

Committee: United Nations Environment Programme

Issue: Addressing the environmental policies of the U.S.A. under current administration

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INTRODUCTION

Multiple studies have shown that the temperature of the globe is rising at an alarming rate, and many attribute that to humanity's intense industrial activity during the past two centuries. More problems threaten the well being of the planet such as plastic in the oceans and deforestation, which cause the dwindling of the wildlife. In such an environmental crisis, the related policies of the world's superpowers are crucial for its containment.

The environmental policies of the US varied through the years and the administrations, with the previous, Obama's, being quite active on such issues.

Ever since Donald Trump assumed office in the USA on January 20, 2017 and made it clear that the environment is not one of the current government's priorities, many scientists and organisations became concerned of the possible consequences on the environment. Many actions that have been taken by the US government under current administration are worrying, such as the abolition of the Clean Power Plan and the decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement. The US are the second largest CO₂ emitter (15% of global emissions) and the country with the highest GDP, therefore its decisions have a heavy impact on our planet. This is the reason the UN has decided it is necessary to address this issue.

If you have any inquiries regarding this topic, do not hesitate to contact me - the expert chair on this topic, Eugene Kardasis, at edkardasis@gmail.com.

Important note from the chairs' team

In order for the chairs to fully understand the dynamics of the committee, discovering any misunderstanding prior to the debate and for the better preparation of the delegates you are asked to proceed as indicated below;

1) Conduct your chairs via email and informing them about your mun experience so that they can know what exactly to expect of you.

2) Prepare and send your chairs by 11:59 of the 6th of November one position papers for each of the topics you are going to discuss during the conference. You can conduct the expert chair, of each topic for further information concerning your country's policy if needed, and for general guidance when it comes to your position papers (word limit structure etc). You are going to receive general comments during the lobbying for your position papers as well as personal feedback and grades for your papers. The points you will receive will add up to your general score which is one of the factors that determine the best delegate award. **If you for any reason fail to send your papers before the final deadline you will not be eligible for any award.**

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Climate Change

A change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC

Global Warming

The phenomenon of increasing average air temperatures near the surface of Earth over the past one to two centuries.

Encyclopedia Britannica

Greenhouse Effect

Warming of Earth's surface and troposphere (the lowest layer of the atmosphere) caused by the presence of water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, and certain other gases in the air.

Encyclopedia Britannica

Greenhouse Gas (GHG)

Any gas that has the property of absorbing infrared radiation (net heat energy) emitted from Earth's surface and reradiating it back to Earth's surface, thus contributing to the greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide, methane, and water vapor are the most important greenhouse gases.

Encyclopedia Britannica

The atmospheric gases responsible for causing global warming and climate change. The major GHGs are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). Less prevalent -- but very powerful -- greenhouse gases are hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆).

UNFCCC

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement [...] for the first time brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. As such, it charts a new course in the global climate effort.

UNFCCC

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

Agency, founded in 1970 by US President Richard Nixon. It is lead by an administrator who is appointed by the President and approved by the Congress. It has the responsibility of maintaining and enforcing national standards [...] in consultation with state, tribal, and local governments. It delegates some permitting, monitoring, and enforcement responsibility to U.S. states and [...] tribes. EPA enforcement powers include fines, sanctions, and other measures. The agency also works with industries and all levels of government in a wide variety of voluntary pollution prevention programs and energy conservation efforts.

Wikipedia

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Effects of climate change

Multiple studies have shown the effects of climate change, which have grown visible in everyday life: this year's record shows unprecedented heat and cold waves all around the world, while extreme weather phenomena have become more common in the past few years. Many species have become endangered due to the reduction of their natural habitats, notably polar bears. Other species (such as bark beetles) thrive in the winter when they normally shouldn't, causing (in this specific case) deforestation in Colorado. The fauna in many areas is brought to instability and coral reefs die out. Food production is heavily affected in specific areas for maize, wheat and coffee, increasingly affecting the economy of Africa. Drinking water supplies are at risk with major lakes around the world drying up.

Paris Agreement

Its main goal is to strengthen the worldwide measures towards countering climate change by keeping the global average temperature below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and empowering countries to deal with its effects. All parties are required to put their efforts in nationally determined contributions and to strengthen those efforts in the following years. Regular reports of GHG emissions and the above efforts are also required.

The agreement was negotiated upon and adopted by consensus by 196 member states on 12/12/2015. As of now, the Agreement has been signed by 197 members of the UNFCCC and 185 have ratified it, meaning that it has become binding for them. 12 states have signed but not ratified the agreement yet: Angola, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Russia, South Sudan, Suriname, Turkey and Yemen. It is suggested that, in your preparation, you look up your country's position on the Paris Agreement.

In April 2017, 20 members of the European Parliament sent Trump a letter urging him to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. On 25/5/2017, 22 Republican senators from 15 states did the same, while earlier 40 Democrat senators had asked for the contrary. On 1/6/2017 Donald Trump announced the US' withdrawal from the agreement, claiming that "The bottom line is that the Paris accord is very unfair at the highest level to the United States." causing a generally negative global response. He said that the Agreement would have a severe impact on the American economy, mentioning a GDP loss of 3 trillion and 6.5 million jobs. That decision was contrary to the views of a large portion of the US public, as well as several US states, governors, senators and most of American and international media. The first day on which the withdrawal from the Paris agreement

can take effect and the United States can become the only member state of UNFCCC not to sign the Agreement is November 4, 2020, coincidentally one day after presidential elections in the US.

Withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol: a precedent

US president Bill Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol, a predecessor of the Paris Agreement, that confirmed the existence of climate change and its strong correlation with human CO₂ emissions. While the signature was still impending, president George W. Bush, Clinton's successor, withdrew from the treaty in March 2001, soon after assuming office. In his statement, he said that global warming had not been proven to be a product of human activity (a statement with which his EPA disagreed a year later) and further argued that it put the US economy at disadvantage. He also mentioned that China and India, major CO₂ emitters, were not signatories and that not enough pressure was put on LEDCs towards implementing the regulations.

The decision and his claims caused a vast reaction from the scientific community, many accusations from critics and even critic from his own EPA's administrator. Seattle mayor Greg Nickels proposed the Climate Protection Agreement, with the goal of reducing GHG emissions by 5.2% by 2012 compared to 1990 levels, in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol. By October 2009, over 1000 mayors representing over 86 million residents had signed. The president's move, arguments and reaction by the community is very similar to those of the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

US environmental policies in the past

George H. W. Bush: Bush senior proposed a variety of environmental initiatives in his plan, however, he assigned both environmentalists and development-oriented politicians, so conflicts were imminent. Bush worked towards reducing SO₂ emissions as part of the Clean Air Act. However, industry -favorable decisions were made (such as the redefinition of wetlands) after negotiations with the EPA, at the environment's expense, one could say. He created the Council of Competitiveness, which could operate without Congress' oversight, unlike any other regulation -relieving structures. That council later took several measures favoring development over the environment. In the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro, he did not sign the biodiversity treaty and supported the removal of all binding tasks of reduction of CO₂ emissions.

Bill Clinton: Clinton's administration had promised change in the environmental policies, following the somewhat restrictive in terms of environmental policies administration of George H.W. Bush. He did receive some criticism from environmentalists regarding certain compromises he made between economic growth and environmental protection (a pair which he argued to be not incompatible). However, he notably signed the Kyoto Protocol (a climate change action convention) and created

the President's Council on Sustainable Development. EPA's budget increased during his presidency and the protection of natural resources was made stricter.

George W. Bush: Bush's environmental policies were mixed. Several environmentally friendly policies were implemented during his administration, such as the Healthy Forests Initiative, the Clear Skies Initiative and the Great Lakes Legacy Act. On the other hand, he withdrew the US from the Kyoto Protocol stating climate change had not been proven to be caused by humanity, which caused a lot of controversies. In the last years of his administration, however, his views on global warming changed. While he defended his earlier decision, he proposed several national and international measures like a follow-up plan after Kyoto expired.

Barack Obama: Obama's administration got elected promising environmental action, having the support of most environmental groups. Several initiatives were taken during his administration, such as America's Great Outdoors Initiative and the Clean Power Plan, which was aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions of the energy sector by 32% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. He also set the goal of 54 miles/gallon by 2025 for new cars.

US current administration's measures that impact the environment

- a) The current Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is rolling back Obama's Clean Power Plan.
- b) EPA has loosened regulations on toxic air pollution of the private sector.
- c) The effectiveness of car engines goal of 54 miles/gallon by 2025 has been reduced to 34 miles/gallon by 2021.
- d) Climate change is no longer on the list of national threats, leading to less Department of Defense funding towards research in the area.
- e) EPA's criminal prosecutions are at a 30 year low, which indicates its reduced influence.
- f) Bears Ears and Grand Staircase -Escalante - two national monuments in Utah - have been reduced by 8000 km² or 85% and that area is now open to corporate exploitation.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States

Obviously, the country most involved in the matter is the USA. The decisions president Trump has made regarding the environment are quite unpopular and are to be defended by the delegation of the United States. The major argument in favor of leaving the Paris Agreement was that the US was disadvantaged by it and put the US economy at risk, as he stated in his speech.

The United States Climate Alliance

Immediately after Trump’s statement that the US will withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the governors of California, New York and Washington founded the US Climate Alliance. By June 2, 9 states were participating. Right now, it consists of 24 states and Puerto Rico (which is led by a party that supports their becoming a state of the US), most led by Democratic governors but also 3 led by Republicans. Their goal is to apply measures that work towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
November 4, 2016	The Paris Agreement enters into force.
January 20, 2017	Donald J. Trump becomes president of the USA.
June 1, 2017	Trump announces that the US would cease all participation in the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change mitigation.
November 4, 2020	The earliest date at which USA’s withdrawal from the Paris agreement can take place, in accordance with Article 28 of Paris Agreement, coincidentally one day after the next presidential elections.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The UN has not yet taken measures towards addressing Trump’s environmental policies, which makes it more important to produce an effective resolution that deals with the issue in all aspects.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Trump’s environmental policies, and especially the decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, have caused a great deal of controversy and many reactions worldwide.

The scientific community has criticized the above decision, with many world-famous scientists, such as Stephen Hawking, expressing disapproval of the decision.

Right after Trump's speech on the 1st of June, the governors of California, New York and Washington formed the United States Climate Alliance. Currently, 24 states are participating, that will attempt to fulfill Paris Agreement's goals within their borders. In the past few years, they have attracted billions of dollars in new investment in climate action and clean energy and have led to the creation of 1.7 million clean energy jobs.

Internationally, over 100 nations stated their disapproval of the US withdrawal, reaffirming their allegiance to the Agreement.

The Republican party gave mixed reviews on the decision, while the Democrats clearly condemned leaving the Paris Agreement.

25 of US' biggest companies from various industries addressed an open letter to President Trump suggesting the administration remains in the Paris Agreement. Even some of the biggest companies of the fossil fuel industry stated their approval of the Paris Agreement and climate change action. CEOs of tech giants also made individual statements on the issue. Two more public figures, Elon Musk (CEO of Tesla, Inc. and SpaceX) and Robert Iger (CEO of The Walt Disney Company) resigned from their positions in presidential advisory councils in protest.

The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in November 2016 found that 69% of adult Americans support the participation in Paris Agreement, while 13% oppose it, which explains the major reactions of the US public and the domestic media over Trump's decision. Similarly unfavorable was the presentation of the decision by international and foreign media.

Even though the American government has not changed its policies despite all the above reactions, it is evident that "Americans will honor and fulfill the Paris Agreement by leading from the bottom up", as Michael Bloomberg put it.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The delegates of our committee will be asked to:

- a) Discuss, debate and agree upon how important certain environmental problems are.
- b) Come into an agreement about how US environmental policies need to be amended.
- c) Find specific ways in which the US' policies could become more environmentally friendly without a heavy impact on the American economy and find ways to create economic growth

while reducing pollution and GHG emissions. Green energy is an example of such development, because its technology is improving, while the fossil fuel reserves are limited and will inevitably run out.

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