

**Background Guide**

**UN Environmental Program**

**Topic: Invasive Species**

**Prepared by: Caylee Sheaffer (Hood College)**

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## **I. Introduction to the Committee**

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The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is the leading global authority on the environment. Founded in 1972, the UNEP's mission is to inspire, inform, and enable nations and peoples to improve their quality of life, but without compromising future generations. To do this, the UNEP has worked with governments, civil society, the private sector, and numerous United Nations entities to address environmental issues. Later, it was established as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations Environment Assembly in May 1985. UNEP's headquarters are located in Nairobi, Kenya.

As the leading global environmental authority, the UNEP's primary role is to coordinate environmental activities, promote sustainable development, and guide the international community in addressing environmental challenges. The organization's work is focused on helping countries transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy, safeguarding ecosystems, strengthening environmental law, and providing evidence to inform policy decisions. The organization has several divisions including: Communication Corporate Services , Industry and Economy , Ecosystems , Governance Affairs , Law , Policy and Program , and Early Warning and Assessment..

The UNEP reviews global, regional, and national environmental conditions and trends and plays an important role for the development of national and international norms, policies, and laws. . Finally, the UNEP works with institutions to encourage the wise and legal management of the environment so that institutions have the resources and knowledge to make informed policy and legal decisions.

As a subsidiary organ of the United Nations Environmental Assembly, the UNEP works closely with the assembly to provide information and ideas. This includes: contributing to the preparation of the agenda of the assembly governing body, providing advice to the assembly, preparing decisions for adoption, arranging thematic and/or programmatic debates, promoting effective ways to facilitate participation of the non-resident members of the committee, and performing any other functions delegated by the UN Environmental Assembly. These actions aid the UNEP in achieving its mission and the United Nations Environmental Assembly with performing its duties.

## **II. Statement of the Problem**

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Invasive species pose a severe threat to biodiversity, and evidence has shown that such species are causing untold damage to many ecosystems (UNEP, 2016). An invasive species is an organism that is not indigenous (native) to a particular area. They can cause great economic and environmental harm to new areas.

Invasive alien species (IAS) can be plants, animals or pathogens. These species are introduced (intentionally or unintentionally) and become established in a new environment, then spread in ways that are destructive to human interests and natural systems (UNEP, 2016). For example, in Ethiopia 82 to 95 percent of sorghum yields are lost to *Parthenium hysterophorus*. Also known as *Prosopis juliflora* (“the Devil Tree”), which has invaded about 800,000 hectares in Ethiopia, 600,000 in Kenya, 1.8 million in South Africa, and 5.6 million hectares in India (UNEP, 2016). Invasive plant species can have significant negative impacts and force people off their land and into migration.

IAS have adverse effects on national economies, food security, human health, and biodiversity. Economic costs of invasive plants and animals in the USA are estimated at \$137 billion and in Southeast Asia at 33.5 billion per annum (UNEP, 2016). Reduced agriculture production is one of the biggest impacts of IAS, which can affect food security.

IAS are still being introduced everywhere. Invasive species are introduced to new areas either intentionally – by hunting or fishing, for example – or unintentionally, through a contaminant on traded goods, for instance, or as a “hitchhiker” on vehicles or boats. With the increased movement of people and goods around the world, the number of established alien species is expected to increase by 36 per cent between 2005 and 2050 (UN, 2020).

Invasive alien species are a gradual, hidden process. Problems from these species often develop years later. Economies have been hurt by IAS, thereby costing billions per year. There is not enough awareness about invasive species; however, there is more focus now on prevention strategies.

### **III. History/Past UN Actions**

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For decades, the UN has called upon member states to collectively address the invasive species issue and the problems they produce. In 2015, member states created and adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere (United Nations, 2023). These goals are a part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which sets out a 15-year plan to achieve the goals. Specifically, the issue of invasive species is linked to SDG 15 (Life on Land), which includes the imperative to: protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss falls under SDG 15 (Life on Land).

To address these challenges, considerable efforts are underway to expand sustainable forest management and to protect sites critical to biodiversity (UN, 2020). Countries are also

enacting legislation and accounting principles to address threats to biodiversity, such as the growing spread of invasive alien species. Fortunately, conservation actions could stave off further species loss. For example, many bird and mammal species have benefited from invasive species control, conservation in zoos and other collections, and site protection (UN, 2020).

Preventing the introduction of invasive alien species is the most cost-effective way to address their often negative economic impacts. Nearly all countries (98 percent) now have national legislation to prevent or control invasive alien species, but the sectoral coverage of such legislation varies widely (UN, 2020). Most countries have adopted legislation relevant to plant and animal health in agriculture (92 percent and 82 percent), but fewer countries have created legislation focused on the environment (42 percent) or fisheries and aquaculture (27 percent) (UN, 2020). In addition, adequate resources are crucial to an effective response. However, only 55 percent of countries have reported allocations from their national budgets to deal with invasive species, while only 37 percent have accessed global financing mechanisms (UN, 2020).

#### **IV. Latest Developments**

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In 2022, the fifth UN Environment Assembly endorsed 14 resolutions to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2022). Three resolutions prioritize ecosystem restoration, biodiversity protection, resource efficiency, consumption and production patterns, climate mitigation and adaptation, job creation and poverty reduction (UN, 2022). Another resolution on biodiversity and health calls on Member States to reduce health risks associated with trade in live wildlife captured (UN, 2022). The Ministerial Declaration stressed the urgent need to halt the global decline of biodiversity and the fragmentation of habitats, unprecedented in human history and driven by changes in land and sea use, exploitation of nature, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, climate change, invasive alien species and pollution of ocean and fresh water, air and soil (UN, 2022).

For your research, consider the following questions from your country's perspective

1. Is your country a source, transit, and/or destination location for invasive species?
2. What sectors of the economy have been the most impacted by invasive species in your country?
3. Does your country have adequate legislation in place to address invasive species?
4. Does your country work with other countries in tracking invasive species?

## **V. Problems a Resolution Should Address**

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A resolution by the UNEP should formulate a comprehensive response that focuses on prevention and control where it most counts and is most feasible. They should be cost-effective and environmentally friendly methods and should make others more aware of how severe the problem really is. Invasive species are also a development problem and intersect with the attainment various Sustainable Development Goals. .

## **VI. Helpful Sources**

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UN Environmental Program: <https://www.unep.org/>

Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

## References

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