UN environment

HIGHGATE WOOD SCHOOL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

BRIEFING PAPER

February 2020 **CONFERENCE**

What is UNEP?

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.

UN Environment promotes sound environmental governance - the rules, policies and institutions that shape how humans interact with the environment. By building robust governance systems, we can safeguard the environment and human rights and work toward all 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

A healthy environment plays a key role in meeting many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. With a little over 10 years left to meet the target date of 2030, the world will need to pick up the pace and put greater efforts in finding better solutions to pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss in order to truly transform societies and economies. The environment infiltrates all areas of the world with developing countries affected hugely in all areas of their development including health, economies and immigration. UNEP is one of the most important committees within this conference with it being at the root of the climate change crisis with all delegates within this room needing to promote their environmental needs and help move together as a united force against the crisis at hand.

What is the Environment?

- ➔ the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates

Why is the Environment Important?

- ➔ The environment is the most important resource for life
- ➔ We get water, power and Oxygen from the Environment.
- ➔ It helps to clear pollution and is a large habitat for animals

What is Climate Change?

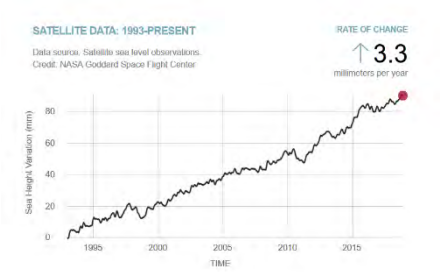
- ➔ Otherwise known as 'Global warming' is the long-term rise in the average temperature of the Earth's climate system.
- ➔ It is a major aspect of climate change and has been demonstrated by direct temperature measurements and by measurements of various effects of the warming.

What Impact does Climate Change have on the Environment?

- ➔ Drastic changes in global temperatures
- ➔ Extreme weather patterns

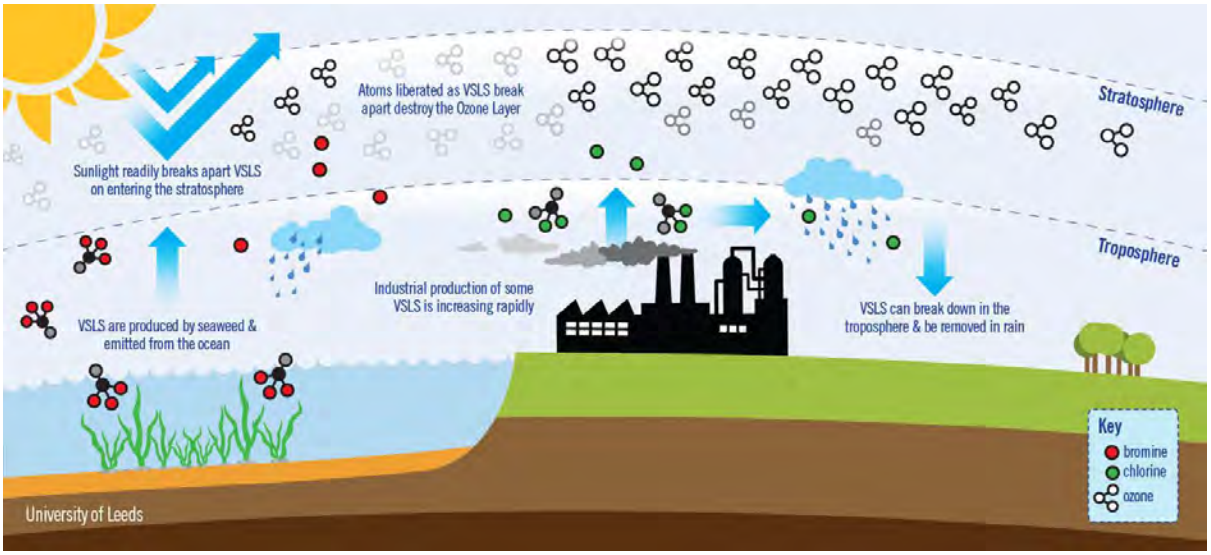
What are the challenges that the environment faces?

Our Earth is currently facing a lot of environmental concerns. The environmental problems like global warming, acid rain, air pollution, urban sprawl, waste disposal, ozone layer depletion, water pollution, climate change and many more affect every human, animal and nation on our planet.



Global warming is projected to have a number of effects on the oceans. Ongoing effects include rising sea levels due to thermal expansion and melting of glaciers and ice sheets, and warming of the ocean surface, leading to increased temperature stratification. With these changes come the issue of loss of habitat, which effects can be seen globally. The Adélie penguin is one of just two true Antarctic penguins, surviving on the ice-bound continent for 45,000 years. Colonies of this little penguin on the West Antarctic Peninsula have declined by at least 80% since the 1970s, and this is an area with more years of warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures than other regions. Another example of loss of habitat due to damage to the environment which was directly caused by climate change is caused by sea levels rising as rapidly as they have been. Even a small increase can have devastating effects on coastal habitats farther inland, it can cause destructive erosion, wetland flooding, aquifer and agricultural soil contamination with salt, and lost habitat for fish, birds, and plants.

Further devastation to the environment is seen in the ecological effects of acid rain which are most clearly seen in aquatic environments, such as streams, lakes, and marshes where it can be harmful to fish and other wildlife. As it flows through the soil, acidic rainwater can leach aluminium from soil clay particles and then flow into streams and lakes. The acidity in the water can cause many fish and sea life to die, and that can throw off the whole food-chain. Some types of plants and animals are able to tolerate acidic waters and moderate amounts of aluminium. Others, however, are acid-sensitive and will be lost as the pH declines. Generally, the young of most species are more sensitive to environmental conditions than adults. At pH 5, most fish eggs cannot hatch. At lower pH levels, some adult fish die. Some acidic lakes have no fish. Even if a species of fish or animal can tolerate moderately acidic water, the animals or plants it eats might not.



Ozone depletion is also seen to have significant effects on the environment with UVB radiation being found to cause damage to early developmental stages of fish, shrimp, crab, amphibians, and other marine animals. The most severe effects are decreased reproductive capacity and impaired larval development. Small increases in UVB exposure could result in population reductions for small marine organisms with implications for the whole marine food chain.

What are human's role is the deteriorating environment?

- ➔ Burning of fossil fuels
- ➔ Deforestation
- ➔ Livestock farming

Environmental crisis (impact of global warming)

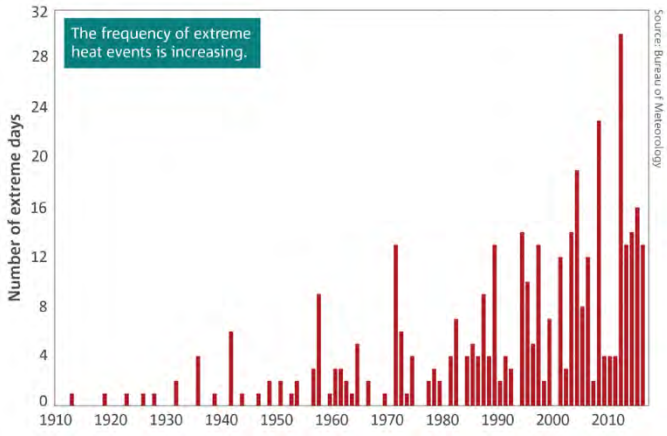
Australian wildfires

Australia is being ravaged by the worst wildfires seen in decades, with large swathes of the country devastated since the fire season began in late July.

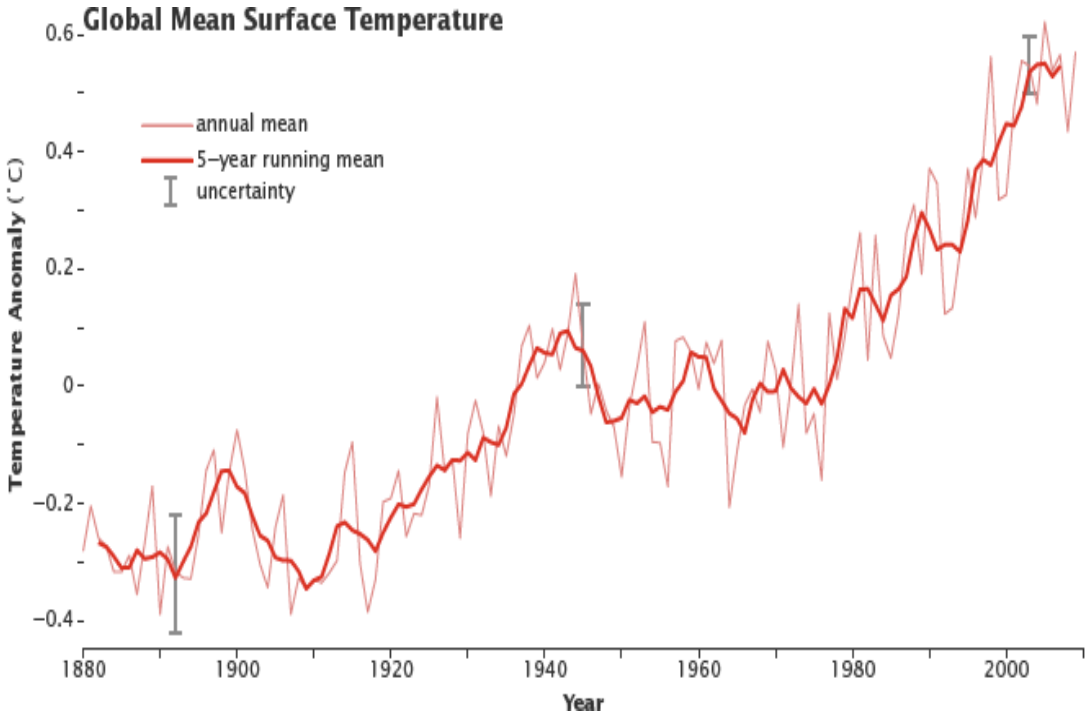
27 people have died nationwide, and in the state of New South Wales (NSW) alone, more than 2,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged. State and federal authorities are struggling to contain the massive blazes, even with firefighting assistance from other countries, including the United States.

All this has been caused by persistent heat and drought, and many point to climate change as a factor making natural disasters go from bad to worse. Australia is experiencing one of its worst droughts in decades -- the country's Bureau of Meteorology said in December that last spring was the driest on record. Meanwhile, a heatwave in December broke the record for highest nationwide average temperature, with some places sweltering under temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius (about 113-120 degrees Fahrenheit).

This is an example of climate change destroying the environment with it affecting all aspects of both human and animal life. Climate change has been occurring for years but now the repercussions of the lazy global efforts are truly being felt and quick action must be taken.



These worrying statistics not only show how drastic the effects of the climate change crisis are but also highlight the worrying trends and what will unfold in the future.



These worrying statistics display the global crisis at hand with Australia being only one example of global warmings detrimental and potentially irreversible effects.

Arctic

Arctic is at the centre of the all environmental crisis with it showing all effects

Changes in surface temperatures in the Arctic are more significant than anywhere else in the world. According to the U.S. National Center for the Study of Snow and Ice, Arctic water temperatures in winter have increased between 2 and 3 degrees over the last 50 years. This information shows that climate change is already a reality at the North Pole, directly affecting the ice pack. The latest study on climate published by the World Bank predicts a 4°C rise in global temperature by 2100, but the increase in the Arctic Ocean could be as high as 8°C, with dramatic consequences on the ice pack. This affects all areas of the Arctic's wildlife with animal populations dying out at terrifying rates.

Faced with the major economic interests at stake, we need to affirm the ecological emergency and the importance of the Arctic for the global climate. At the same time we must recognize that demands for total conservation are utopian - impossible to achieve in the current political context. As was the case for the Antarctic a few decades ago, the Arctic can and must be the site of a new dynamic of collective agreement for the establishment of peaceful and sustainable governance of its resources, based on the principle of general interest, and justified by the importance of the region for all life on our blue planet. It is a global responsibility to protect this area rich with wildlife and ensure that these species are preserved.

Questions to consider

- Is your country a party to the Kyoto Protocol? Why was the decision made?
- Did your country sign up to the Paris Agreement? Why was that decision made?
- What actions has your country taken, or plan to take, to address the issue of climate change?

Useful links

https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/what-is-the-paris-agreement

https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/04/parisagreementsingatures/

https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol

https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/reports.shtml