

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

**THE EMERGING THREAT OF WILDFIRES TO FOREST COVER AROUND THE
WORLD.**

BACKGROUND GUIDE

SAIMUN 2021

Letter from the Dias

Dear delegates,

Welcome to the 2021 Sub-Saharan Model United Nations Conference (SAIMUN) and to the United Nations Environmental Programme Committee (UNEP).

In line with this year's theme; Impactful youth engagement towards fulfilment of the SDG'S in the COVID-19 pandemic time we shall be discussing: The emerging threat of wildfires to forest cover around the world. The Covid-19 Pandemic has coincided with a drastic rise in wildfires across the world. This has caused a huge threat to our ever-dwindling global forest cover. We invite delegates to interrogate the issue and pose lasting solutions that will benefit the current and future generations.

We look forward to interacting with you and having lively sessions during the conference. If you need any assistance or clarification, please do contact us through my email provided below.

Regards,

UNEP Dais.

Email: unep@saimun.net

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE



The United Nations Environmental Programme committee is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda. It coordinates the organizations environmental activities and helps developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. It was founded in 1972 and is currently headed by Inger Andersen, from Denmark with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The work of UNEP is categorized into seven major areas: climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, chemicals and waste, resource efficiency and environment under review. The mission of UNEP is to ensure provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment and enabling people to have quality life without compromising that of future generations. They also host a number of environmental conventions, secretariats and inter-agency coordinating bodies. They include the Vienna Convention for the Protection of Ozone Layer and Montreal Protocol and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.¹

¹ United Nations Environment Programme Document Repository.

History of the Topic

Since the beginnings of human history, human beings and fire have enjoyed an intimate but uneasy relationship. While the control of fire was central to the development of human civilization, over the ensuing millennia fire has posed a constant threat to human beings and their settlements.²

Uncontrolled fires originating outside of major human settlements are called wildfires, wild land fires, bushfires, forest fires, vegetation fires or peat fires, depending on the country and category of vegetation burned. These uncontrolled fires include lightning-caused fires, unauthorized human-caused fires, and escaped prescribed fire projects. In previous years, some of these fires have devastated large areas and received significant media coverage. Some of these major wildfires include; the 2009 devastating Victoria fires in Australia; the haze from Indonesian forest fires, which regularly results in a large band of smoke over Singapore and parts of Malaysia; and the 2010 forest and peat fires in Russia, which coupled with a heat wave, doubled the daily mortality rate in Moscow and the 2019 Amazon Wildfires which destroyed a significant percentage of the Amazon forest.

Currently, forests cover approximately 30 percent of the Earth's land. This means that as at the end of the year 2020, the earth had lost 25.8Mha of tree cover. The trend is quite concerning when one considers the rapid manner in which forest fires spread.³



² Global Forest Fire Watch: Wildfire Potential, Detection, Monitoring and Assessment.

³ Retrieved from <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/global/> on 19th April 202.

Discussion of the Topic

Fire is a good servant but a bad master. T. Adams Englands Sickness, 1615.



The ecological role of fire is to influence several factors such as plant community development, soil nutrient availability and biological diversity. Forest and wildland fire is a vital and natural process that initiates natural cycles of vegetation succession and maintains ecosystem viability. As stated earlier, uncontrolled or misused fires can, however, cause tremendous adverse impacts on the environment and human society.⁴

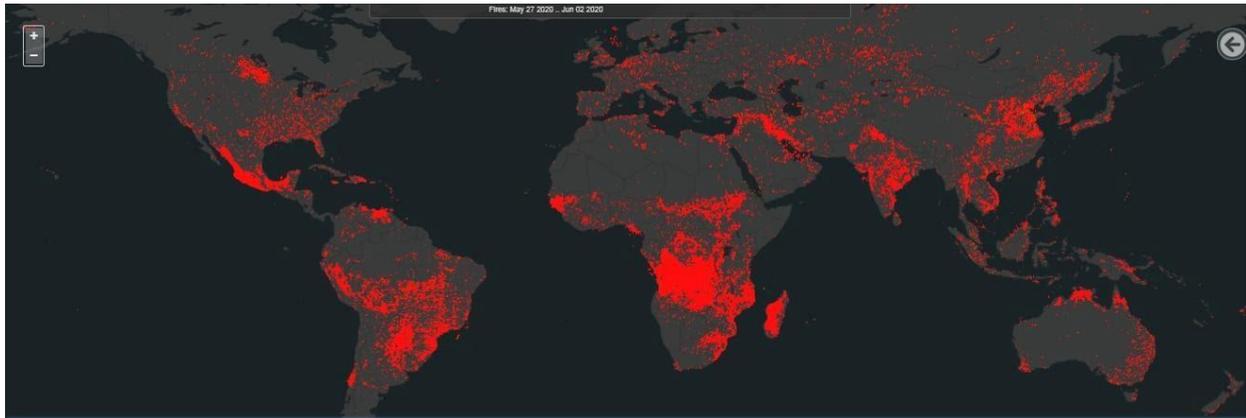
Within the past 16 months, many countries such as Australia, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Russia, South Africa and Ukraine have been affected by wildfires/forest fires. The effects and severity of the fires have been exuberated by the restrictions and hardships placed upon the world populous by the global pandemic.

Forests are vitally important for sustaining life on Earth and play a major role in the fight against climate change. Around 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihood, including 70 million indigenous people. Forests are home to more than 80 per cent of all terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects.⁵

⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/> on 19th April 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

Fire weather seasons have lengthened globally since 1979. Global land area burned has declined in recent decades, mainly due to less burning in grasslands and savannahs (high confidence). While drought remains the dominant driver of fire emissions, there has recently been increased fire activity in some tropical and temperate regions during normal to wetter than average years due to warmer temperatures that increase vegetation flammability (medium confidence). The boreal zone is also experiencing larger and more frequent fires, and this may increase under a warmer climate (medium confidence).⁶



The effect of the wildfires is that plants on the forest floor or smaller trees are often destroyed by wildfires, while larger trees are able to survive as long as the fire does not spread into the tree canopy.⁷ For plants and trees that can survive the flames, they are susceptible to disease, fungus, and insects due to their decreased resistance following burn injuries. After the loss of vegetation, the ground's soil becomes hydrophobic and prevents the absorption of water.⁸

Unlike many natural disasters, most wildfires can be prevented. The environmental and economic costs of wildfires have an impact that lasts for many years. Through using caution, taking preventive measures, and monitoring fires responsibly, we can lower the threats associated with these devastating tragedies. Added international and national policies should be introduced to provide guidance and sanctions especially where human negligence results in wildfires. States should also be constantly alert to the potential threat of wildfires to enable a quick and adequate

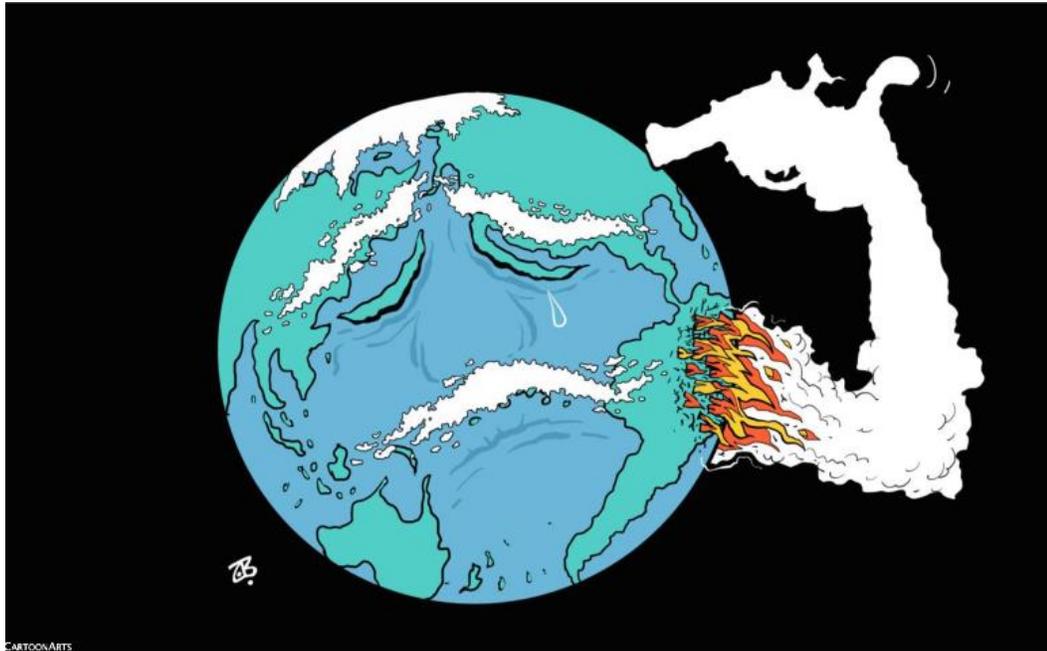
⁶ Early Warning Systems: A State of the Art Analysis and Future Directions.

⁷ Retrieved from <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/> on 19th April 2021.

⁸ Wildland Fires and the Environment [1999]: a Global Synthesis ,USA.

response to ensure our forests and tree cover is protected in line with SDGs 13-Climate Action & 15-Life on Land.

The Earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. This we know. We did not weave the web of life, We are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves. Chief Seattle, December 1854.⁹



Questions a Resolution should answer

The Dais has come up with a few questions to consider;

1. **Has the global Covid-19 pandemic contributed in any way to the recent rise in forest fires?**
2. **What role can the youth play in dealing with the rising cases of forest fires and the harmful effects on forests?**
3. **How can the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development address the effects of wildfires such as runoff and erosion when tree vegetation dies?**
4. **What are some of the sustainable, nature-based solutions that can be adopted by Countries which face constant forest fires?**

⁹ Pachamama: Our Earth, Our Future United Nations Environment Programme, Peace Child International.

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