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“UNEP Convention on Biological Diversity”

Topic B: “The Clothing industry and its Impact on Biodiversity”

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COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

The Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), also known as the Biodiversity Convention, is an international treaty and a part of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Its three main goals are “the conservation of biological diversity”, “the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity” and “the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources”. It is generally recognized as the founding text for sustainable development with the aim of developing national policies for the preservation and responsible utilization of biological diversity.

The Convention on Biological Diversity was inspired by the growing commitment of the global community to sustainable development. It represents a huge step forward in the preservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its constituent parts, and the equitable and just distribution of benefits resulting from the use of genetic resources. The Convention was made available for signature during the United Nations

Conference on Environment and Development on June 5th, 1992 (The "Earth Summit" in Rio) up until June 4th, 1993, when it had 168 signatures. The Convention went into effect on December 29, 1993.

HISTORY OF TOPIC

According to the UN, "variability among living organisms from all sources, including, among other things, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems" is what is meant by "biodiversity" or "biological diversity." Biodiversity, to put it simply, is the "life nature" that covers the entire planet, encompassing all the animals, plants, habitats, ecosystems, and interactions between them. Our skin keeps us together, allows us to breathe, move, create, and engage with the outside world.

We depend on it for food and energy, as well as its important function in maintaining air quality, supplying fresh water and soil, and controlling the temperature. Nevertheless, biodiversity is disappearing more quickly than it has ever done in human history. One million species, both marine and terrestrial, which are between 12 and 20 percent of the estimated total species, are in danger of going extinct.

By enabling land-use change and habitat loss, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution, and climate change, global overproduction and consumption patterns are indirect causes of biodiversity loss.

Animal testing, sometimes referred to as animal experimentation, animal research, or in vivo testing, is the use of non-human animals in studies that aim to regulate the factors that influence the behavior or biological system being investigated. Animal Testing is another way in which the fashion industry affects the environment. Facilities that utilize animals for

testing frequently get rid of potentially harmful substances, food waste, and various supplies used during the testing procedure. Although it is not uncommon for animals to be used in several tests over a long period of time, animals are normally killed when an experiment is finished so that their tissues and organs may be analyzed. Animal testing has also had a significant influence on the quality of the air and water.

Everything we wear - clothing, accessories, jewelry, and footwear - is made from materials found in nature. (9) Fashion's primary function is to clothe society, and it draws on nature for both aesthetic inspiration and raw materials: we make clothing from plants, animals, insects, oils, minerals, and metals. We create florals, leaf prints, landscapes, and skeletons inspired and made from nature's resources. A biodiverse ecosystem provides an incredible palette for fashion designers to work with.

Cotton, linen, bast fibers, regenerated cellulose, silk, lotus fiber, leather, fur, animal skins, wool, cashmere, mohair, angora, feathers, muka, tapa cloth, indigo, madder, bark dye, bio-plastics, orange fiber, and fish skin are just a few examples of biodiverse species that have been grown, processed, and innovated. Even non-living species-derived materials, such as oil-based synthetics or metals, are extracted from biodiversity-supporting environments. However, the relationship between fashion and nature is complicated: on one hand, fashion's purpose is to praise nature; on the other, much of the industry's production has dangerously negative consequences.

Fashion production contributes 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, depletes water resources and pollutes rivers and streams. Furthermore, each year, 85% of all textiles are thrown away, and washing some types of clothes releases significant amounts of microplastics into the water.

Every year, a million tons of microfibre are poured into the sea, the equivalent of three million barrels of oil, and the garment sector consumes 93 million cubic meters of water, enough to provide for five million people.

Cotton production, which accounts for one-third of all fibers used in clothing, can result in soil degradation, habitat loss, and species extinction due to the use of toxic pesticides. Meanwhile, leather is a byproduct of cattle rearing, which is responsible for 70% of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest. Viscose, too, contributes significantly to deforestation, with an astounding 150 million trees cut each year to manufacture the fiber.

Other materials such as wool and cashmere can cause land degradation and disturb food systems, whereas synthetic fibers, such as polyester, are derived from the exploitation of fossil fuels, causing further land degradation and habitat loss (not to forget the greenhouse-gas emissions caused by the millions of dangerous microplastics that end up in the oceans.)

CURRENT ISSUE

Italy:

According to new research from sustainable fashion brand LABFRESH, Italy ranks as the worst textile polluter in Europe, producing 466 tonnes of textile waste per year. Italians spend a proportionately large amount on new clothing each year, at £920 per person.

Ghana:

20 million garments from Western countries arrive in Ghana every week. One study found that 40% of it is discarded on the market. Unusable clothing ends up in sewers before being washed up on beaches and buried beneath the sand. Some of it is thrown away on illegal dumps in the area. Waste-pickers sift through it looking for the last bits of wearable

clothing. To get rid of it, much clothing is burned in the open air, exposing the waste-pickers to toxic burning air.

Chile:

The import of discarded clothing in South America is concentrated in the Chilean port of Iquique, in the economic free zone of Alto Hospicio. Every year, 59,000 tonnes of clothing from all over the world are imported. A similar environmental disaster occurs. Clothing that can no longer be worn ends up in the nearby Atacama Desert (receiving up to 40,000 tonnes per year). Many of the clothes in these dumps still have price tags on them, which is worth noting. These are items that have never been sold or worn. Large fashion houses are to blame, but they continue to act like nothing has happened.

Japan:

According to a Japanese Environment Ministry survey, clothing weighing 819,000 tons were supplied in Japan in 2020. In the same year, households and businesses discarded 787,000 tons of clothing, with only about 150,000 tons being reused and 120,000 tons being recycled, with the remaining 510,000 tons being disposed of as waste.

Nowadays, a number of Japanese fashion firms are harnessing these traditional concepts in the name of sustainable development, adopting centuries-old garment production practices and pioneering new technologies to decrease waste and negative impact throughout the production process.

France:

France, a significant player in the fashion market and home to several of the world's most recognized luxury fashion labels, has taken the lead in coordinating a worldwide reaction to the damage caused by the fashion business. Aside from the unique cultural history of the Paris Region, the

capital of France, the fashion business contributes significantly to France's GDP - 3.1%, more than the automotive industry - and employment, with over 600,000 employees in this industry.

China:

Aside from cheap labor costs, China has earned the moniker "the world's factory" due to its robust business ecosystem, lack of regulatory compliance, low taxes and levies, and competitive currency practices. In Shanghai, there is a "smart" garbage and recycling collecting station. As a result, China discards 26 million tons of clothing each year, with fewer than 1% being repurposed or recycled.

China has the world's biggest textile industry, and about 20 million tons of textile waste is discarded each year. Now, the government is advancing its sustainable growth by establishing ambitious development objectives and activities.

UN AND EXTERNAL ACTIONS

UN:

The United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion is a collaboration between United Nations agencies and related organizations that aims to contribute to the United Nations sustainable development goals via coordinated action in the fashion sector. Specifically, the Alliance strives to facilitate cooperation across UN entities working in fashion, as well as to promote programs and policies that guarantee the fashion value chain contributes to the fulfillment of the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Alliance defines fashion as apparel, leather, and footwear created from textiles and allied items. The Alliance's operation ranges from the processing of raw materials through the fabrication of clothing,

accessories, and footwear, as well as their distribution, consumption, and disposal.

Sustainability involves both social concerns, such as improved working conditions and worker recompense, and environmental issues, such as the reduction of the industry's waste stream, as well as reductions in water pollution and contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.

Through the Partnership, the UN pledges to alter the course of fashion, decreasing its negative environmental and social implications, as well as transforming fashion into a driver of Sustainable Development Goals implementation.

EU:

At the end of March 2022, the European Commission presented its sustainable textiles strategy, which is part of the Circular Economy action plan. Textile waste prevention and mandatory collection of used textiles beginning in 2025, are two critical points of departure. Textile recycling for new clothing production from old clothing must become a reality. Raw materials must not be discarded. It is unclear how far the Strategy will go towards ending the export of low-value textiles to African countries such as Ghana and South America as long as it is not published.

External Actions:

Now, a lot of famous companies are focused on eco-friendly clothing. These products encourage resource-wise living or ecologically sound manufacturing practices. In other words, eco-friendly products enhance rather than harm the environment. The benefits of wearing eco-friendly clothing include less upkeep, a healthy interior ecology, a smaller carbon impact, and increased property value.

CONCLUSION

Overproduction and consumption patterns globally are indirect causes of biodiversity loss because they underpin land-use change and habitat loss, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution and climate change, all of which are drivers of biodiversity loss. The majority of the negative impact on biodiversity is caused by raw-material production, material preparation and processing, and waste disposal. We need to rethink current clothing consumption practices in order to buy less, buy better, wear our clothes longer, and figure out how to recycle them in a circular fashion.

By focusing on enabling the preservation and restoration of damaged ecosystems, fashion can begin to reverse its destructive relationship with biodiversity. Ecosystem conservation, restoring the health of working agricultural lands, providing farmers with financial incentives for good practices, institutionalizing carbon emission reductions, mainstreaming traceability and blockchain, and promoting certifications and holistic management are just a few examples.

While we all have a role to play in helping nature recover locally and internationally, corporations and politicians must take extreme measures to protect and restore nature. We still have time to make things right, but we need reform quickly - and we need it now!

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- What is your country doing to reduce fashion waste?
- Where does your country's garbage from fast fashion go?
- What impact does fashion have on the environment in your nation?
- What percentage of textile waste is being recycled in your country?

RESOURCES

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