



ALABAMA MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE XII

UNEP

Update Paper

Topic A:

Environmental Racism and Its Impacts on Indigenous Populations in the Amazon

In the past few months, the world's attention seems to have shifted from the burning of the Amazon to the Australian wildfires. Despite the concern that the Australian fires may justifiably warrant, the focus of our committee will remain the same and delegates should continue their research on the topic of environmental racism and its impacts on indigenous populations.

As delegates continue to prepare for ALMUN XII, it is important to recognize some recent updates regarding the Amazonian fires. As mentioned in the background guide, the Amazon Rainforest is the largest carbon sink in the world, meaning that the trees of the Amazon are among the top absorbers of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. However, in the last decade, there has been a 30% decline in carbon capture. Since the release of the background guide, a study has been published that predicts not only the intensification of the fires and continuation of carbon emissions into the atmosphere, but also the possibility of the transition from a carbon sink to a carbon source. This means that the forest may go beyond reducing its abilities to capture carbon, it may go as far as produce more carbon than it captures as the forests are destroyed.

Another adverse consequence of the deforestation of the Amazon is the lack of preparation for the next dry season (roughly June through December). As the wet season has now begun, the wildfires are beginning to terminate naturally, but not action is being taken to better protect the rainforest for the next wet season, which is now only around five months away. In fact, the Brazilian government is currently drafting legislation to open even more indigenous lands to agricultural development and mining, continuing both undermining indigenous rights and putting the rainforest at additional risk of deforestation.

As more time has passed since the start of the 2019 forest fires, continued organizing by interested actors has led to the rise of several key leaders pioneering the fight for stronger rainforest and indigenous lands protections, hopefully indicating more positive changes to come. Raoni Metuktire, a major leader of the indigenous land rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s, “has returned to the spotlight to challenge the man he calls the worst president of his lifetime.” During his work in the 1970s and 1980s, Raoni was recognized as helping changing Brazilian popular opinion about the legitimacy of indigenous land claims and helped put international pressure on the Brazilian government to cede more land rights to the indigenous population. His re-emergence as an active may help further galvanize popular and international support once again for better environmental protections for indigenous lands. One of the most highly regarded environmentalist indigenous authors in Brazil, Davi Kopenawa Yanomami has also been outspoken during this crisis. According to Davi, “[Illegal miners] are poisoning our rivers, killing our fish, and our people are starting to get sick with malaria again,” highlighting the impact that such activities have directly on indigenous lives. These indigenous leaders are two amongst many others whose voices the delegates of UNEP must find a way to elevate in order to secure a more equitable indigenous rights policy in Amazonian nations.

Following the forest fires of 2019, to few people’s surprise, deforestation in specifically the Amazon in 2019 was recently concluded by environmental scientists to have had the largest scale of deforestation since 2008. This remarkable statistic has largely been attributed to the Brazilian president’s new government’s scale back on indigneous lands protections and loosening regulations on mining and agriculture. Despite these academic findings, the Brazilian president and his allies continue their policy of climate change and ecosystem destruction denial. Going forward, delegates will need to find ways of solving this major social and environmental issue while keeping in mind that relevant governments may be hostile to any solution at all.

Topic B:

Ocean Acidification

As the battle over the Amazon ensues and Australia continues to burn, the issue of ocean acidification still persists and poses a threat to the various coral reef habitats and ocean species. Delegates are urged to continue to find ways to reduce the carbon footprint that aids in the spreading of acidification and find ways to ensure that the detrimental effects of acidification are controlled.

The ocean has long acted as a buffering agent in the fight against climate change, as it would absorb the CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere and acting as a sink. But with recent events, specifically the deforestation of the Amazon and the fires on the east coast of Australia has aided in the rising CO₂ levels found in the atmosphere. The Amazon rainforest acts as lungs for the Earth as it absorbs large amounts of CO₂, but with the large-scale deforestation underway in Brazil the CO₂ levels have risen causing the ocean to absorb more CO₂ than before. The massive fires in Australia pose a very significant threat as the coral reefs and ocean habitats found along the east coast of the country are already being affected by acidification, and now are facing increased CO₂ emissions due to the massive scale of the fires. The issue presents an interesting problem to delegates. Delegates must be able to address the dire need to find a solution to the issue of ocean acidification, but must also be able to work around the new pressing issues of the Australian fires and the deforestation issue found within Brazil.

Furthermore, United States President Donald Trump, has decided to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, exhibiting indifference at inhibiting those factors of the state which contribute to climate change and exacerbate the effects of ocean acidification. The Paris Climate Agreement, signed by nearly 200 countries in an attempt to take action to reduce emissions and lower the rate at

which the world's climate is warming, provided stipulations about the continued emissions of carbon dioxide gas, that which furthers ocean acidification. The agreement's primary goal was to limit global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees Celsius, while attempting to keep the change under 1.5 degrees Celsius, in order to preserve the integrity of the world's natural resources before the climate warms to a point where the damages are irreversible. One action taken in order to reach this goal was commitment from all major emissions contributing countries to cut down their personal contributions to air pollution and develop more sustainable and environmentally-friendly alternatives to implement in their home states.

The United States, which produces the second largest amount of greenhouse gases in the world and comprising about 12% of total emissions, was one of these countries who initially committed to taking action within their country upon signing the Paris Climate Agreement. Actualization of this commitment would have astronomically beneficial impacts and would set a precedent for clean energy and sustainable development for future generations. However, as stated, President Donald Trump started the withdrawal process from the Paris Climate Agreement in early November of 2019. Although it will take one year from this date for the withdrawal to become official, President Trump has evidenced that he does not aim to hold environmental consciousness in as a primary concern of United States policy.

Trump's action to withdraw from the agreement also presents difficulties on the scene of foreign policy. His inaction will make it more difficult for world leaders and environmental activists to convince other major emissions contributing countries, like China and India, to take action themselves, seeing as disregarding the commitment is a much easier and convenient option for many world leaders. Considering these effects of changes to the Paris Climate Agreement, delegates will have to think critically about ways to make up for lost progress and innovate new solutions that could global emissions and, thus, ocean acidification and its devastating effects.