

FORUM: United Nations Environment Programme

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What is the UNEP and how does it work?

The United Nations Environment Programme is responsible for the coordination of the UN's responses to environmental issues. Its jurisdiction ranges from climate change related problems to the development of green economies to the management of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It is currently based in Nairobi, Kenya. As climate change becomes an increasingly controversial and hotly debated issue, whether responsibility for it lies among the already developed Western nations or the current global emitters, the UNEP will become an increasingly important UN forum. More information can be found in the guidance documents available on the WESMUN website.

Background

The Arctic is often referred to as the last unconquered land on the planet Earth, yet this was largely because when much of its ice was frozen, it was inhospitable to industrial development and could only accommodate small populations. The Arctic, which can be taken as the Arctic Ocean and its adjacent seas, currently holds 4 million people, one third of which are indigenous peoples like the Sami and the Inuit, who could arguably be the most crucial stakeholders in a resolution. These indigenous peoples coexist with the ecosystem, which is also one of the most vulnerable in the world. The Arctic is experiencing the fast and drastic climate change with a temperature increase of 1.9 degrees C in the last 30 years

However, this region holds incredibly valuable resources: the US Geological Survey has estimated that the resources within the Arctic Circle account for 22% of the world's yet undiscovered reserves of resources. Equally, the opportunity for trade routes opening up through the Arctic has great economic and geopolitical value. As more and more ice melts, geopolitical activity around the Arctic has been hotting up.

The Arctic Council was founded in 1996, and now includes Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. It a forum to increase interaction between all the states which exercise sovereignty over lands within the Arctic Circle.

In 2007, Russia its flag on the North Pole seabed, suggesting a territorial claim on the whole region. Luckily, so far, states have bartered rather than fought over rights and territory, and in 2008 the Ilulissat declaration was signed, which committed Arctic states to peaceful cooperation.

Current situation

The three most important resources in the Arctic are minerals, fish stocks and huge oil and gas reserves, most of which are located in Russian territories. Russia has always been advancing also in terms of settlement, one major one being on Svalbard. While the war in Ukraine has not spilled over massively into the Arctic theatre, with global tensions rising and the Arctic melting, delegates will have to look for solutions and ways to deescalate future potential flare-ups.