a result of increased, ever advancing human activity. On the 23rd of June, 1988, an American scientist, Dr James Hansen, appeared in front of the US Congress to present his research on the increasing global temperatures over the previous century¹. There had been increasing awareness and concern surrounding the issue, but that specific event has been described as the turning point in the modern history of climate change.

Since then, the United Nations have led many efforts to work towards decreasing the harmful effects of human activity on the earth's climate. The United Nations Environmental Programme was established on the 5th of June, 1988², and has spent the past 40 years coordinating events, treaties and programmes that all work towards the organisation's aim to encourage sustainable development and reduce our footprint on the planet. This organisation helped to create the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and has since continued its work in overseeing the extensions of the UNFCCC (Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement) and in helping the international community to meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Climate Change

"Climate change is a long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns. Often climate change refers specifically to the rise in global temperatures from the mid-20th century to present."³

Conference of the Parties (COP)

"The COP is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention. All States that are Parties to the Convention are represented at the COP, at which they review the implementation of the Convention and any other legal instruments that the COP

¹ "Congressional Testimony of Dr. James Hansen, June 23, 1988." *Hansen Senate Testimony, June 23, 1988*, www.sealevel.info/1988_Hansen_Senate_Testimony.html

² "United Nations Environment Programme." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Environment-Programme

³ National Geographic Society. "Climate Change." *National Geographic Society*, 27 Mar. 2019, www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/climate-change/

adopts and take decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the Convention.”⁴

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

“A set of 17 goals adopted in 2015 by all United Nations member states as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.”⁵

Annex I Countries

“Annex I Parties include the industrialized countries that were members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in 1992, plus countries with economies in transition (the EIT Parties), including the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, and several Central and Eastern European States.”⁶

Annex II Countries

“Annex I countries that are not EITs, which are required to provide financial resources to enable developing countries to undertake emissions reduction activities under the Convention and to help them adapt to adverse effects of climate change.”⁷

Economies in Transition (EITs)

Economies in Transition (EITs) are economies that are changing from being under government control to being market economies.”⁸

Non-Annex 1 Countries

“Non-Annex I Parties are mostly developing countries. The Convention emphasizes activities that promise to answer the special needs and concerns of these vulnerable countries, such as investment, insurance and technology transfer.”⁹

Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

“Least developed countries (LDCs) are low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly

⁴ “Conference of the Parties (COP).” *Unfccc.int*, <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop>

⁵ “Sustainable Development Goals.” *UNDP*, www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html

⁶ “Parties & Observers.” *Unfccc.int*, <https://unfccc.int/parties-observers>

⁷ “Parties & Observers.” *Unfccc.int*, <https://unfccc.int/parties-observers>

⁸ “TRANSITION ECONOMY: Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/transition-economy>

⁹ “Parties & Observers.” *Unfccc.int*, <https://unfccc.int/parties-observers>

vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets.”¹⁰

Signatory to a treaty

“A State that is in political support of the treaty and willing to continue its engagement with the treaty process. This intent is codified as a “signature” submitted to the qualifying international body with oversight of the treaty or the authoritative body defined by the treaty.”¹¹

Party to a treaty

“The term “party” refers to a State that gives its explicit consent to be bound by the treaty.”¹²

More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs)

Countries with a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a high standard of living.

Gross Domestic Product

“Gross domestic product (GDP) is the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period.”¹³

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

Countries with a low GDP and a lower standard of living (in comparison to MEDCs).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

International cooperation surrounding this issue and finding ways to deal with it has been and will continue to be crucial. In the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set out by the UN in 2015, the 17th of them is about “partnership for the goals”, signifying the importance of cooperation.

¹⁰ “Least Developed Countries (LDCs) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category.html

¹¹ Dopplick, Renee. “Legal Obligations of Signatories and Parties to Treaties.” *Inside Justice*, www.insidejustice.com/intl/2010/03/17/signatory_party_treaty/

¹² Dopplick, Renee. “Legal Obligations of Signatories and Parties to Treaties.” *Inside Justice*, www.insidejustice.com/intl/2010/03/17/signatory_party_treaty/

¹³ Fernando, Jason. “Gross Domestic Product (GDP).” *Investopedia*, Investopedia, 13 Nov. 2020, www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gdp.asp

The creation of the UNFCCC is a result of a few other organisations and events that happened in the previous years. Notable examples include the International Panel on Climate Change, the 2nd World Climate Conference calling for Global Treaty, and the General Assembly negotiations beginning in 1990.

Rio Earth Summit

The Framework was opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit (formerly known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), which took place from the 3rd to the 14th of June, 1992. 154 states signed it on the 12th of June, and since then, the number has risen to 165. All 197 member states are party to the Convention, but 32 states are yet to formally sign it. Essentially, this means that while all 197 states are legally bound to the Convention and therefore required to enforce it, 32 have not officially expressed willingness to engage with further negotiations surrounding the issues that the Convention addresses. Whether they choose to do so or not is up to their discretion, but they have not formally committed to engaging in the processes of the Convention.

MEDCs and LEDCs in relation to the Convention

One of the biggest challenges of uniting all 197 member states in creating an agreement suitable for each state is the economic side of the adaptation process to the requirements of the Convention. Some states have, in the past, expressed that they believe that tackling climate change is not a big enough priority in comparison to issues they see as more pressing, namely in LEDCs.

The UNFCCC has become a platform upon which subsequent important treaties have been created, the main ones being the Kyoto Protocol, the Copenhagen Accord and the Paris Agreement.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Brazil

Brazil has signed and ratified the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, along with being one of the authors of the Copenhagen Accord. However, it has been a somewhat controversial country in regards to climate change, due to its high deforestation rate in the Amazon rainforest. In 2018, Brazil held the highest loss of rainforest in the world.¹⁴ This was largely due to the actions taken by the new government under President Jair Bolsonaro. Brazil's budget used to adapt to UNFCCC

¹⁴ "Brazil Led World in Rainforest Losses in 2018 despite Decline from 2017: Research Group." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 26 Apr. 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-deforestation/brazil-led-world-in-rainforest-losses-in-2018-despite-decline-from-2017-research-group-idUSKCN1S22CS

requirements, namely those of the Paris Agreement of 2015, has been cut, spending nothing in 2019.¹⁵

China

China has consistently been one of the highest emitting countries of greenhouse gases (GHGs), accounting for 27.92% of global emissions in 2019¹⁶. A recent announcement was made on the 22nd of September, 2020, from President Xi Jinping, where new outlines were announced to improve China's response to the issue. It was announced that China is aiming to achieve full carbon neutrality by 2060. Despite this, however, China still falls into the "highly insufficient" category in terms of the work it is doing to meet the Paris Agreement requirements. China is also an author of the Copenhagen Accord, as a member of the BASIC countries.

Iran

Iran has signed the Paris Agreement, but has not yet ratified it. This is an issue, as Iran is the second highest emitter of GHGs out of the few countries that are not actively enforcing the Paris Agreement, after the United States.

Turkey

Turkey has signed the Paris Agreement, but has not yet ratified it. Turkey is now the only member of the G20 countries that has not ratified the Paris Agreement. It was initially listed as an Annex I country, but, by Turkey's request, it is now listed as a Non-Annex country.

United States of America

The US under the Obama administration was very active in its participation in climate agreements and working towards reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Under the Trump administration, the US withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement and cut spending on climate change adjustment. As the US is the second largest greenhouse gas emitter, this was a very significant issue. However, the new Biden administration has already formally re-accepted the Paris Climate Agreement, and the US will officially reenter it on the 19th of February, 2021.¹⁷

¹⁵ Angelo, Mauricio. "Brazil Slashes Budget to Fight Climate Change as Deforestation Spikes." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 2 June 2020, www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-deforestation-climate-change-a-idUSKBN2392LC

¹⁶ Tiseo, Published by Ian, and Jan 5. "Largest Emitters of CO2 Worldwide 2019." *Statista*, 5 Jan. 2021, www.statista.com/statistics/271748/the-largest-emitters-of-co2-in-the-world/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20China%20was%20the,largest%20emitter%20the%20United%20States

¹⁷ "Secretary-General Welcomes US Return to Paris Agreement on Climate Change | | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1082602>

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
June 5 th , 1972	United Nations Environmental Programme established (UNEP).
February 12 th – 23 rd 1979	First World Climate Conference takes place.
June 23 rd , 1988	Dr. James Hansen gives Congressional testimony on his climate research.
1988	Establishment of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
October 29 th – November 7 th , 1990	Second World Climate Conference takes place, calls for Global Treaty.
December 1990	Framework Convention for Climate Change negotiations begin in Un General Assembly.
May 9 th , 1992	UNFCCC Adopted at UN Headquarters in New York.
June 3 rd – 14 th , 1992	Earth Summit in Rio takes place, convention is opened for signature.
March 21 st , 1994	UNFCCC enters into force.
December 11 th , 1997	Adoption of Kyoto Protocol.
December 18 th , 2009	Copenhagen Accord is produced.
February 16 th , 2005	Kyoto Protocol entered into force.
December 12 th , 2015	Paris Climate Agreement adopted.
November 4 th , 2016	Paris Climate Agreement entered into force.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

United Nations Convention on Climate Change, No. 30822

Published on the 21st of March, 1994. This is the official resolution in which all the necessary information surrounding the purpose, aims, work etc. etc. of the Convention were set out. It was opened for signature on the 12th of June, 1992.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted on the 11th of December, 1997, and entered into force on the 16th of February, 2005. Working through the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol calls industrialised countries and economies in transition (EITs) “to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets”.¹⁸



Figure 1: Status of signing and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol [1]

Copenhagen Accord

The Copenhagen Accord is a document drafted by 5 countries, the USA and the BASIC countries (Brazil, China, India and South Africa). It was drafted during COP 15 on the 18th of December, 2009, where delegates decided that they would “take note of” it. It has been viewed as a failed attempt to expand on the work done by the Kyoto Protocol. One of the reasons as to why this is the case is the fact that only 5 countries were involved in producing it. Additionally, it is not legally binding and has not actually put forward targets that can be acted upon to help reduce gas emissions. It is also notably vague surrounding the economic side of the matter, as it has not described in detail where the funds will come from to achieve its aims, how it will economically benefit those who sign it, and has been criticised for showing bias towards certain countries, ignoring the rest.¹⁹

¹⁸ “The Kyoto Protocol.” *Unfccc.int*, https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol

¹⁹ “Copenhagen Deal Reaction in Quotes.” *BBC News*, BBC, 19 Dec. 2009, <https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8421910.stm>

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement was adopted on the 12th of December, 2015 at COP 21 (the 21st Conference of the Parties) in Paris. Its aim is to “limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius”.²⁰ At this moment in time, 189 parties to the UNFCCC have signed it, with eight states still to adopt it (the United States signed it in 2015 under the Obama administration, but later officially withdrew on November the 4th, 2019 under the Trump administration). Other significant non-signatories include Turkey, the only member of the G20 countries not to sign it, and Iran, the highest emitter of greenhouse gases (not including the USA) out of the non-signatory states.

The State of the Paris Agreement

Countries by their participation in the Paris Agreement (as of November 4, 2020)

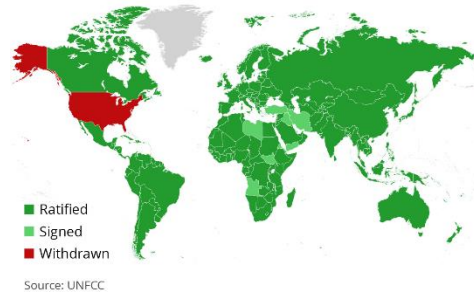


Figure 2: The State of the Paris Agreement [2]

Majuro Declaration

The Majuro Declaration is a good example of an effective solution to the potential economic issues that smaller states may face when working towards adapting to climate change and the requirements set out by the Convention.

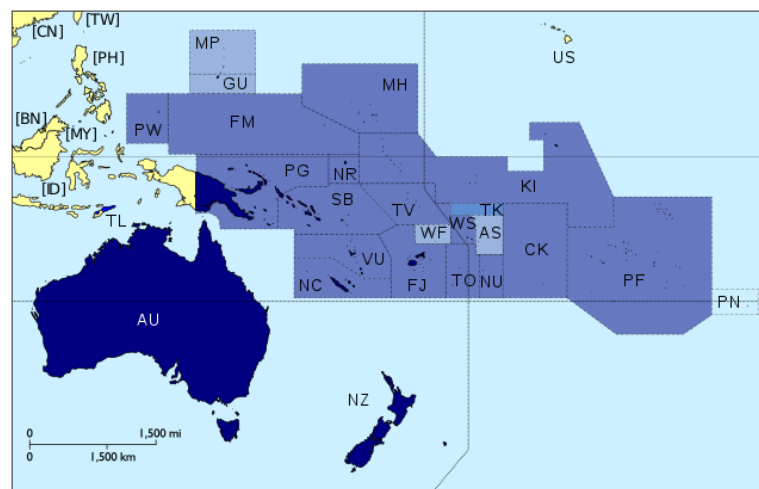


Figure 3: The members of the Pacific Islands Forum [3]

It was signed on the 5th of September, 2013, by the members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) during the 44th Pacific Islands Forum Summit.

²⁰ “The Paris Agreement.” *Unfccc.int*, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

In the declaration, Article 16 states that “this Declaration and the actions under it are intended to complement, strengthen and augment processes under way and commitments already made, including those under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol.”²¹

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF)

This organisation was established in 2001, and its aim is to support countries that are affected by climate change, but do not have the financial means to adapt to the requirements of the UNFCCC. As mentioned earlier on in the study guide, the Annex system was created to get more economically advantageous countries to financially aid states with lower GDPs in their efforts to adapt to Convention requirements. The LDCF has been developed since, so as to further aid LDCs and therefore encourage the participation in further developments and treaties.

National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs)

The NAPA system was established to create processes for LDCs through which urgent needs in terms of adaptation to climate change can be identified and better dealt with. Each country that participates in this programme (of which there are 51²²) has the ability to submit their specific adaptation programme, which, when approved, can make the country eligible to access funding from the LDCF to cover economic requirements for tackling the issue the specific NAPA refers to..

Cancun Agreements

During the COP 16, which took place in Cancun, Mexico between November 29th and December 10th, 2010, the Cancun Agreements were adopted as measures to improve and increase the effectiveness of the work of the international community towards meeting the requirements set by the Convention and the subsequent agreements made. It specifically aimed to help LEDCs economically, through establishing the Green Climate Fund (GCF)

²¹ “MAJURO DECLARATION FOR CLIMATE LEADERSHIP.” 5 Sept. 2013

<https://www.forumsec.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2017/11/2013-Majuro-Declaration-for-Climate-Leadership.pdf>

²² “National Adaptation Programmes of Action.” *Unfccc.int*,

<https://unfccc.int/topics/resilience/workstreams/national-adaptation-programmes-of-action/introduction>

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There is only so much that can be done to convince a country to sign a treaty. The way to approach the issue is through finding ways to raise awareness around the potential problems that can exist from a country not signing the convention and the aid that can be provided for LEDCs.

So, negotiations are necessary with non-signatory states, so as to encourage them to sign the Convention. When possible, efforts should be made, to whatever extent possible, to increase public support for the signing of the Convention and to make known the potential issues that can arise if they do not.

When necessary, additional aid could be provided for non-signatory countries (of which, the majority fall under the LEDC category) struggling with the enforcement of the Convention, so as to further encourage them to formally agree to further negotiations and actions of the UNFCCC. This includes general reminders and negotiations of the economic support that would be readily available to countries less economically capable of adapting to the requirements of the Convention. A good example of helpful dialogue surrounding this issue is the Pacific Islands Forum Summit in 2013, mentioned earlier in the guide.

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