

"Debate and deliberation is how you stir the soul of a democracy"

-Jesse Jackson

Greetings delegates,

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you all as delegates at CENMUN '24. I hope you're as excited as we are about being a part of this conference. To the MUN veterans out there, we promise you a very enriching debate and to the newcomers, we promise you a memorable first experience! A MUN inculcates in you, oratory skills, cajoling negotiations, in-depth research and if we start making a list of the qualities, the entire background guide might talk just about it! With this said, a committee simulation is meaningful and successful only when the delegates are well prepared. To aid in your research preparation, we have spent hours researching and writing this Background Guide. The Background Guide serves as an introduction to your respective committee and an overview of the topics that you will be debating over the course of the conference. Also, it is to be considered that this guide is only a basic outline to direct you with regards to the agenda; you are advised not to rely on this totally. What we desire from the delegates is not experience, or how articulate they are. Rather, we want to see how she/he can respect differences of opinion and work around these, while extending their own stance so that it encompasses more of the others without compromising their own stand, thereby reaching acceptable, and practical solutions.

We would require you all to be thorough with the research and implement it in a wise way in the committee. Also, the Executive Board only thinks the matter at hand is somewhat objected to this way, this is entirely subjected to different perceptions of different people. Any contradictions if at all occur, this guide is not to be taken as a binding or ruling document. We would insist that you follow this research pattern:

- Read about your state (country)
- Read the relation of your country with the agenda centric countries
- Read about those countries, the trade, cultural, historic and diplomatic relations between your country and them
- Read about the agenda,
- Read about the previous UN actions, resolutions and conventions,

We sincerely hope that this simulation of UNEP will help you gain experience to become better professionals in the future. We are always at your disposal, and please feel free to clear your doubts. You can ask us questions, or you could come with answers. We would like you much better that way!

Nayan Sarawgi

Chairperson

nayan.sarawgi@gmail.com

BASIC SUGGESTIONS BEFORE YOU START RESEARCHING-

A few aspects that delegates should keep in mind while preparing:

Procedure: The purpose of putting in procedural rules in any committee is to ensure a more organized and efficient debate. The committee will follow the UNA-USA Rules of Procedure, a link for which has been provided in the last section of this Guide. Although the Executive Board shall be fairly strict with the Rules of Procedure, the discussion of agenda will be the main priority. So, delegates are advised not to restrict their statements due to hesitation regarding procedure.

Foreign Policy: Following the foreign policy of one's country is the most important aspect of a Model UN Conference. This is what essentially differentiates a Model UN from other debating formats. To violate one's foreign policy without adequate reason is one of the worst mistakes a delegate can make.

Role of the Executive Board: The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate debate. The committee shall decide the direction and flow of debate. The delegates are the ones who constitute the committee and hence must be uninhibited while presenting their opinions/stance on any issue. However, the Executive Board may put forward questions and/or ask for clarifications at all points of time to further debate and test participants. A challenging, yet highly rewarding committee, involvement in this simulation offers an insight into the dynamics of international relations and politics. Lots of work will be required but as previous participants in similar simulations ourselves, we promise you an exciting experience.

NATURE OF SOURCES/EVIDENCE:

This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during formal debate is acceptable from the following sources.

1. **United Nations:** Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body is held as credible proof to support a claim or argument.

2. **Multilateral Organizations:** Documents from international organizations like NATO, NAFTA, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, OPEC, the International Criminal Court, etc. may also be presented as credible sources of information.

3. **Government Reports:** These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. However, a nuance is that a report that is being denied by a certain country can still be accepted by the Executive Board as a credible piece of information.

4. News Sources:

a. Reuters: Any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the fact or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.

b. State operated News Agencies: These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are – RIA Novosti⁸ (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency¹¹ (People’s Republic of China), etc.

Note: Under no circumstances will sources like Wikipedia, or newspapers like the Guardian, Times of India etc. be accepted as sources of proof. However, notwithstanding the aforementioned criteria for acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates are still free to quote/cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.

Introduction to UNEP:

For five decades, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been the leading global authority on the environment. Since 1972 UNEP has informed, enabled and inspired countries, communities and people to come together to tackle the most urgent environmental challenges facing the planet and humankind. UNEP's mission is to:

- Provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment
- Inspire, inform, and enable nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generation

As a member of the United Nations Development Group, UNEP aims to help the world meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. UNEP hosts the secretariats of several multilateral environmental agreements and research bodies, including The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), The Minamata Convention on Mercury, The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, The Convention on Migratory Species and The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), among others.

Agenda: Impact of fast fashion trends on environment and its hazards

INTRODUCTION:

Fast fashion, which prioritizes the rapid production of inexpensive clothing to keep up with the latest trends, has drastically transformed the global fashion industry over the past two decades. While it promises trendy designs at low prices, this model thrives on high turnover rates and mass production, leading to a host of environmental and ethical concerns. The allure of affordable, on-demand fashion has fueled unsustainable consumption patterns, encouraging consumers to purchase more clothes, more frequently, and with little regard for the long-term consequences.

Behind the glitz and glamour of fashion weeks and celebrity endorsements lies an often overlooked reality: the fast fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to environmental degradation. The production of clothing in this industry relies heavily on cheap, synthetic materials like polyester, which are not only non-biodegradable but also contribute to microplastic pollution in our water bodies. Moreover, the process consumes vast amounts of water and energy, often in countries already facing water scarcity and environmental stress.

The environmental hazards do not stop at production. Once discarded, these garments, many of which are designed to be short-lived, end up in landfills, creating mountains of textile waste that can take decades to decompose. The dyes and chemicals used in the manufacturing process can leach into soil and water, further exacerbating the problem. The fast fashion industry's carbon footprint is staggering, as factories often rely on fossil fuels to power production, resulting in significant greenhouse gas emissions.

Beyond the environmental impact, there is also a human cost. Fast fashion's demand for cheap labor has led to the exploitation of workers, particularly in developing countries, where labor regulations are often lax. These workers, predominantly women, are paid meager wages and endure unsafe working conditions, all to meet the insatiable demand for new clothing collections.

As the UNEP, this committee must not only address the environmental hazards posed by fast fashion but also consider the social implications. The challenge lies in finding solutions that balance the global demand for affordable fashion with sustainable production methods, ensuring both environmental protection and fair labor practices. This committee at CENMUN seeks to explore the multifaceted impact of fast fashion and aims to develop actionable strategies that promote responsible consumption, ethical manufacturing, and environmental sustainability.

BACKGROUND:

The fast fashion industry has become a significant player in the global economy, and is estimated to be worth around \$100 billion (as of late 2023), with forecasts predicting continued growth, particularly in emerging markets where affordable, trendy clothing is in high demand. Global brands like Zara, H&M, and Shein are leading the charge, offering consumers runway-inspired styles at low prices through fast production cycles.

History and Evolution: Fast fashion as a concept emerged in the mid-20th century, when brands like Zara revolutionized the traditional fashion industry by drastically shortening the time it took to design, manufacture, and sell new collections. Unlike traditional fashion houses that worked on seasonal schedules, fast fashion brands began introducing new styles in weeks, sometimes even days, driving consumer demand for the latest looks at affordable prices. With the advent of globalization, these companies outsourced production to countries with cheap labor, which further cut costs and accelerated the growth of the industry.

Economic Size and Employment: Today, the fast fashion industry is an economic juggernaut, continuing to grow at an annual rate of about 5%. Estimates suggest that by 2026, the global industry could be worth over \$133 billion. On the employment front, fast fashion provides jobs to millions of people worldwide. By 2019, the broader fashion industry was employing around 60 million people globally, with a considerable number of those jobs tied to fast fashion production. The bulk of this employment is in developing countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, India, and China, where low-cost labor is essential to the business model. These countries house factories that operate around the clock to meet global consumer demand for fast and affordable clothing.

Global Supply Chain and Economic Dependency: Fast fashion depends on an intricate, globalized supply chain that involves different stages of production across several countries. For example, cotton might be sourced from the United States or India, dyed in China, and sewn into garments in Bangladesh or Vietnam before hitting shelves worldwide. While this system creates significant economic opportunities in lower-income countries, it also perpetuates cycles of exploitation and environmental damage. Many of these economies rely heavily on the fashion industry for employment, and any disruption—such as factory shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic—leaves workers vulnerable, as millions found themselves unemployed with little warning.

To sum up, fast fashion has undoubtedly driven global economic growth and created millions of jobs, but it also poses serious ethical challenges. Its reliance on cheap labor and environmentally harmful practices raises critical questions about how we balance economic benefits with sustainability and worker rights, a challenge that the global community must address for a more responsible future.

TIMELINE OF SOME MAJOR EVENTS:

1910 - The first fashion show was organized by Jeanne Paquin.

1940 - The fashion scene shifted from Paris to London and New York.

1947 - Clothing-retail companies H&M and Zara are founded, eventually becoming dominant competitors in the fast fashion market.

1980 - Sports brands like Nike, Reebok, Adidas came up with athletic clothes and became popular.

1990s-2000s - Demand for fast fashion exponentially increases as major companies from Europe bring new fashion trends to America.

2000s - Environmental concerns and the ethical impact of fashion began to touch the consciousness of the customers by the early years of this decade.

2011 - Greenpeace International, a global environmental activist organization, launches the Detox My Fashion campaign to increase public awareness around encouraging major companies to lead a toxic-free production line.

2019 – The UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion was established

THE ISSUE WITH FAST FASHION:

Fast fashion has become a major environmental concern due to its rapid production cycles, reliance on cheap materials, and unsustainable consumption patterns. Here are some of the major environmental problems caused by fast fashion:

1. Waste Generation and Landfills

Fast fashion encourages consumers to buy more clothes more often, but the quality of these garments is often poor, leading to a shorter lifespan. The result is a staggering amount of textile waste. On average, the world produces over 92 million tons of textile waste each year, and much of this ends up in landfills. In fact, it's estimated that 85% of all textiles are discarded annually. These discarded clothes can take decades or even centuries to decompose, especially those made from synthetic materials like polyester, which don't break down naturally.

2. Water Pollution and Usage

The production of clothing in the fast fashion industry consumes enormous amounts of water, particularly for processes like dyeing and finishing fabrics. It's estimated that the fashion industry uses around 93 billion cubic meters of water annually, enough to meet the water needs of five million people. Additionally, untreated wastewater from textile factories is often dumped into rivers and lakes, contaminating water supplies and harming aquatic ecosystems. Chemicals from dyes, including heavy metals and toxic substances, find their way into the environment, posing risks to both wildlife and human populations.

3. Microplastics Pollution

A significant portion of fast fashion garments are made from synthetic fibers like polyester, nylon, and acrylic, which are derived from fossil fuels. When these garments are washed, tiny fibers, known as microplastics, are released into the water systems. These microplastics are too small to be filtered out by wastewater treatment plants and eventually end up in oceans and other water bodies, contributing to the growing crisis of plastic pollution. Marine life ingests these microplastics, causing harm to the food chain, and there are growing concerns about their long-term effects on human health as well.

4. Excessive Carbon Emissions

Fast fashion is a major contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions. The production of synthetic fibers, such as polyester, requires significant energy inputs from fossil fuels, releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases. Additionally, the global nature of fast fashion supply chains—where raw materials are

sourced from one country, manufactured in another, and shipped to consumers worldwide—means that the transportation of goods adds further to the industry's carbon footprint. In 2018, the fashion industry was responsible for approximately 10% of the world's carbon emissions, which is more than the combined emissions of international flights and maritime shipping.

5. Deforestation and Agricultural Damage

The fast fashion industry's reliance on natural fibers, such as cotton, also has environmental consequences. Cotton, in particular, is a resource-intensive crop, requiring large amounts of water, pesticides, and fertilizers. It's responsible for around 24% of global insecticide use and 11% of pesticides, which degrades soil health and harms ecosystems. Additionally, the growing demand for fibers like viscose, derived from wood pulp, has contributed to deforestation in areas like Indonesia and Brazil, where ancient rainforests are being cut down to make room for tree plantations used in textile production.

6. Harmful Chemicals

The chemicals used in fast fashion production, including dyes, bleaching agents, and fabric treatments, pose serious environmental and health risks. Many of these chemicals are not biodegradable, meaning they persist in the environment long after the clothes have been discarded. Factories in countries with lax environmental regulations often release these toxic chemicals into local water bodies without proper treatment, leading to water pollution that affects both the environment and nearby communities. Workers in fast fashion factories are also exposed to these hazardous chemicals, leading to health risks such as respiratory problems, skin diseases, and even cancer.

7. Overconsumption and the Throwaway Culture

Fast fashion has fostered a culture of overconsumption, where trends come and go so quickly that consumers are encouraged to buy new clothes frequently. The “wear it once” mentality, spurred on by social media and influencers, has contributed to a disposable attitude toward clothing. This results in people buying clothes they don't truly need and discarding them after minimal use, which adds to the already substantial burden of textile waste. Additionally, the more that consumers buy, the more demand there is for production, creating a vicious cycle of resource consumption, pollution, and waste.

8. Exploitation of Labor and Social Inequities

While not purely environmental, the social impact of fast fashion is closely linked to its environmental footprint. The industry often relies on sweatshops in developing countries where workers, predominantly women, are paid low wages and work in unsafe conditions. This exploitation of labor is compounded by the environmental degradation in these countries, where textile factories often pollute local water supplies and land, making already vulnerable communities more susceptible to environmental hazards.

9. Energy-Intensive Manufacturing Processes

The processes involved in textile manufacturing, particularly for synthetic fibers, require large amounts of energy. The fashion industry is heavily dependent on non-renewable energy sources, which exacerbates global energy consumption. For instance, polyester production emits nearly three times the carbon emissions of cotton, even though it is a much cheaper and more widely used material. The reliance on fossil fuels to power factories and machinery further compounds the industry's overall environmental impact.

UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion

The **UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion** was launched in 2019 as a collaborative initiative by several United Nations agencies with the goal of addressing the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry, particularly the fast fashion sector. This alliance aims to promote sustainability across the fashion value chain, working towards reducing the industry's negative effects on both people and the planet.

Purpose and Goals:

The UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion was formed in response to the growing awareness of the harmful environmental and social impacts of the global fashion industry. Fast fashion, in particular, has raised concerns due to its reliance on rapid production cycles, resource-intensive processes, and the generation of excessive waste. The Alliance's mission is to ensure that fashion contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), and decent work (SDG 8).

Member Organizations:

The Alliance brings together several UN agencies and other partners, including:

- **UN Environment Programme (UNEP):** Focuses on reducing the environmental impact of fashion, particularly in areas like water consumption, pollution, and waste management.
- **International Labour Organization (ILO):** Works to improve labor conditions and ensure fair wages for garment workers, especially in developing countries where the fast fashion industry has significant influence.
- **UN Climate Change (UNFCCC):** Engages with the fashion industry to reduce its carbon footprint and develop climate-friendly practices.
- **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):** Supports efforts to ensure sustainable production and trade in fashion, balancing economic development with environmental protection.
- **UN Global Compact:** Encourages companies in the fashion industry to align their operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, the environment, and anti-corruption.

QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED:

In what ways are fast fashion and major clothing companies responsible for environmental hazards?

Is the profit made through fast fashion practices worth the inhumane working conditions?

Where does your country stand in the supply chain of the fashion industry and how can changing that help contribute to the whole industry?

How can countries be held accountable for their sustainable fashion objectives?

What incentives or deterrents can be put into place to ensure sustainability?

Why has fast fashion risen in popularity both in the world and in your country?

How do major fashion brands that are prevalent in your country affect the environment?

Are there any efficient ways to minimize the fashion industry's damage to the environment?

How do we reach some middle ground so as to ensure the growth of the industry while also ensuring minimal impact to the environment?