



Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2016 Montessori Model United Nations Conference.

The following pages intend to guide you in the research of the topics that will be debated at MMUN 2016 in committee sessions. Please note this guide only provides the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information necessary on the topics and how they relate to the country you represent. Such information should help you write your Position Paper, where you need to cite the references in the text and finally list all references in the Modern Language Association (MLA) format.

The more information and understanding you acquire on the two topics, the more you will be able to influence the Resolution writing process through debates [formal and informal caucuses], and the MMUN experience as a whole. Please feel free to contact us if and when you face challenges in your research or formatting your Position Papers.

We encourage you to learn all you can about your topics first and then study your country with regard to the two selected topics. Please remember that both committee members need to be well versed and ready to debate both topics.

Enjoy researching and writing your Position Papers.

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

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United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)

UNEA was a result of the call made by world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Brazil in June 2012, to strengthen and upgrade UNEP as the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda and by establishing universal membership in its Governing Council. Subsequently, at the first universal session of the UNEP Governing Council held in February 2013, Member States recommended to the UN General Assembly that the Governing Council, the 58-member governing body of UNEP in place since 1972, be renamed the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme with universal membership. In March 2013, the General Assembly adopted resolution [A/RES/67/251](#), formally changing the designation of the Governing Council to the “United Nations Environment Assembly”. Now all the 193 United Nations Member States, Observer States and other stakeholders participate in discussions and decision-making on issues that affect the state of the environment and global sustainability.

Source: <http://www.unep.org/unea/about.asp>

Protecting Endangered Species

Topic Background

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists 7123 species as endangered and 4734 species as critically endangered.¹ Despite modern technology and scientific advancement, humans remain inextricably reliant on the environment. Healthy ecosystems regulate the climate, manage nutrients and waste, control floods, afford coastal protection, and provide food, freshwater, fuel, medicines, building materials, fertile soils, and breathable air. Biodiversity loss jeopardizes this in ways we do not yet understand. As such, it is a problem of global concern.

Efforts to promote biodiversity can be found in the sustainable farming practices of many ancient farming cultures. In this sense, the problem can be seen as primeval, but academic acknowledgment can be traced to John Evelyn's *Sylva* in 1662, which described the depletion of England's forests.² The arrival of the industrial revolution and the forces of globalization lead to exploitation of the environment in a manner that was unprecedented in scale and unsustainability.³ In modern times the problem has continued to grow; in 2000 only 1451 and 1228 species were listed as endangered and critically endangered respectively.

In a historical context, the endangerment of species has largely been due to the natural changes within their environment, but in a modern context, humans have been the major cause of endangerment. The destruction of habitat has been the leading factor in species endangerment. Approximately 80% of all extinctions to species has been attributed to the destruction of habitat.⁴ This destruction is accelerated by the expansion of cities, the requirement of resources and the need for larger quantities of agricultural land.

Overexploitation comes as humans use species for their own benefit, either through hunting, clothing, medicine, or trophies. Although trophies and medicine are only a minimal threat to the natural world, their selected targeting of already endangered species such as the rhinoceros and tiger is what makes it an immense threat to already dwindling population numbers.

The introduction of alien species by humans has also had a disastrous impact on ecological systems historically. Introducing new predators has distorted food chains and damaged the environment. This has been seen with the introduction of the Signal Crayfish across Europe, as well as the domestication of European animals in Australia during the colonial period.

¹ "Red List of Threatened Species". International Union for Conservation of Nature. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

² "Sylva". John Evelyn. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20778/20778-h/20778-h.htm>.

² "Sylva". John Evelyn. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20778/20778-h/20778-h.htm>.

³ Endangered Species. Science Daily. http://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/endangered_species.htm

⁴ "Endangered Species" National Geographic.

<http://education.nationalgeographic.com.au/encyclopedia/endangered-species/>

Australia:

Prior to Western colonization of Australia which began in the late 18th century, Australia's ecosystems were relatively untroubled by the indigenous population. Over the last 200 years 75% of rainforests and nearly 50% of all forests have been lost, as well as 99% of South Eastern Australian grasslands. This has left Australia with 201 endangered species, 105 critically endangered species and 35 extinct species. It is well established that this loss of biodiversity is attributable to reckless agricultural policy that did not consider the effect on the ecosystem.

Brazil:

Hosting the Amazon Rainforest, Brazil is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. However, a combination of hunting, habitat loss, and increased populations of feral species has led to 304 species being classed as endangered, 152 as critically endangered and 14 becoming extinct. Illegal deforestation is a major concern, as government tries to manage Brazil's emerging economy and deal with an entitled and burgeoning middle class.

Iceland:

The above examples are to be contrasted with Iceland, where there are only 8 endangered species, 2 critically endangered species and 1 extinct species. Damage to land based organisms is largely attributable to environmental factors, such as erosion stemming from over grazing and clearing of the birch woodlands, over 95% of which have now been lost, with the remainder covering only 1% of the surface.

A failure to protect endangered species would lead to a loss of the variety that we rely upon in ways that we do not yet understand. Just as bees fertilize our crops and forests sequester carbon, other species may play equally vital yet unknown roles in maintaining Earth as a useful resource for humanity.

Past Actions

Highly relevant to the question of protecting endangered species is Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensuring Environmental Sustainability. Particularly Goal 7.A, "integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources", as well as Goal 7.B, "reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss". A failure to protect endangered species would result in further extinction and loss of biodiversity, making this topic critical to the fulfillment of these goals. Extinction is fundamentally incompatible with sustainability, as it marks the permanent loss of a natural resource.

The central treaty on this point is Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which aims to ensure international trade in specimens does not threaten the survival of species in the wild. CITES functions to prohibit trade in certain species. As a result, it has been criticized for its negative approach wherein trade in all

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species is permitted unless specifically prohibited. This leaves a heavy burden on member states to quickly evaluate different species and their suitability for exploitation.

Despite the progress made, CITES has been criticized for failing to address the full range of causes the endanger species including habitat loss and human poverty.⁵ It seeks to prevent unsustainable exploitation rather than promote sustainable use. Further, it has no market based mechanisms to address that which creates the market. While this does not negate the achievement that CITES is, it provides a clear path forward for future UN action and consensus building.

The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) at the forefront of stopping the degradation of the world's natural resources is the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) which has a general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In the first instance, WWF aims to conserve habitats which are under threat. In some circumstances, this alone is not enough and WWF takes steps to promote regulation of their harvest.

Within the UN framework, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the lead body. Its work "encompasses assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions" and "trends as well as strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment". UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) assesses biodiversity and supports policy making. Similarly, UNEP's International Ecosystem Management Partnership (IEMP) aims to be a resource and knowledge hub for policy makers in developing nations.⁶ Given that many of the endangered species reside in developing nations which are under-equipped to address the problem, WCMC and IEMP play a vital role in empowering states to act.

Possible Solutions

The emphasis in the MDGs on protection of endangered species is continued in Sustainable development goal 15 which, among other things, seeks to halt biodiversity loss. Delegates should pay close attention to goals 15.5, 15.7, 15.8, & 15.c when considering possible solutions.⁷ Particularly, there is an emphasis within these sub-goals on ending poaching, reducing the degradation of natural habitats, and countering feral species.

Poaching remains a critical issue. According to WWF, the illegal wildlife trade is worth approximately \$20 billion annually. One of the most affected groups is those species that produce ivory, namely rhinoceroses and elephants.⁸ Many governments struggle with the

⁵ Internationally Endangered Plants and Animals. Department Of Environment.
<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/cites>

⁶ About UNEP-IEMP. IEMP. <http://www.unep.org/ecosystemmanagement/UNEP-IEMP/AboutUs/tabid/55729/Default.aspx>

⁷ Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>

⁸ "Elephants in the Dust: The African Elephant Crisis." United Nations Environment Programme,
http://www.unep.org/pdf/RRAivory_draft7.pdf.

question of what to do with confiscated ivory: to destroy it drives up the price and incentivizes poachers, whilst releasing it tacitly accepts the exploitation of the species in question.

The degradation of natural habitats will inevitably endanger many species. As world leaders prepare for climate change talks in Paris, the effects of rising global temperatures are already putting pressure on ecosystems around the world. Moreover, conversion of land to agriculture and urban sprawl have a major impact on natural habitats. The Brazilian experience of how roads through rainforests can facilitate illegal logging is an important lesson on how development must be cautious to avoid indirect consequences.

Feral animals and plants also continue to have an impact on endangered species in both developed and developing nations. In Australia, feral cats have put over 100 native species survival in jeopardy and caused the extinction of several.⁹ In the delicate ecosystems of the Galapagos Islands, the damage is yet to be seen, but active steps have had to be taken to address the 36 vertebrate, 750 plant and 543 insect species that have been introduced by foreign vessels and the tourism industry. This highlights how the issues facing states vary with the extent of introduction of foreign species.

China is determined to crack down on the ivory trade, but is mindful of the strong demand coming from within its burgeoning middle class.¹⁰ The creation of an ivory registration system in 2004 provided the government with a mechanism to crack down on the illegal trade, but resulted in a substantial increase in sellers that made enforcement of existing controls more problematic, especially given that illegal trade is still being carried out by many registered sellers.¹¹

Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, is acutely concerned with the slimming populations of rhinoceros, elephants, and other safari animals. Being both a major source of tourism and an integral part of indigenous cultures, loss of these species would be hugely detrimental. The challenge will be to assist these largely fledgling nations to utilize these natural resources in a sustainable manner.

Delegates face a landscape that has taken some steps to address what is a vitally important and all encompassing issue, which lacks a comprehensive response.

⁹ Feral Animals in Australia. Department of Environment.

<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia>.

¹⁰ "Blood Elephants: Asia's Ivory Demand Fuels African Conflicts." Eleka Watts.

<http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/blood-elephants-asias-ivory-demand-fuels-african-conflicts/>.

¹¹ "Ivory Market in China". International Fund for Animal Welfare.

<http://www.ifaw.org/sites/default/files/Ivory%20Market%20in%20China%20China%20ivory%20trade%20survey%20report%20-%202006.pdf>.

Further Research

Guiding Questions

1. What measures can be take to incentivize people and governments to protect species?
2. How can monitoring and evaluation initiatives become more effective?
3. How can we find a balance between utilizing natural resources and sustainable development?

Research Sources

[Sustainable Development Goals](#)

[International Union for Conservation of Nature List of Endangered Species](#)

[WWF Arguments for Protection](#)

[International Union for Conservation of Nature Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Questions:

1. How many species are currently listed as endangered and critically endangered?
2. What percentage of South Eastern Australian grasslands habitat has been lost?
3. Which treaty aims to ensure international trade in specimens does not threaten the survival of species in the wild?
4. How much is the illegal wildlife trade worth annually?
5. In what year did China create an ivory registration system?

Answers:

1. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists 7123 species as endangered and 4734 species as critically endangered.
2. 99%
3. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
4. \$20 billion
5. 2004

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