

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Standard Committee**



ECOSOC

Topic B

Chair | Anath Moorthy

Houston Area Model United Nations 46

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HAMUN 46

ECOSOC

**Topic 2: Economizing the Environment in
Efforts to Achieve Carbon Reduction**



Houston Area Model United Nations

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 46th annual Houston Area Model United Nations Conference! Over the course of two days of intense debate and engaging diplomacy, all of you will be tackling some of humanity's most pressing issues.

I am Ananth Moorthy, and I have been given the honor of being your chair for the Economic and Social Council. Right now, I am a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin, intending to double major in International Relations and Biochemistry.

MUN has been a large and, thankfully, amazing part of the last 5 years of my life. I have done it since freshman year in high school, during which I have been a delegate and chair. However, despite my time in MUN, this will be my first ever HAMUN, so I am very excited to see what all of you delegates have in store.

This year, as ECOSOC, we will be debating two extremely relevant topics: the economic impact, specifically issues of employment, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to economize the environment to achieve carbon reduction.

These topics are changing rapidly daily, so it is important to not only keep up with the progression of current events but also understand the institutional instruments working behind the scenes in the context of geopolitical events. By doing so, you can be better prepared to incorporate such instruments in whatever solution you all as committee create.

I highly recommend you research your own countries policies on these issues, especially since this background guide barely covers the intricate world of international economics. I expect you all to come prepared with many ideas and an intense spark to debate. I look forward to meeting you all, and I am sure you will have a great experience at HAMUN 46. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ananth Moorthy
Chair of the Economic & Social Council, HAMUN 46
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Committee Background

The Economic and Social Council is one of the six main entities outlined in the Charter of the UN and was established in 1945 when the Charter became effective. As delineated in Chapter 10 of the Charter, the Council consists of 54 UN members who are elected by the General Assembly. The Council's broad purpose is to establish global stability through the promotion of equitable economic, social, cultural, and health related developments and policies.

In order to achieve such goals, the Charter provides the Council with various avenues through which members of the Council can collect data on global issues, advise the General Assembly and the Security Council, co-ordinate reformative efforts with non-UN agencies, and establish UN commissions to facilitate UN actions related to the promotion of human rights.¹

The Council performs its intended functions through several established commissions, sub commissions, and committees. Among these entities are ten functional commissions that provide recommendations to other UN bodies on specific areas of responsibilities and expertise such as science and technology for development or social development.² Additionally, the Council implements its mission in the various diverse areas around the world through five regional commissions, each responsible for a specific geographical area like Africa or Western Asia.³

Bearing in mind the value of multilateralism, the UN Charter grants the Council with the ability to enter agreements with specialized agencies. Specialized agencies like the World Health Organization and the International Monetary Fund are international organizations that are established by intergovernmental agreements and have a wide range of global responsibilities.¹ Working with such specialized agencies gives the Council access to existing aid infrastructure and allows it to co-ordinate international efforts to solve issues with pivotal international actors.

The Council has been subject to various reforms over the last decade, most of which have strengthened its abilities to identify and address global issues. The main reform was implemented after the passage of the UNGA's Resolution A/68/L.2 in 2013. Among its various provisions, the resolution refocused the Council's agenda to incorporate the issues discussed at global summits and conferences in environmental, social, and economic fields while also implementing a theme to the Council's annual program to ensure global issues are strategically addressed.⁴

¹ Charter of the UN & Statute of the UN, 1945

² <http://dagdok.org/un-system/economical-and-social-council/functional-commissions/>

³ <http://dagdok.org/un-system/economical-and-social-council/regional-commissions/>

⁴ <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/unga-adopts-resolution-for-ecosoc-reform/>

Topic 2: Economizing the Environment in Efforts to Achieve Carbon Reduction

Topic Overview:

Climate change has been widely regarded as a definite threat to humanity. From the insurmountable amount of evidence regarding growing global temperatures to the physical destruction caused by frequent forest fires, longer droughts, and increased number of hurricanes, there is no question that climate change needs to be addressed, especially through global carbon reduction. However, this is very difficult to achieve when nearly every nation depends on coal, oil, and gas to generate electricity, manufacture goods, or fuel their cars.⁵ This is where climate change also becomes a question of economics. Non-renewable energy is a heavily subsidized industry, with global subsidies adding up to around \$5.2 trillion in 2017.⁶ This makes fossil fuels like oil, gas, and coal extremely profitable for businesses, despite them being responsible for nearly 10,000 million metric tons of carbon emissions.⁷ Any efforts to economize the environment to achieve complete carbon reduction must include a mechanism to disincentivize the combustion of fossil fuels and reduce the consumption of products made from non-renewable resources like petroleum.

Timeline⁸:

1972: Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment is adopted at Stockholm

1988: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is established by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environment Programme

1992: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is adopted at Rio de Janeiro

1997: Kyoto Protocol is adopted in Japan, making it the world's first greenhouse gas emissions reduction treaty

2001: Special Climate Change Fund is established to finance projects relation to green technology and economic diversification. The Least Developed Countries Fund is also established to aid Least Developed Countries to carry out their climate policies

2005: The European Union Emissions Trading Scheme launches, making it the world's first and largest carbon market

⁵ <https://ourworldindata.org/energy>

⁶

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2019/05/02/Global-Fossil-Fuel-Subsidies-Remain-Large-An-Update-Based-on-Country-Level-Estimates-46509>

⁷ <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/global-greenhouse-gas-emissions-data>

⁸ <https://unfccc.int/timeline/>

2006: The Clean Development Mechanism created in the Kyoto Protocol opens

2008: Joint Implementation Mechanism created in the Kyoto Protocol opens

2012: Mexico becomes the first developing nation to pass domestic global warming legislation, which intends to cut carbon emissions by 30% by 2030

2015: The Paris Climate Agreement is adopted

2019: New Zealand passes legislation which commits the nation to reduce its carbon emissions to zero by 2050

September 2020: EU Agrees on a \$895 billion COVID-19 rescue package of which a third will be devoted to decarbonization and promoting green technology

November 2020: US withdraws from the Paris Climate Agreement

Past UN Action & Resolution:

The first impactful instance of UN climate intervention was the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, which was intended to begin international discourse on curbing climate change. The Declaration passed at the conference includes 26 principles the world should use to guide future climate action. The Conference also resulted in the creation of the UN Environment Programme, which is tasked with combating issues like climate change.⁹ The creation of the IPCC in 1988 was a significant step in that it created an advisory organization tasked with collecting comprehensive research regarding the scientific, technical, and socio-economic aspects of climate change and its impacts.¹⁰

The next landmark UN act was the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992, which included a commitment to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations before it became a dangerous interference in our climate system¹¹. During every subsequent year, a Conference of the Parties is held, where signatories of the UNFCCC gather to amend and progress international climate agreements.

The Kyoto Protocol was one such addition adopted at the 3rd Conference of the Parties in 1997. The Protocol introduced legally binding emissions targets for developed nations with respect to the six major greenhouse gases. Most importantly, however, were the three market-based reduction mechanisms that were offered to help countries meet their emissions reductions.

The first mechanism was the system of Emissions Trading, which commodified carbon emission into units that can be sold. For example, a country that reduces its emissions enough to have spare units can sell their spare units to countries that are not meeting their goals.¹² This provides

⁹ <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972>

¹⁰ <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

¹¹ <https://www.eesi.org/policy/international>

¹² <https://unfccc.int/process/the-kyoto-protocol/mechanisms/emissions-trading>

an economic incentive to increase carbon reduction as much as possible. This system of emissions trading was adopted into the EU, with the launch of their Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS). The EU ETS has since grown to be the largest emissions trading market in the world and has proven to be effective as seen by the 35% decline in emissions produced by installations covered by the program.¹³

The second mechanism is called the Clean Development Mechanism, which has been operational since 2006. The program involves a credit system in which a country with an existing emission reduction or limitation commitment can implement their plan in developing countries to receive emission reduction credits that are counted towards meeting the Kyoto targets. This program provides an incentive for developed nations who have better infrastructure in place to reduce carbon emissions to invest and help developing nations reduce their carbon emissions as well.¹⁴

The last mechanism, known as Joint Implementation, allows two countries with an emission reduction or limitation commitment to implement projects in each other's countries to reduce carbon emissions multilaterally. The mechanism's credit system became operational in 2008.¹⁵

The most recent major UN involvement was the Paris Climate Agreement. Its main goal was to fortify international climate response in order to prevent the global temperature rise from exceeding 2 degrees Celsius. The Agreement also includes provisions to increase climate financing, improve technology frameworks, and establish capacity building frameworks to support developing countries.

Current Situation:

In the last decade, humanity has been able to achieve many strides in green technological innovation, yet nearly all nations in the world depend heavily on fossil fuels. The lucrative nature of non-renewables, especially with high subsidization, makes economic reform a necessity in energy markets in order to curb carbon reduction. While the UN climate agreements have helped grow international spotlight on climate change, the current mechanisms in place have fallen short. There is also the fact that the price of renewable energy is decreasing as a result of cost-reducing advances in technology and growth of its market does which if subsidized can compete with the price of non-renewable resources.¹⁶ Additionally, the idea of a carbon tax has become a popular fiscal policy that many countries are debating. A carbon tax is a tax levied on fossil fuels and other products created from non-renewable resources in order to make non-renewable products more expensive than renewable alternatives. A carbon tax, however, would not be ideal for nations where renewable alternatives for generating heat and electricity are not available. The carbon tax has been implemented in some form in more than 40 governments, and in countries like Sweden, a carbon tax has helped reduce emissions by 26%

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/ets_en

¹⁴

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-kyoto-protocol/mechanisms-under-the-kyoto-protocol/the-clean-development-mechanism>

¹⁵ <https://unfccc.int/process/the-kyoto-protocol/mechanisms/joint-implementation>

¹⁶ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-the-economics-of-climate-change-and-climate-policy/>

since 1990.¹⁷ Ultimately, economizing the environment to reduce carbon emissions can take many forms, from subsidies and taxes to carbon credit systems and carbon markets.

Blocs:

1. North America
 - a. USA
 - b. Canada
2. Russia
3. South & East Asia
 - a. China
 - b. India
 - c. South Korea
 - d. Bangladesh
4. Middle East
 - a. Saudi Arabia
 - b. Israel
 - c. Bahrain
 - d. Qatar
5. Europe
 - a. UK
 - b. Germany
 - c. France
 - d. Belgium
 - e. Norway
6. South & Central America
 - a. Brazil
 - b. Venezuela

Discussion Questions:

1. How do current advancements in green technology impact the way governments approach climate policy?
2. What factors in a country dictate what type of fiscal policy works best in terms of reducing carbon emissions while maintaining a similar standard of living?
3. Are renewable energy sources more profitable than fossil fuels? If not, what form of fiscal policy should be implemented to maximize carbon reductions?
4. How can the successes of the Kyoto Protocol's market mechanisms be applied to a modern solution to reduce carbon reductions?

Resources:

1. <https://climate-laws.org/> - provides an easy method of researching climate policy/legislation passed by various countries
2. <https://unfccc.int/timeline/> - provides a timeline of UN Climate actions and conferences

¹⁷ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/what-is-a-carbon-tax-and-how-could-it-help-us-fight-the-climate-crisis>

