

# Environmental Committee

(EC)

**Topic A:**

The question of preserving biodiversity and combating habitat destruction



## I. Introduction

The preservation of biodiversity and the fight against habitat destruction are two issues that go hand-in-hand to ensure the health and balance of our environment. This is because any habitat's health depends on its biodiversity and the concrete actions we take to mitigate the impacts we have had on ecosystems and combat habitat destruction.

Our planet's ecosystem depends on biodiversity and the health of the habitat in which these species live, however, human activities have harmed this intricate balance. Urbanisation, industrialization of the expansion of agricultural land often comes at the expense of natural habitats and the species that reside in them. As our cities grow, landscapes change drastically causing entire ecosystems that once thrived with diverse life, to disappear completely. In addition, human exploitation of natural resources in practices like deforestation, overhunting and fishing and pollution contribute to the degradation of ecosystems all over the world, threatening global biodiversity and causing many species populations to decrease dramatically.

The UN has identified that the main issues that are causing this decrease in biodiversity are: Climate change, pollution, habitat loss, overexploitation of species and invasive species.

Due to the destruction of habitats, the organisms in them are harmed and risk extinction, resulting in a decrease of biodiversity. (United Nations. "Biodiversity") This issue is extremely important and while it may be impossible to restore the biodiversity and habitats that we once cohabited with, it is still our duty to take action. The UN, through initiatives like Sustainable Development Goal 15 'Life on Land', which strives to 'Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss' and several resolutions which detail concrete action plans countries are taking; is working towards a better future and healthier environment. (Yiuno)

## II. Definition of key terms

Preservation: protection of the environment from harmful human activities.

Biodiversity: the variety of plant and animal species, which can be considered globally or in a specific habitat.

A high level of biodiversity is considered ideal and necessary for the health of an ecosystem.

Habitat destruction: the process by which a natural environment is damaged to the point it becomes incapable of supporting its native species, usually due to human activities.

UNEP: the United Nations Environmental Programme; a group within the UN that coordinates responses to environmental issues.

Urbanisation: the process of expansion of livable areas in cities due to population shifts from rural to urban areas.

Industrialization: the development and expansions of industries in a specific area on a wide scale.

Deforestation: the act of clearing wide areas of trees, destroying forest habitats.

Overhunting and overfishing: exploiting land animals or fish in a specific area by capturing or killing too many at once, causing damage to the populations so significant it is almost impossible for them to recover and restore the balance of the ecosystem.

Pollution: the introduction of harmful man-made materials and chemicals into the environment.

Climate change: a change in global climate patterns that will affect the environment and entire ecosystems, changing and damaging habitats and various species' lifestyles.

## III. Background information

1968: The United Nations Secretary-General delivers a report: Activities of United Nations Organizations and Programmes Relevant to the Human Environment, which

establishes the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the world's leading environmental authority.(UNEP)

1969: The Report on Problems of the Human Environment warns that "If current trends continue, life on Earth could be endangered."(UNEP)

1972: The UNEP holds the first UN conference on the Human Environment. (UNEP)

1974: The world celebrates the first World Environment Day to raise awareness of human contribution to the destruction of habitats. The UN also launched the Regional Seas Programme to address the destruction of ocean habitats that have caused the degradation of biodiversity in world oceans. (UNEP)

1975: 16 countries across the Mediterranean coast agree to promote coastal management and adopt the Mediterranean Action Plan to protect the Mediterranean habitat. (UNEP)

1979: 17 countries cooperate in research to support the protection of 120 migratory species and protect the biodiversity of these species. (UNEP)

1980: In partnership with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Wildlife Fund, UNEP publishes the World Conservation Strategy; a document that details the concept of sustainable development and defines the global sustainable development agenda. (UNEP)

1987: The World Commission on Environment and Development delivers the Brundtland Report to the General Assembly, ushering in a new approach to environmental action focused on the concepts of sustainable development to protect endangered animals' habitats.(UNEP)

1989: 183 countries adopt the Basel Convention to regulate the movement and disposal of hazardous waste. (UNEP)

1992: At the Water Convention, two multilateral treaties were signed: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The convention on Biological diversity coerced the way countries can act to ensure they are protection their environments' biodiversity on all levels; including ecosystems, species and genetic resources (*Convention on Biodiversity*)

1996: The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification enters into force. The Convention, which has 195 parties, works to protect habitats from desertification and by extension the diverse species being harmed by the process. (UNEP)

1999: United Nations Member States adopt The United Nations Global Compact. With more than 8,500 signatories from 135 countries, the initiative encourages businesses to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies and to report on their implementation. This was a successful initiative to mitigate the effects of growing industries on habitats that were being harmed. (UNEP)

2000: 103 countries sign the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; an international agreement that aims to ensure the safe handling, transport and use of organisms that have been modified using modern biotechnology. (UNEP)

2001: United Nations Member States adopt the Stockholm Convention. The Convention, which includes 176 parties and its goal is to mitigate effects on the environment from chemicals that persist for long periods in ecosystems. This convention focuses specifically on concrete actions to protect habitats from these harmful substances. (UNEP)

2008: Member States launch the UN-REDD programme. It has since spurred 14 national initiatives to combat deforestation, forest degradation and climate change. (UNEP)

2009: The UN Climate Change Conference focuses on the safeguarding of iceberg and glacier habitats and how countries can take action to safeguard these habitats and protect the diverse species living or relying on these ecosystems. (UNEP)

2010: Ministers of environment and heads of delegations adopt the Nusa Dua Declaration, highlighting the vital importance of biodiversity, the urgent need to combat climate change, and the advantages of advancing towards a "green economy."(UNEP)

2012: UNEP Member States launch the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services to provide policymakers with reliable, independent and credible information on the status of biodiversity in response to concerns about the lack of policy-relevant information to tackle threats. (UNEP)

2015: The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit leads to the adoption of 17 Sustainable Development Goals as part of a new global agenda on sustainable

development, with several focusing on the environment, including life below water, life on land, climate action, clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy. (UNEP)

2016: In response to the global trafficking crisis, UNEP launched Wild for Life, a campaign to protect endangered wildlife species. The campaign raises awareness and elicits behavior change to prevent poaching and illegal trade and to reduce demand for wildlife and wildlife products.(UNEP)

UNEP and partners launched the BreatheLife campaign to raise awareness of the impacts and solutions of air pollution. (UNEP)

2017: The Minamata Convention on Mercury comes into force with the objective of protecting human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury compounds. The UN also launches the Clean Sea campaign to protect biodiversity in salt water bodies. (UNEP)

2019: The United Nations General Assembly declares 2021–2030 as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, which aims to scale up the restoration of degraded and destroyed ecosystems as a proven measure to fight the climate crisis and enhance food security, water supply and biodiversity. UN Secretary-General António Guterres visits the South Pacific to spotlight the issue of climate change, how it is destroying habitats and affecting species and ecosystems biodiversity. (UNEP)

#### **IV. Major countries and groups involved in the issue**

Several UN member states actively take part in significant efforts to protect biodiversity and combat habitat loss.

Some key contributors include: Brazil, Canada, China, India and Australia. (*Here's how...*)

**Brazil:** Brazil is the most biodiverse country in the world, containing two biodiversity hotspots: the Atlantic Forest and the Cerrado, six terrestrial biomes and three large marine ecosystems. In the country there have been significant threats to biodiversity, especially due to: fragmentation, introduction of alien species and exotic illnesses, overexploitation of plants and animals, pollution and climate change. However the most significant contributor to the issue was the drastic loss of habitats, driving species

towards threatened status. To combat this, Brazil was one of the first countries to fully adopt a National Biodiversity Strategy, composed of various initiatives and 51 national biodiversity targets to be implemented by 2010, was approved by the National Biodiversity Commission (CONABIO). Brazil set targets to be achieved in 2020, in 2013, which aligned with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. In order to achieve these goals, the country established a number of activities specifically related to establishing ecological corridors, more protected areas, sustainable forest management, more non-timber products and sustainable agricultural practices. In addition to this, Brazil also installed new support mechanisms for national implementation including legislation, funding through federal funds and tax incentives, capacity building and environmental education initiatives. (*Convention on Biological Diversity. "Brazil"*)

Canada: In December 2022, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). This historic framework lays out a set of global goals and targets to protect biodiversity. Canada's initiatives for environment and climate change led in the development of the new 2030 national biodiversity strategy. The 2030 strategy will be developed and implemented in collaboration with the entire community, including Indigenous representatives, and with input from partners and stakeholders. (*Canada*)

China: China is among the 12 mega-biodiversity countries in the world due to the different habitats it houses. Despite some positive trends, many natural areas in China are threatened, in particular the grasslands, affected by desertification and the wetlands, threatened by severe degradation. This causes significant species loss, especially due to the accelerated urbanisation and industrialization the country has experienced in the past years. To combat the issue, China has implemented the Biodiversity conservation action plan, a strategy containing 3 goals, 8 strategic tasks, 10 priority domains, 30 priority actions, 35 priority areas for conservation and 39 priority projects for implementation. Some concrete actions the country took included the establishment of nature reserves, creating new protected areas policies and developing a new policy on invasive alien species. (*Convention on Biological Diversity. "China"*)

India: India is one of the recognized mega-diverse countries of the world due to the varied edaphic, climatic and topographic conditions and years of geological stability. The main threats to biodiversity include habitat fragmentation, over-exploitation of resources, shrinking genetic diversity, invasive alien species, deforestation, climate change and pollution. The first major step India took to help preserve biodiversity was the implementation of the National Policy and Macrolevel Action Strategy that called for the consolidation of existing biodiversity conservation programmes and initiating new steps in conformity with the spirit of the Convention. India also developed a National

Environment Policy in preparation of the new National Biodiversity Action Plan. India also worked to establish a network of 676 protected areas, especially regarding forest protection and reforestation. The country also developed programs regarding the conservation and sustainable development, eco-development of degraded forests, development of community conservation reserves outside PAs, economic valuation of ecosystem services and climate change, and finally inculcating awareness and imparting training to a range of stakeholders. On top of this India also implemented legislative actions in its constitution and in the creation of treaties and resolutions to combat the issue. (Convention on Biological Diversity. "India")

Australia: Australia's biodiversity is both rich and unique; between 7 and 10 percent of all species on Earth occur in Australia. Many activities have put pressure on the biodiversity of the country, including climate change and degradation of habitats; including the spread of invasive species, marine and coral pollution, altered hydrology, inappropriate grazing and fire regimes and population growth which put pressure on economic development. To combat these issues Australia implemented Australia's biodiversity conservation society and taking action by engaging communities in biodiversity conservation, building ecosystem, resilience and mitigating the effects of climate change. (Convention on Biological Diversity. "Australia")

The main group fighting to preserve biodiversity is the Convention on Biological Diversity, which involves numerous countries working together to address global biodiversity challenges. Among the initiatives the CBD took is the Aichi Biodiversity targets, a list of ambitious goals covering various aspects of biodiversity observation, including reducing habitat loss, preventing the extinction of species, and promoting sustainable resource use. In addition some other projects include the Global strategy for Plant conservation, the Biodiversity Indicators Dashboard and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. (Here's how...)

## V. UN Treaties and Historical Events

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): An international legal instrument for "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources" that has been ratified by 196 nations. (*Multilateral Environmental Agreements*)

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (enforced in 1975 and ratified by 180 countries): an agreement to ensure that the global trade in wild animals and plants does not jeopardise the survival of these species. Wildlife trading is allowed for some species, but permits are needed for many to cross international borders. (*Multilateral Environmental Agreements*)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): mitigating the effects climate change has on species and habitats. (*Multilateral Environmental Agreements*)

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: destruction of habitats through the process of desertification, causing biodiversity to decrease. (*Multilateral Environmental Agreements*)

Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS): preservation of biodiversity of these species. (*Multilateral Environmental Agreements*)

Convention on Wetlands: protection of these endangered habitats. (*Multilateral Environmental Agreements*)

## **VI. Main issues**

There are many issues regarding the protection of global biodiversity. The destruction of our planet's natural habitats is one of the biggest drivers of biodiversity loss. It has been concluded that we must strive to restore at least 30% of the world's land and sea habitats to give nature and various animal and plant species a chance to rebound. (*Stopping habitat destruction*).

The main issue being the destruction of habitats these species inhabit. There are many elements that contribute to this problem. The poor representation of habitats being one of them. For example, less than 4% of the ocean is considered a protected habitat, even though it is a key habitat in ensuring many ecosystems can maintain their biodiversity. Another big issue is the lack of funds being actively put towards protecting the environment, especially when it comes to developing countries and the protection of marine areas. This, along with Poor management un declaring said protected areas and developing the conditions that must be in place to protect the areas is another issue.



In addition, another important issue to consider is that human activities have hurt the environment. These include logging, poaching, mining, encroachment by human settlements and agriculture. Human activities outside of protected areas are also often a threat – such as those leading to pollution, climate change, and the introduction of invasive species. (WWF)

## **VII. Relevant UN Resolutions**

The preservation of habitats is the subject of multiple UN resolutions. The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which attempts to protect biodiversity and guarantee the sustainable use of natural resources, is one such example. Furthermore the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include several targets related to habitat conservation. One such goal is Goal 15: Life on Land, which centres on preserving, rehabilitating, and advancing the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. The significance of protecting habitats for the health of ecosystems and biodiversity is emphasised in these resolutions. In addition, there is the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, adopted in 2010, regarding a framework for actions to halt biodiversity loss. (*Convention on Biodiversity*)

## **VIII. Possible solutions**

Addressing the loss of biodiversity and destruction of habitats has to be considered through a multifaceted approach relying on conservation, sustainable development, and international cooperation. The establishment of protected areas and conercarion reserves, which follow clear guidelines and policies, is an action that governments can take to protect habitats. In addition sustainable land use planning is vital in balancing human and economic development with the conservation of the environment and biodiversity. Another key component to solving the issue involves community inevil even and raising awareness through education, especially to foster a sense of responsibility and interconnectedness regarding the project. Countries must also invest in research on their own ecosystems and monitoring of changes in biodiversity and habitat quality, to allow for timely interventions. The most important action that each country has the duty of taking, though, is the mitigation of climate change. Countries must address the issue and collaborate on a global scale to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience to climate impacts.

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