

CHANTILLY MODEL UNITED NATIONS PRESENTS

UNEA

CHMUN XXI

General Assembly

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Committee Background:

The birth of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in 2012 was a direct result of the Rio+20 Conference, and it serves as the governing body of UNEP. All members of the United Nations are given the right to join UNEA, which is a universal members' body and replaces the UNEP Governing Council, thus raising the level of environmental discussions among its peers in the international decision-making process to a higher degree. In addition to addressing major global environmental issues, acknowledging new problems, and fostering the science-policy interface, UNEA's mandate is expansive and includes pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, and the management of transboundary environmental conflicts.

Water security has been a recurrent theme in the meetings of the UNEA, particularly in the cases of climate-stressed and politically difficult regions. The Assembly carries on in a worldwide scope, which is characterized by the partially aggravated situations of severe droughts, erratic rainfall, and the competing demands on shared water resources. The pressures mentioned above are the most marked in the transboundary basins like the Nile, Mekong, and Amu Darya, where climate change has an effect on the already existing political and economic tensions. Being the scientific arm of the UN system for environmental issues, UNEA relies on the findings of climate models, hydrological data, and ecosystem assessments to suggest equitable resource management.

The work on water at UNEA is mentioned within the context of a broader global situation: for example, in the epoch of 2050, there could be over one-half of the global human population faced with situations of water scarcity. The chances of water allocation conflicts rise significantly in regions that are already dealing with the problems of water shortages attributed to climate change. UNEA has reacted to sustainable lake management and ecosystem-based adaptation through resolutions on freshwater governance. With the support of all the member states, it is a neutral ground for the states that are part of the upstream and downstream to negotiate the principles of fair share, exchange the best practices on drought resilience, and integrate the environmental aspects into the development planning. In this regard, UNEA has a good platform to intervene in both the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and global frameworks in climate-stressed regions.



Topic A: Resolving the Dispute Over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Nile Water Allocation

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is arguably one of the most complex environmental and geopolitical issues in Africa at this time. The dam is located on the Blue Nile close to the Ethiopian-Sudanese border and has been under construction since 2011. And as of September 2025, it is operational. The project is a source of national pride and development for Ethiopia, which expects the dam will produce over 6,000 MW and usher Ethiopia into a new era as an energy exporter and boost for industry.

The potential for Ethiopia is tempered, however, with great alarm from downstream countries. Egypt receives over 90% of its fresh water from the Nile River, so any reduction in the flow of the river is an event that threatens



the Egyptian people on a national level. Sudan sits in between the two; however, it is more ambivalent. Countries hope for a regulated flow for agriculture and flood risks but are alarmed by the potential operational safety of its dams as well as the lack of coordination with Ethiopia.

At the center of the controversy are questions of water rights and the power of treaties made in a very different world; the majority of Nile water under the 1929 and 1959 Nile Waters Agreements went to Egypt and Sudan, with Ethiopia an uninvited guest. Ethiopia says these agreements are old and unjust, while Egypt claims a legally binding arrangement will ensure it receives its share of water, especially in drought years. Multiple rounds of negotiations led by the African Union, the United States, and the World Bank have not resolved critical issues. Disputes focus on how quickly the dam's

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reservoir will be filled and how Egyptian concerns about drought will be managed, and a winning argument for including a binding process for dispute resolution. Ethiopia's determination to fill its dam, without consensus among the three and completion of the reservoir, heightens Egypt's angst and willingness to warn about "existential" threats to water security.

The conflict is representative of the broader challenges in transboundary water management under climate-driven stress. The increasing variability of rainfall across the Nile Basin, along with rising temperatures, is expected to affect water availability over the next few decades, too. Variation exacerbates climate-driven stress and makes cooperative planning even more important, with diminished trust from riparian states. Each sees water allocation not simply as resource distribution but as connected to forces of national sovereignty and regional authority. Egypt previously used diplomatic power to sustain its superior water rights, Ethiopia is focused on its right to development, and Sudan is trying to limit instability over water to maximize crop productivity.

The Nile Basin Initiative opened in 1999 to create opportunities to share riparian usage equitably and played a major role in integrating collaboration identification. The CFA was signed by Ethiopia and several upstream states in 2024 and rests on serious divisions with Egypt and Sudan regarding legality and sovereignty. Growing domestic political pressure will not allow for compromise in any of the three states when embroiled with water management negotiations, and periodic moments of noise from all states, and definitively Egypt, indicate a fragile environment even concerning diplomacy over this critical resource. Absent comprehensive frameworks for regularized water-sharing that consider seasonal and climate-induced variability and some form of assured trust, good intentions around more technical approaches will surely come to an end.

The UNEA has the opportunity to reposition the discussion in the dispute within the neutral space of applied environmental science/hydrology and climate resilience to address climate change as it relates to sustainable development and ecosystem management. If UNEA focuses on the broader conversation around natural resource governance, such as cooperative monitoring and tracking systems at the basin scale, as well as using nature-based solutions to enhance ecosystem resilience in the context of climate resilience strategies to ameliorate drought's impacts, the dialogue would begin to shift away



from zero-sum politics. Such strategies could help establish parameters for discussions about common human needs, such as economic development and its intersection with environmental needs. UNEA does not impose legally binding agreements. Still, it can help reinforce norms of international law, shape collaborative practices, and advance understanding of rights, as well as collaboration and shared interest. Commitments, regardless of nation-state recognition, to use sustainable energy production, practice environmental sustainability, and share the water can open a door and create a precedent for dealing with water disputes on the same order and level as in other climate-stressed countries.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can UNEA facilitate legally binding agreements ensuring equitable water allocation while supporting Ethiopia's energy needs?
2. Should UNEA advocate for an independent monitoring mechanism to oversee GERD operations?
3. How can UNEA integrate climate modeling and environmental safeguards into future Nile Basin treaties?
4. What role should international financial and technical partners play in supporting basin-wide cooperation?

Useful Links:

1. Ethiopia completes the power-generating dam on the Nile that caused a dispute with Egypt:
<https://apnews.com/article/b567f19bcfeaca6315acf29d56944b9e>
2. Nile Basin Initiative: <https://www.nilebasin.org/>
3. UN Environment Assembly 5 (UNEA 5.2) Resolutions:
<https://www.unep.org/resources/resolutions-treaties-and-decisions/UN-Environment-Assembly-5-2>



Topic B: Developing a Global Framework for Preventing Water Conflicts in Climate-Stressed Regions

Climate change is fundamentally altering water security worldwide. Increased global temperature is altering precipitation in both quantity and distribution, glacial ice is disappearing, and a smaller fraction of freshwater is available, particularly in arid and semi-arid areas. Climate change-related stresses on weak water systems and the reason for competition make water scarcity arguably the most destabilizing environmental challenge of the 21st century. The Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, and, to some extent, the Middle East are particularly vulnerable to climate-induced water security challenges, and they are not alone. By 2050, it is estimated that half of the world's population will potentially be living under some degree of water stress. The complexity of this issue is also emphasized by the increasing number of transboundary water conflicts (e.g., rivers, lakes, and aquifers shared and managed by neighbors) among countries with unequal power sharing, competing demands, or long-standing rivalries. Water is a source of conflict, not cooperation, when the management and coordination of regional water resources is limited.



Treaties such as the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the 1992 UNECE Water Convention at least establish core principles such as equitable and reasonable use and educational engagement: 'source' vs no 'source'. The capacity for these initiatives to have transformative potential is limited by ratification, the inherently regional dimensions of impact, and their inability to extensively cover frameworks, conflict resolution tools, and climate resilience binding agreed-upon initiatives. Notably, however, many of the states facing acute water stress are not signatories to either treaty, and the environmental context is of

the water-stressed states across South Asia and Africa. None of the existing treaties provides robust institutional tools for dispute resolution or climate resilience at this time, and frankly, the fact that treaties signed in one period (and with a significant absence of climate change considerations) are not suited to address many of the long-term culpabilities and climate disruptions experienced today is equally puzzling. Of particular controversy and pervasiveness as a dilemma of WEHAB initiatives is the most glaring absence of global early warning systems, conflict preventative tools, and sanitation, public health, and environmental targets, particularly in areas that are more vulnerable or distressed, where insufficient governance, underinvestment in infrastructure, and environmental degradation compound potential tensions. In these contexts, water insecurity is evaluated alongside food insecurity, forced migration, and armed violence.

Recent developments have amplified the need to address the complexities of transboundary governance. For example, at the UN 2023 Water Conference, a global Water Action Agenda was established. The Water Action Agenda demonstrated the commitment of members of the international community by summarizing and bundling more than 700 voluntary commitments by governments, NGOs, and the private sector to enhance water governance. Nations and water authorities have not effectively integrated these commitments into water governance; the challenges posed by climate change remain. Prolonged drought conditions in the Horn of Africa have led to competition for access to groundwater resources, encouraging displacement and fueling inter-community tensions. Disputes over negotiating the environmental and political impacts of the downstream flow of transboundary rivers, such as the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, have contributed to fractures in relations between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia. In Southeast Asia, conflicts over the environmental and cultural resources of the Mekong River Basin countries have delayed important talks among China, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the world's sixth largest river basin by discharge. Persistent drought conditions in Iraq and Syria have contributed to failed irrigation and water-related protests and armed conflicts. These growing regional conflicts over water resources are mere manifestations of the inability to transform regional water governance systems to serve a world that is rapidly warming.



The United Nations has made numerous efforts designed to enhance sustainable and peaceful water governance. The 1997 UN Watercourses Convention and the 1992 UNECE Water Convention both came with legal frameworks advocating for equitable use and cooperation. However, their limited implementation and lack of a binding application make them ineffective on a global level.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can UNEA support early warning and mediation mechanisms in transboundary water disputes?
2. What role should climate data, modeling, and Indigenous knowledge play in global water governance?
3. How can UNEA leverage partnerships with financial and technical bodies to support climate-stressed states?
4. How can the international community respect national sovereignty while fostering collaboration on transboundary water issues?
5. What specific roles should climate adaptation and resilience strategies play within a global framework to reduce the risk of water conflicts?

Useful Links:

1. Water Action Agenda Progress Report:
<https://www.unwater.org/news/water-action-agenda-progress-report>
2. Central Asia: Water and Conflict:
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/cambodia-thailand-china/343-dammed-mekong-averting-environmental-catastrophe>
3. Dammed in the Mekong: Averting an Environmental Catastrophe:
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/central-asia-water-and-conflict>



Works Cited

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UN-Water/UNESCO, 2023,
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