

General Assembly

Topic 1: Environmental Sustainability

In the new millennium, the international political community has embraced environmental activism, with companies, organizations, and individuals across the globe “going green.” Despite this, actual progress made on this issue has been slow and woefully inadequate. In 2007, the United Nations released a report stating that while the international community has cut the use of ozone-layer damaging chemicals by 95 percent, created limited cap-and-trade markets for carbon emissions, and supported the establishment of terrestrial protected areas covering approximately 12 percent of the Earth, persistent problems such as the decline of fish stocks, the loss of fertile land through degradation, unsustainable pressure on finite resources, the dwindling amount of fresh water may undo the progress that has been made and threaten humanity’s survival.

Environmental sustainability has been on the UN’s agenda for over a decade, being the seventh goal on the list of Millennium Development Goals established in 2000 at the Millennium Summit. The goal has four targets: to integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources; reduce biodiversity loss; halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation; and to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of slum-dwellers.

These goals, while admirable and necessary to create a future that is both sustainable and achievable, put an unproportional burden on developing countries that are attempting to industrialize. Developed countries that have already experienced their industrial revolutions typically have the technological capabilities and luxury to pursue environmentally sustainable business practices, while developing countries have to struggle with rudimentary technological capabilities to develop the most basic facilities, such as safe drinking water and sanitation. Without transnational assistance, these countries are unlikely to make significant progress by 2015.

Many additional criticisms have been levied against the international community progress regarding the environment. The largest criticism is the nature of international efforts in establishing common policies. Many scholars, scientists, and organizations have attributed the recent 2009 Copenhagen Summit’s failure to produce a concrete framework or document to the politicking of major world powers, such as the United States and China. While most UN members can publically agree the protecting the environment is a priority, many key members’ adherence to national interests that conflict with multilateral coordination.

Questions:

1. How can the UN secure cooperation from both developed and developing countries in its pursuit of environmental sustainability?
2. How can developing countries continue to pursue their right to develop while still reducing their negative environmental impacts?

3. What existing international institutions and organizations can be used to achieve this Millennium Development Goal?

Resources:

1. **United Nations Foundation: Reducing Carbon Emissions**
<http://www.unfoundation.org/our-solutions/reduce-carbon-emissions/>
2. **Nature article by Norman Myers-- "Biodiversity hotspots for conservation priorities"**
<http://web.ipb.ac.id/~mujizat/jurnal/Myers%20et%20al%202000.pdf>
3. **United Nations: Capacity Building in Trade and Environment**
<http://www.un-trade-environment.org/>
4. **United Nations Environment Programme**
<http://www.unep.org/>
5. **The Guardian: Environment**
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment>
6. **International Institute for Environment and Development**
<http://www.iied.org/>
7. **Science Daily: Environmental Policy News**
http://www.sciencedaily.com/news/earth_climate/environmental_policy/
8. **European Commission: Environmental Policies**
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/policy_en.htm
9. **"Low targets, goals dropped: Copenhagen ends in failure"- The Guardian**
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/dec/18/copenhagen-deal>

General Assembly Topic 2: Global Primary Education

In 2000, the United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals, the second being to achieve universal primary education by 2015. Currently, there are more than 100 million children around the globe who do not attend school, the majority of which being in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

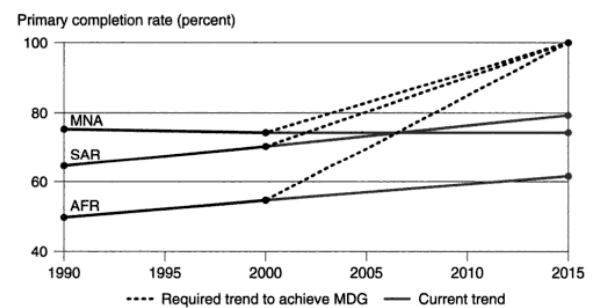
Providing education for children goes beyond merely establishing facilities, many environmental and cultural factors can prevent children from attending school. Extreme climates with severe weather conditions and geographically distant facilities coupled with inadequate infrastructure may create unsafe or distant learning environments. Conflict and disease ravaged areas often cannot even create the facilities, let alone bring pupils into them. In certain regions, gender discrimination can prevent women from being enrolled in school. Ethnically fractured areas, such as the tribal regions of Africa, present a problem for a school when classes need to be taught in one standard language while the student body speaks dozens of dialects.

The number of students completing primary education remains far below the projected trend required to achieve universal primary education by 2015. Of greater concern is the finding that primary education rates in the Middle East and North Africa are declining, as much of their region becomes home to failing governments and intrastate conflicts.

In February 2010, Transparency International published that schools in Uganda, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Senegal, Morocco, Madagascar, and Niger had poor governance systems and practices, with limited availability of financial documentation at district education offices and schools. This indicates that funds provided for the country squandered or siphoned off at the top, leaving students with inadequate facilities. Interestingly, the survey also revealed a lack of interest by parents in the running of schools, which highlights a need to obtain grassroots support to achieve this goal.

Universal primary education would also result in significant progress in other priority development areas. Schooling offers children a safe environment, with support, supervision and socialization. Students learn life skills at an early age that can help them prevent diseases, such as how to avoid HIV/AIDS and malaria. They may receive life-saving vaccines, fresh water and nutrient supplementation at school. Additionally, independent think-tanks have shown that educating a girl also dramatically reduces the chance her child will die before age five.

FIGURE 1 Primary Completion Progress in Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia Regions, 1990–2015, Country-Weighted



Questions:

1. How can UN programs overcome the aforementioned environmental and cultural impediments to creating successful school systems?
2. What strategies can be targeted at areas of greatest concern, such as the Middle East and North Africa, despite the existence of conflicts and failing governmental structures?
3. How can the UN foster more grassroots support for increasing enrollment rates for primary education?

Resources:

1. **“Lack of transparency undermining primary education in Africa”- The Guardian**
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2010/feb/23/primary-education-africa>
2. **End Poverty 2015: Millennium Campaign, Universal Education**
<http://www.endpoverty2015.org/goals/universal-education>
3. **The Brookings Institute: Center for Universal Education**
<http://www.brookings.edu/UNIVERSAL-EDUCATION.ASPX>
4. **“The Path Toward Universal Education in 2010”- The Brookings Institute**
http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0422_universal_education_gartner.aspx
5. **“Universal Education is Achievable and Affordable, Academy Study Concludes”- American Academy of Arts & Sciences**
<http://www.amacad.org/news/ubase.aspx>
6. **“How Investing in Education Boosts Development”- International Monetary Fund**
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2005/06/index.htm>
7. **UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2010**
<http://www.unesco.org/en/efareport/>
8. **“New Approach to get universal education”- DoSomething.org**
<http://www.dosomething.org/news/new-approach-get-universal-education>
9. **“India aims for universal education”- Al-Jazeera**
<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2009/08/200981594550894401.html>

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Topic 3: Disarmament

One of the biggest security challenges going into the twenty-first century is the problem of disarmament. As violence throughout the world continues, and with less of it being perpetrated by state actors, the United Nations must expand its scope of disarmament to not only include the reduction of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, including, but not limited to nuclear arsenals, for state actors, but the reduction of weapons available to non-state actors.

Many disarmament problems originate with the unprecedented arms race that resulted between the United States and the former Soviet Union prior to the 1990s. The superpowers built up a massive stockpile of both nuclear and conventional weapons, and upon the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, many of their nuclear facilities soon found themselves outside Russian borders and in the successor Soviet states. Endemic corruption had led to a steady leak of small arms produced by the USSR, a leak which only exponentially grew upon the Soviet Union's collapse.

Nuclear arms continue to pose a threat to the security and stability of international peace. Despite numerous conventions, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), major nuclear powers continue to maintain arsenals that would ensure nuclear winter in the event of a limited exchange. Additionally, many more states are in the process of becoming nuclear powers and their methods are not typically transparent to the international community. The establishment of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ) has only been a limited success, with South America boasting the only operational NWFZ.

Small arms and light weapons, in many ways, are a larger more pressing problem than the existence of nuclear arsenals. While nuclear weapons programs pose an existential threat, the majority of present-day conflicts are fought with conventional weapons. Small arms are the weapons of choice in civil wars, terrorism, organized crime, and gang warfare. In order to better implement conflict prevention, resolution, and management, ground situations must improve, and the reduction of small arms available is a key component in this strategy. Possible solutions include the destruction of surplus ammunition, increased cooperation among national authorities, and improving the monitoring mechanisms involved in arms embargos; however, these solutions are not without faults and are often difficult to implement globally.

One of the greatest problems to disarmament is its voluntary nature; a government has to voluntarily reduce its arsenal, which it may be hesitant to do if there are significant perceived security risks. In an effort to reduce weapons arsenals, the UN must also simultaneously address the reasons that fuel a country's decision to maintain a large stockpile. Security risks from both non-allied states and, increasingly, non-state actors contribute to a country's armament. The UN must ensure that diplomatic channels always exist in which member states can seek peaceful solutions to transnational problems.

Questions:

1. How can the UN respect national sovereignty and their right to defense while significantly reducing global arsenals?
2. How can the loopholes and shortcomings of existing treaties be remedied?
3. What can be done to reduce the trafficking of small arms, particularly to countries in conflict or experiencing civil war?

Resources:

1. **United Nations Security Council Report: Small-arms**
<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/SALW/Docs/SGReportonSmallArms2008.pdf>
2. **The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq, Abstract**
<http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG304/>
3. **"No Excuses for EU on Nuclear Disarmament"- New York Times**
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/29/world/europe/29iht-letter.html>
4. **International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament**
<http://www.icnnd.org/>
5. **Center for Defense Information: Small Arms & Light Weapons**
<http://www.cdi.org/program/index.cfm?ProgramID=23>
6. **"Dispatches from the Edge: Nuclear Treaty's Pluses and Minuses"- The Berkeley**
<http://www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/issue/2010-04-20/article/35057?headline=DISPATCHES-FROM-THE-EDGE-Nuclear-Treaty-s-Pluses-Minuses->
7. **"Nuclear treaty 'not a failure' despite challenges, says first US arms control general council"- FSI Stanford News**
http://fsi.stanford.edu/news/nuclear_treaty_not_a_failure_despite_challenges_says_first_us_arms_control_general_counsel_20050516/
8. **"Facing the failures of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty regime"- bNet**
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1374/is_5_63/ai_107897329/
9. **"Small Arms? Big Problem"- CommonDreams.org**
<http://www.commondreams.org/views04/0709-01.htm>