JejuMUN XII

BACKGROUND GUIDE

United Nations Environment Programme

Combating environmental degradation in the fast fashion industry

SDG: 12. Responsible Consumption and Production

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Committee Introduction

Founded in 1972 by a UN General Assembly resolution (2997 XXVII), the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) addresses growing global issues of pollution, natural resource depletion, and environmental degradation. The UNEP addresses a wide range of urgent issues, including global climate change, loss of biodiversity, water pollution, desertification, deforestation, and even sustainable development, as one of the main UN committees that focuses on environmental issues and tries to foster international cooperation and provide support on environmental issues.

The committee addresses environmental issues through research, shaping international agreements, and supporting countries in implementing sustainable environmental policy to promote sustainable development and conserve the environment. Including the Montreal Protocol of 1987, which successfully terminated ozone-depleting materials, and the Paris Agreement of 2015, which strengthened the global response and nations' accountability regarding climate change and carbon emission, the UNEP has played a vital role in global efforts.

As UNEP does not have legal enforcement or sanction powers, unlike other special agencies/committees like the ICJ and the Security Council, it utilizes actions by providing scientific knowledge, building consensus, and fostering international cooperation. This role of UNEP makes it a unique and crucial body of the UN that works through peaceful advocacy, research, and cooperation to solve some of the most complex and urgent global problems threatening the future.

Agenda Introduction

Fast fashion is the manufacture of low-cost clothing following the latest fashion trends, and it encourages frequent buying and disposing of clothing. The appetite for fast fashion certainly comes with hefty environmental damage. It pollutes water, wasteful water consumption, and deforestation, and it releases carbon, all the way to exploitative labor configurations.

Fast fashion has serious and widespread environmental consequences. Textiles are among the largest sources of environmental pollutants, mainly due to the use of dyes and chemicals for production.

Textile dyeing and finishing account for up to 20% of the total worldwide wastewater. And fashion accounts for roughly 10 percent of global carbon emissions, more than international flights and maritime shipping combined.

Fast disposal of clothes also contributes to the problem. About 92 million tonnes of textile waste are produced per year, and the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or burned every second. These activities result in diminishing biodiversity, depletion of resources, and considerable implications for the climate.

Evidently, the problem of the environmental impact of fast fashion isn't something specific to the UK, but is universal and applicable to almost every corner of the world. The pollution is particularly concentrated in manufacturing hubs, including Bangladesh, India, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, where weak regulations allow massive environmental destruction. But it’s a matter that the Western world is not immune to; fashion in developed countries contributes to high levels of textile waste and unsustainable consumer conduct.

The most at-risk groups include factory workers suffering from dangerous working conditions or communities near polluted waterways or toxic wastelands. More and more, though, future generations are inheriting a planet degraded by resource exploitation and climate change made worse by fast fashion.

The UN has crucial responsibilities with regard to the impacts of fast fashion — to protect overall global environmental health and to ensure sustainable development. While the UNEP emphasizes sustainable consumption and production, the environmental damage that fast fashion causes must be addressed to realize that broader sustainability ambition. Responsibility must be shared at the international level, both in terms of the behavior of corporations and governance. Tackling fast fashion resonates with a number of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, from climate action and clean water and sanitation through decent work and economic growth, to life below water and on land. Through the encouragement of EPP and sustainable production, UNEP can contribute to the alleviation of environmental problems, thus providing a better Earth and a sustainable future for present and future generations.

Letter from the Chairs

Minji Kim / Head Chair / s23270936@sjajeju.kr

Welcome delegates, my name is Minji Kim, and I'm a junior at St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju. I am honored to be serving as the Head Chair of this committee. I first participated in MUN as a delegate in middle school at JEJUMUN. This remarkable experience allowed me to continue my successful MUN career. Now, I've participated, chaired, and organized multiple conferences. I am sure that this committee will be one of the most intense and enjoyable committees I've ever chaired. While preparing for UNEP, you would need to read various documents and analyze information. It might be challenging at the beginning, but always enjoy the process of researching. From my experience, the more you prepare, the more you will enjoy the conference! Throughout the conference, I wish all delegates to express their passion for the agenda and passionately interact with each other! Always feel free to reach out! Have fun while preparing for the conference, and I'm looking forward to seeing you all at JEJUMUN XII.

YoonJi Kim / Deputy Chair / s22290644@sjajeju.kr

Greeting delegates, my name is YoonJi Kim, and I'll be serving as your deputy chair for the upcoming conference. I'm an incoming freshman at St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju, and this is my 3rd year participating in MUN. Over the past years, MUN has challenged me by deepening my passion for global affairs, diplomacy, and cooperation. Just like how I was inspired by MUN, I look forward to seeing innovative solutions and thoughtful discussions that could empower you to grow into a confident delegate.

Shirley Jang/ Associate Chair / ysjang27@kis.ac

Greetings, delegates. My name is Shirley Jang, a junior at Korea International School Jeju. I've always found thrill in participating in MUNs as a delegate, but recently began to enjoy chairing after a series of unforgettable events. It's my pleasure to be serving you all as your associate chair for JEJUMUN Xii, and I really hope we will make the best memories together. Whether you are a beginner delegate or a passionate advocate, please try to learn as much as possible during our discussions. This may sound cliché, but once you realize that people participate in MUNs not only for the awards but for the lessons and connections, you will never be the same. With that said, I welcome you to what will be the best committee ever! Should you have any questions, please reach out to one of the chairs! See you there.

Key Terms

Fast Fashion

The reproduction of clothing is rapidly produced by mass-market retailers at low cost in response to the latest trends.

Mass Market

The production and sale of goods (clothing) in large quantities at affordable prices appeals to a wide range of consumers.

Environmental Degradation

The deterioration of the environment due to the depletion of natural resources like water, air, and soil, as well as the destruction of ecosystems, is often linked to the fashion industry.

Textile Waste

Waste is generated due to the production and consumption of clothing or textiles. Scraps of fabric thrown away during production, clothes that consumers no longer wear, and waste generated from the production and disposal of textile products are included.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The simultaneous pursuit of benefits to society, including ethical management, social contribution, local communities, and environmental management, while conducting production and business activities, involves making decisions and activities accordingly.

Carbon Footprint

The total amount of greenhouse gas emissions (especially carbon dioxide) emitted directly or indirectly from a company, product, or activity that leaves a large carbon footprint. In the fashion industry, a carbon footprint activity includes transportation, production, and consumption processes.

Greenwashing

An act of an enterprise producing a product that actually adversely affects the environment, but promotes itself as an eco-friendly company through advertising, etc.

Supply Chain Transparency

Disclosure of information on the overall production and distribution process of the product, and enabling consumers or related companies to have a transparent understanding of the process from the procurement of raw materials for the product to delivery to the consumer.

Microplastics

Very small pieces of plastic debris are present in the environment due to the disposal and decomposition of consumer goods and industrial waste. Microplastics in the fashion industry are mostly released from clothing and textiles during the product's lifecycle.

Overconsumption

An act of spending more money or resources than necessary. It refers to the excessive buying of clothing, often driven by rapid fashion trends, leading to a culture where clothes are frequently discarded after minimal use.

Historical Background

The fast fashion industry gained international attention in the late 20th century with the rise of cheap, trendy clothing brands such as Zara, H&M, and Shein. However, the roots trace back to the Industrial Revolution when the concept of "division of labor" and "assembly line" was introduced. The modern, fast-paced mass production with the use of low-cost labor has newly increased the overconsumption culture, and gained significant consumer demand for its affordability rather than sustainability. Developed nations are outsourcing textile production to developing countries, where they have cheaper labor and weaker environmental regulations. Most developed nations have implemented stricter labor and corporate rights and standards due to increased concerns of human exploitation. However, the rise of the fast fashion industry not only exposed labor abuses but also devastating environmental impacts.

Collapse of the Rana Plaza Factory (2013)
Bangladesh is known for its huge garment industry and is well-established as a major textile producer. In fact, according to the World Fashion Exchange, Bangladesh is the world's fifth-largest exporter of home textiles, and the industry is a great source of income for the country. However, with this rapid growth comes a price. The garment industry is one of the biggest polluters as its demand for raw materials, non-ideal ways of transportation, and its toxic waste disposal lead to water pollution, a substantial carbon footprint, deforestation, and land degradation. Not only that, but back in 2013, a commercial textile factory—the Rana Plaza Factory—in Bangladesh collapsed, killing thousands of people and leaving thousands more injured. This catastrophe exposed the unsafe core of these fast fashion industries. Including the unsafe working conditions and environmental neglect caused by a lack of corporate transparency and accountability.

Detox My Fashion campaign - Greenpeace (2011-2018)
International non-governmental organization Greenpeace has recommended eighty major clothing brands to ensure sustainable chemical usage in their supply chain by 2020. The Detox campaign is regarded as an innovative procedure that has raised clothing industry awareness, giving the wake-up call to the whole industry. According to Head of Corporate Sustainability PUMA SE Stefan Seidel, the campaign was limited to "chemical management and environmental compliance in Tier 2 of the supply chain," expanding environmental performance efforts and promoting positive brand image.

Fashion Industry Charter (2018)
The Fashion Industry Charter was launched at COP24 in Katowice, Poland, in 2018. The charter contained a sustainable vision to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Also, keeping the global warming level below 1.5°C from fashion brands such as Puma, Adidas, and Levi's.

UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion (2019)
The United Nations Environment Programme and UNFCCC launched an alliance that is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on the 12th SDG, "Responsible Consumption and Production." It gathered effective global attention and improved collaboration, but it failed to be successfully enforced.

European Union Circular Economy Action Plan (2020)
The European Commission adopted a new circular economy action plan (CEAP), which is considered the main focus of the European Green Deal. It aims to reduce pressure on natural resources and produce sustainable jobs and growth. It monitors the entire production process, such as the material footprint, resource productivity, and consumption footprint.

Current State of Affairs

Generating 92 million tonnes of textile waste annually, fast fashion is one of the factors that greatly impacts the environment. The rapid production of clothes and the temporary change of trend led to excessive amounts of waste and environmental damage. According to McKinsey & Company, by 2030, the global consumption of fast fashion will be estimated at 102 million tons, rising 63 percent. The total amount of greenhouse gas emissions from textile production is 1.2 billion tons per year, more than all international flights and maritime ships combined, as three of the five garments produced are dumped or incinerated in landfills every year.

In response to the status quo, the United Nations Environment Programme launched a six-year, $340 million initiative targeting to reshape the supply chain of the fashion industry and reduce environmental impact in eight countries: Cambodia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago. Apart from UNEP, countries and corporations also showed efforts. The European Union (EU) passed a bill making fashion companies responsible for collecting, sorting, and recycling their products, which will take place in 2026. Helena Helmersson, the new CEO of fashion brand H&M, has set a goal of producing all products from 100 percent recycled materials or raw materials collected in a sustainable way by 2030, and has also announced plans to change the company into a climate-positive one by 2040. In addition, the state enacted the Responsible Textile Recovery Act (SB 707) in 2024, requiring clothing and textile manufacturers to operate product recycling programs. But the general progress of mitigating excessive consumption of the fast fashion industry is constantly being impeded.

The emergence of fast fashion platforms, including Shein and Temu, has accelerated the consumption and production of products, which is greatly worsening environmental degradation. Additionally, major fashion brands, including Adidas and Lululemon, have been reported to have failed to achieve their carbon reduction targets and to have adopted a clean energy transition. The fact that the regulation of the fashion industry varies country by country and the low disclosure of the company's supply chain make the situation more inefficient. Innovative technologies such as AI-based textile sorting and recycling have emerged as an alternative solution, but have not shown an improvement, nor have they demonstrated the possibility of deployment.

To summarize, despite countless efforts by organizations, countries, and corporations, corporate resistance, rapid market expansion, and ineffective international cooperation are hindering progress. Therefore, further regulation, international cooperation, and the fashion industry’s accountability are necessary to mitigate environmental degradation caused by the fast fashion industry.

Stances of Parties

Australia
Australia is the second-largest consumer of new textiles, following the United States. They create 27 kilograms of new textiles each year. The fast fashion industry heavily depends on non-renewable resources, emitting significant amounts of greenhouse gases. Asia supplies more than 90% of the garments to Australia. Organizations such as Ethical Clothing Australia (ECA) are helping to clean up the fashion industry.

Bangladesh
Bangladesh is the world's second-largest producer of apparel, which accounts for the premium quality at low costs. They have also seen the increase in wastewater from harmful chemicals, such as dyes, from the process of clothing manufacturing. The Buriganga River, Bangladesh, has the lowest Water Quality Index (WQI) rating.

Brazil
Brazil is the world's fourth-largest producer of cotton. According to the recent report, cotton was produced specifically for eight companies, including H&M and Zara, which manufactured around 250 million items. Cotton for the purpose of export is mainly produced in the Western part of Brazil's Bahia state, a region in an extremely biodiverse savanna. According to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, deforestation there has doubled in the past 5 years.

Cambodia
Greenpeace's Detox My Fashion campaign has exposed the water pollution in Cambodia for the past decade. According to the report, 84.7% of the fashion consumed in the EU took place outside the EU, mainly in Southeast Asia, including Cambodia.

Canada
Textiles are the fifth-largest category of waste that is sent to landfills in Canada. Currently, in Canada, there is a very limited collection and recycling of textiles, with only 2% of plastic textiles ending up in the recycling process. In addition, approximately 878 tonnes of microfibers are released from factories into fresh waters in Canada and the United States each year.

China
China is home to 65% of the world's clothing production. According to the World Health Organization, China's polluted water causes 75% of diseases and over 100,000 deaths yearly. "There is huge room for improvement in the textile industry as a whole," said Ma Jun, director of the Institute for Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE). Currently, over 70% of lakes and rivers and 90% of the groundwater in China are polluted. This has deterred 320 million Chinese from accessing clean water, which is more than the United States' population.

Ethiopia
Ethiopia is regarded as "the rising star" in textile production and "the Water Tower" in Africa. There remains a fear that uncontrolled water extraction in local cotton cultivation might lead

to a significant shortage of clean groundwater. However, increased cultivation will help resolve the economic crisis of unemployment. Similar to what Bangladesh is experiencing, the emancipation of women can be expected.

France
The Member of the French National Assembly Anne-Cecile Violland argued, "The textile industry is the biggest polluter, accounting for 10% of greenhouse gas emissions, and if we do nothing, we will reach 26% by 2050." Recently, the French Senate has approved a bill that includes new measures such as an eco-tax, an eco-score system, and a ban on advertisements for certain fashion brands.

Germany
Germany is the second-largest fashion consumer in the world after England. Annually, the German fashion industry emits 38 million tons of greenhouse gases, 90% emitted worldwide. However, Germany is leading the smart production of textiles. Initiatives such as the circular. Fashion, Clean Clothes Campaign, or FairWertung, is responsible for fair recycling and opposing overproduction and overconsumption. Since German consumers are largely conscious of the importance of sustainable clothing, they place significant emphasis on sustainability and corporate responsibility.

India
India is one of the major contributors to textile waste. So much so that the Prime Minister of India has made a point to highlight the fact that by 2030, the waste generated by fast fashion alone could reach 148 million tonnes. Cities in India like Bengaluru are struggling to manage the textile waste that has accumulated in landfills. So now, it has gone to the point where the Noyyal River in Tamil Nadu is no longer drinkable. In order to resolve this problem, India has made efforts to promote sustainable fashion practices like the SU.RE project, but the results remain unclear

Indonesia
Indonesia has grown to be a significant player in the fast fashion industry. In fact, more than 3.6 million people in Indonesia are involved with textile and garment production, further boosting the country's economy and making up around 6% of Indonesia's GDP. The rise of this fast fashion industry has seen many benefits, but also many harms, as Indonesia generates an estimated 2.3 million tons of textile waste every year. Because of this, landfills are overwhelmed, water is polluted, and the environment is damaged. It is suggested that for the best outcome, Indonesia should find ways to maintain economic growth whilst also finding ways to reduce its environmental impact.

Italy
As a country famously known for high-quality fashion, luxury goods, and craftsmanship, Italy is known for its traditional fashion industry. However, due to the advantages of rapid production and lower price, fast fashion is also rampant in Italy. Contributing around 5.1% of GDP and producing 465,000 tonnes of textiles annually, the rise of the fast fashion industry in Italy shows both opportunities and challenges. Currently, Italy is actively working to mitigate the problem by mandating textile waste collection and increasing environmental commitment.

Still, the challenge of achieving full circulation and addressing environmental degradation remains a problem in Italy.

Japan
Japan has been seen making efforts to fight the rising popularity of fast fashion brands such as Zara or H&M. They do this through recycling programs, second-hand clothes, and brands that take time in making their products. Although their efforts are noted, the status quo remains the same in that, despite their efforts, the country still generates about 485,000 metric tons of clothing annually. That is still a substantial amount of waste.

Kenya
What's known as the "mitumba trade" in Kenya is a system where the country receives second-hand clothes and such from wealthy nations. This method allows its citizens to get their hands on cheap, affordable clothing. Some Kenyans even sell them for income. Although this method sounds great and eco-friendly, it also contributes to textile waste and pollution in Kenya. You see, the reality is, about 20-50% of clothes from the mitumba trade are deemed unsalvageable since the clothes are often damaged or of poor quality. All these clothes are then transported to landfills, which further pollute the environment. It is suggested that Kenya start to engage in a sustainable fashion market, improve fabric recycling, and reduce their dependency on mitumba trading.

Mexico
Brands such as Zara, Old Navy, and GAP have been rapidly growing Mexico's fast fashion industry. That means that now, consumers get a wider range of choices. All this has brought a lot of economic benefits to the country. However, at the same time, concerns were raised about the industry's impact on the environment. According to studies conducted by the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMBDA), the fashion industry in Mexico is responsible for 1.2% of soil waste. Not only that, but it has also been revealed that the industry faces challenges of poor working conditions and a dominance of international brands.

Nigeria
Generating 2.5 million tons of waste each year, the fast fashion industry in Nigeria is generating social and environmental costs that the country can't ignore. Locally known as Okrika, the widespread availability of secondhand clothing accounts for 70-80% of the nation's textile market. The country is addressing this issue through initiatives, sustainable practices, and local resource utilization, but still faces hardship in creating a real impact.

Pakistan
With a market size of around 3.5 billion dollars and a growth rate of 15%, Pakistan is a major player in the global textile and fashion industry. Even though Pakistan's fast fashion industry produces approximately 9.5% of Pakistan's industrial greenhouse gas emissions. The government is addressing the issue by supporting artisan crafts and environmentally friendly practices, but the progress has been slow. Thus, it's essential to support transparent supply chains and centralized compliance systems for long-term sustainability.

South Korea

With more than 110,000 tons of clothing thrown away in 2024, nearly twice as much as in 2019, South Korea is dealing with an expanding fast fashion waste problem. The nation is in favor of growing its advanced textile recycling industry, which is predicted to grow by about 4.5% annually. By making investments in low-water dyeing techniques, biodegradable materials, and increased supply-chain transparency, South Korea hopes to become a regional leader in sustainable textile innovation. Additionally, the government is in favor of more stringent Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations that mandate businesses to recycle and return the clothing they sell.

Spain
Spain is home to Inditex, the parent company of Zara, which made €38.6 billion in revenue and €7.6 billion in profit in 2024. With a major influence on global fashion, Spain has already taken steps. Zara eliminated 95% of single-use plastics by 2023 and aims for net-zero emissions by 2040. Spain believes that, instead of many different national rules, global reporting standards and voluntary industry charters will help fashion companies reduce waste and pollution more effectively. It supports initiatives like eco-design labels to help shoppers recognize environmentally friendly clothing.

Sri Lanka
Garments are the heart of Sri Lanka's economy, generating $4.8 billion in exports in 2024 and employing around 300,000 people, mostly women. However, the country faces challenges with outdated factory infrastructure and growing U.S. tariffs. Since clothing production accounts for 32% of GDP, Sri Lanka is concerned that sudden environmental regulations could threaten jobs. It calls for international help to modernize factories with cleaner wastewater treatment and provide retraining programs to workers. Sri Lanka wants environmental progress that also protects livelihoods.

Sweden
H&M's home country of Sweden is advocating for significant reforms in the production and reuse of apparel. By 2030, H&M hopes to have 100% of its materials come from sustainable or recycled sources, up from its current 89%. Sweden is in favor of stricter regulations throughout the European Union that mandate fashion brands to gather and recycle clothing and create easily disassembled and reusable garments. Additionally, it wants the UN to serve as the focal point for a forum where nations and businesses can exchange the best ideas for greener fashion.

Turkey
With 1.2 million jobs and $19.2 billion in apparel export revenue in 2023, Turkey boasts one of the biggest textile industries globally. Clean technologies are still lacking in many factories, though. Turkey requests funding, including green loans, to modernize factories and cut pollution without compromising economic expansion. In order to ensure that environmental regulations are reasonable, workable, and safeguard the environment and laborers, it also wishes to collaborate closely with important trading partners such as the EU.

United Kingdom

Each person in the UK discards roughly 3.1 kg of textiles annually, and more than 350,000 tonnes of clothing wind up in landfills. The majority of clothing is burned or buried; only 9–12% is recycled. The UK is in favor of requiring businesses to disclose their environmental impact by law in order to combat this. By urging the government to only purchase from environmentally friendly vendors and collaborating with groups to educate the public on responsible shopping, the UK also hopes to promote sustainable apparel.

United States

The United States generates a massive 11.3 million tons of textile waste every year, equivalent to about 37 kg (81 lb) of clothing per person, with 85% of it going to landfills. The U.S. believes the solution lies in innovation and incentives. It supports offering tax credits to companies that invest in garment recycling and sustainable fashion research. While it prefers flexible international agreements, the U.S. is investing in green-label programs and backing university-led studies to improve textile technology.

Vietnam

Vietnam's apparel industry is essential to the country's economy, accounting for around 15% of its exports. However, Vietnam is under pressure to modernize since 67% of US and EU buyers now require environmental standards from their suppliers. The nation suggests a five- to seven-year timeline to meet new environmental standards and is requesting technical assistance to enhance wastewater treatment. In order to exchange resources, expertise, and monitoring systems, Vietnam also wishes to collaborate with other countries in Southeast Asia.

Possible Solutions

Enforcing Corporate Environmental Accountability
Full transparency of supply chains is required for fashion brands through the newly established international initiatives. International organizations such as the United Nations might mandate annual assessments of the carbon and water footprint for the garment producers. They might impose export or import restrictions on countries that overconsume or overproduce. Also, the introduction of stricter legal consequences, such as trade restrictions on corporations that do not adhere to the international environmental guidelines, could encourage green production. Sustained enforcement could pressure brands to adopt sustainable practices, such as incentivizing green producers and adopting initiatives like the French Eco Tax.

Promoting sustainable production in developing countries through investment and education
Developing nations such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Cambodia face challenges in adopting sustainable practices due to a lack of technology transfer and funding. Establishing a new sector in the United Nations or other international organizations could aid developing states in adopting sustainable innovations, including waterless dyeing and biodegradable materials. The additional funds from the developed nations could also reduce reliance on low-cost and high-pollution production techniques and build long-term local capacity. The education of the local factory workers and factory owners regarding the environmental consequences could increase environmental awareness.

Questions to Consider

1. To what limit should the government regulate for the sustainability of fast fashion, and how can we restrict damage to economic growth and employment through over-regulation?
2. What is the responsibility of corporations and fashion companies in checking textile waste, and how can the international community hold them responsible?
3. Does your country already have or employ circular economy strategies like recycling, reusing, and repair plans in the clothing industry? If not, what are the problems, and how can the country overcome these issues?
4. How can MEDCs and LEDCs work together to make sure that solutions to address the agenda do not economically damage low-income countries that rely on clothes exports?
5. What is the position of your country towards importing and exporting textile waste, and how does your country react to the matter of shifting the environmental costs to a few countries?
6. On which side does your country position itself between the international goal of reducing environmental degradation and your industry and economy?
7. What is the role of consumers in the rapid growth of the fast fashion industry and the harm to the environment, and how do countries and businesses have to change consumer behavior?

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