



SciMUNC XVII

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (CSD)

Fast Fashion

BACKGROUND GUIDE

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Letter from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

My name is Alma and I am excited to be the chair for CSD at SciMUNC XVII this year. I am a junior here at Bronx Science and have been part of our model UN team for the past three years. A little about myself, I am interested in pursuing a career in pediatrics, specifically as a Neurologist. Besides MUN, I also work in a cancer research lab at Weill Cornell and volunteer around NYC. In my free time, I love to cook and bake, watch mystery movies, and practice foreign languages.

I hope this committee can foster a rigorous discussion on an issue that becomes increasingly prevalent with each passing year. I encourage you all to work together towards creative and realistic solutions. Feel free to contact me with any questions and I look forward to meeting you all.

I'm Alexandra, and I am honored to be your chair for the Committee on Sustainable Development (CSD) at SciMUNC 2023! Outside of MUN, I write music, read, and am a member of Student Government. I also love to make pizza :). This committee is centered around a topic that I am incredibly passionate about, and I believe must be tackled in modern day society; but I believe that change starts from us. Through committees such as CSD, delegates like yourselves are introduced to heavy topics, and bring themselves one step closer to making a difference in our global community.

I have been a member of the BxSci model UN team for two years, and over my time as both a novice and varsity member I have learned that MUN is an incredible place to learn about the world and take place in a community. My main wish is that you all take the time leading up to the conference to prepare in a way that ensures you are well educated on the topic, so that you can take this information with you both into the conference room and out into the real world. Additionally, I encourage you all to reach out to one another, and embrace this incredible opportunity you have been given! I already know this room will be full of countless bright minds, and I cannot wait to see you all succeed and work together.

At Bronx Science, we believe that it is vital to unleash creativity, effort, and being proactive in the immediate and extended world around us. Through MUN, I believe that it has helped all of us do just that. On the day of conferences, I look forward to seeing you all, and look forward to your excellent resolutions, teamwork, and the effort you will put in. We are beyond excited to have you, and I am grateful to be one of your chairs for CSD at SciMUNC '23.

Best,

Alexandra Davidescu and Alma Arazi

Committee Description

Commission on Sustainable Development

19 on sustainable development in 2020 and 2021.

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was formed in December of 1992 to ensure further action on the part of the United Nations following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. From its inception, the commission has succeeded in greatly advancing sustainable development throughout the international community. The CSD includes roughly 35 member states and focuses on a wide range of developed countries. While there is an emphasis on developing countries within the CSD, more developed states such as the US and Ireland still have membership. While the CSD and relevant committees focus on all forms of sustainable development, there is an emphasis on green economy, an institutional structure for sustainability, and ensuring political participation in guidelines developed by the committee. The CSD (and currently the HLPF) is a dynamic committee, thus addressing new issues that arise throughout the world relevant to the respective committee's goals. For instance, the HLPF addressed the impact of COVID-

Background Information

What is Fast Fashion?

Fast fashion is a business model of imitating fashion trends and mass-producing them at a low cost. The word “fast” describes the speed at which retailers transport garment designs from the catwalk into stores in order to keep pace with the constant demand for new styles. With the modern rise in globalization the supply chains used to execute this rapid turnover are becoming increasingly international. Processes such as the growth of fibers, textile manufacturing, and the sewing of garments have moved overseas to areas with cheaper exploitative labor. Fast fashion retailers are able to keep their prices cheap by using low quality fabrics as well as by outsourcing production to low-income countries. Fast fashion typically takes advantage of underpaid employees, child labor, slave labor, and production often occurs in underdeveloped countries. Because of the cheap costs of such mass produced clothes, participants in fast fashion rely on rapidly purchasing and discarding clothes rather than reuse. These unused clothes end up in dumps and degrade the environment.

Fast fashion processes create inexpensive and widely available garments, changing the way in which consumers buy clothing. By selling clothing at cheap prices and constantly innovating new styles, the fast fashion business model has caused the trend cycle to turn at an accelerated rate. Consumers view the low-quality clothing as disposable and temporary which in turn causes garment consumption to skyrocket. From the growth of water-intensive cotton, to the release of microplastics into water sources, the environmental and social costs involved in textile manufacturing alone pose a major concern. Thus, towards the purpose of sustainable economic development and environmental protection, it is in the CSD’s interest to crack down upon fast fashion practices.

Past Actions

In recent years the CSD has launched investigations into the worldwide environmental and social impacts of fast fashion. The United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion aims to contribute to the efforts toward sustainable development goals within the fashion sector. The alliance supports the coordination between UN bodies dealing in the fashion world by

promoting policies and projects designed to help reach sustainable development targets.

The Alliance for Sustainable Fashion deals with a variety of issues extending from production and manufacturing of garments to the environmental and social effects of their distribution, disposal and consumption. The alliance also delves into the social issues encompassed under the sustainability effort, including improving working conditions in fast fashion factories and decreasing water pollution.

Currently the fashion industry stands as a \$2.4 trillion-dollar global industry that employs over 300 million workers. The scale of the industry is only projected to grow in the coming years. Without major action to change consumption patterns and production processes in the fashion industry the consequences will only continue to become graver.

Fast Fashion as an Environmental Issue

It is estimated that 80 billion pieces of new clothing are purchased each year which translates to \$1.2 trillion contributed to the global fashion industry annually. Approximately 85 % of the clothing that

Americans consume is sent to landfills as solid waste, amounting to nearly 80 pounds per person. The process of making fibers such as polyester and cotton have been shown to negatively impact local citizens and eco systems. Polyester is derived from oil, a finite resource that needs to be mined, and cotton production is incredibly water intensive.

The fashion industry accounts for 10% of industrial water usage, expending 10,000 liters of water to produce one kilogram of cotton and approximately 3,000 liters of water for one cotton shirt. Approximately 20% of the wastewater worldwide is attributed to the process of fabric dyeing. As many factories moved overseas garment production began to take place predominantly in countries lacking strict environmental regulations, resulting in untreated water being allowed to enter the oceans and local water systems.

Synthetic materials are the primary cause of the plastic microfibers that enter our oceans. Producers turn to materials that may be of low quality such as polyester to cut costs, but these fabrics tend to release far more carbon emissions than cotton. The

plastic present within polyester materials is slow to degrade in the ocean and can take thousands of years to degrade completely. These plastic microfibers are also so small that they cannot be removed from the water and find their way into the human food chain through fish, causing many negative health effects.

Fast Fashion as a Social Issue

Garment assembly employs over 40 million workers worldwide. Low-income countries are responsible for the production of 90% of the world's clothing. The fact that safety standards are less enforced due to poor political and organizational infrastructure combined with the high concentration of production results in increased rates of occupational hazard. These hazards include respiratory risks due to poor ventilation and textile particles as well as musculoskeletal hazards from the performance of repetitive motion tasks. While more developed countries such as the United States and UK saw the creation of labor unions during the first industrial revolution, many LMICs do not enforce policies to protect workers in factories. This lack of administration results in health outcomes that include life-

threatening conditions such as lung disease and cancer, adverse reproductive and fetal outcomes and accidental injuries. In addition to the long-term health effects, instances of unsafe working conditions extend to workplace accidents such as the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse which killed 1134 Bangladeshi workers. Despite this disaster and others of its nature there have not been significant advances in the safety standards for workers in LMICs.

The working conditions outlined prior are not only imposed on adults but also child workers. The fast fashion industry is held on the back of child labor in developing countries. Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, and countries in Central Asia employ children to work the same grueling hours for little pay. The U.S. Department of Labor found 77 countries in violation of international standards of child labor as of June 23, 2021, with many children forced to work in unregulated 'underground' factories. Child labor is convenient and cost effective in the eyes of fast fashion manufactures and small children can be paid significantly less and have less power to demand better working conditions. In addition, being so young and susceptible, the working conditions and long

hours take a larger toll on the bodies of children. In addition to physical effects the lack of access to education forces children working in factories to be subjected to a lifetime of hard manual labor. The use of uneducated children in the textile industry results in generational poverty through which future generations subsequently struggle to improve quality of life. In addition, a female majority in the textile workforce lends itself to the creation of inequality, such as gender pay gaps, sexual harassment, and a lack of human rights protection. Female workers face sexual harassment and are often forbidden or unable to take maternities leaves: subsequently being discriminated against for being pregnant.

Fast Fashion from an Economic Perspective

Fast fashion is an extremely popular practice because it's cheap: the industry thrives in the economy-of-scale markets of the modern day because clothes are mass produced in large factories. Even people who do not have significant disposable income can comfortably afford new clothes because they come at significantly low

prices. Sites like Shein, Boohoo.com, etc. provide in-fashion clothes (which are promoted by industry standards) at such prices.

Because fast-fashion factories are accustomed to rapid production at an automated scale, they can easily switch to new clothing items as they come in and out of style, increasing the economic stability of the practice (without regard to sustainability). Furthermore, the clothes produced are extremely low-quality, and thus wear easily, forcing consumers to buy new clothes frequently from the most available retailers: online fast fashion sites.

From the workers and their countries' perspectives, however, fast fashion is a damaging practice. Fast fashion is most common in countries where the minimum wage is already lower and thus where the primary and secondary economic sectors are predominant. The fast fashion industry diminishes small clothing businesses by out-producing them, forcing workers to resort to the lower-wage mass-fashion industries. Furthermore, the factory-hosting countries lose all the income from such factories to the companies producing

the clothes. While the factories exist in said countries, the companies are headquartered out-of-state, meaning that they are economically exploiting the host countries.

Main Committee Topic

The integration of developmental and environmental concerns within the fast fashion industry is a complex issue that requires the careful balancing of the two concerns. Developmental concerns revolve around the well-being of workers across the entire supply chain. It demands equitable wages that empower individuals to support themselves and their families, safe working environments that protect their physical and mental health, and opportunities for skill development and career advancement. By prioritizing these developmental aspects, the fast fashion industry can not only elevate the quality of life for its workers but also contribute to motivate overall economic development.

Simultaneously, addressing environmental concerns lies at the heart of sustainable fashion. This involves a fundamental shift towards eco-friendly materials and sustainable production processes. Brands can make significant strides by embracing alternatives like organic cotton, recycled fabrics, and textiles derived from renewable resources or repurposing used textiles. Equally crucial is the reduction of harmful chemicals and

pollutants in manufacturing by cutting down on the use of harmful cleaning and processing chemicals such as bleach. Such measures are pivotal in curbing resource depletion and mitigating pollution, aligning fashion with the planet's well-being.

Balancing the two issues requires a very careful approach, as the very work that often enables worker development can also be extremely detrimental to the environment.

Embracing the principles of the circular economy is another necessary step in this process. It calls for a paradigm shift by encouraging practices such as garment repair, resale, and recycling, relying less on depleting natural resources and more on reuse. Moreover, the strategy of designing products with longevity in mind is essential for minimizing the need for frequent replacements and conserving resources.

Past Actions

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development was created during the “Conference on Environment and Development” (UNCED), and was signed by

over 175 countries to establish the means for the building of a more sustainable future, and to create the possibility for humans to continue living life in harmony with nature, rather than discord. The document’s articles and clauses called upon countries to enact environmental legislation to protect the Earth from waste. Under Principle 7, the UNCED asked that countries continue to both develop sustainably to both conserve and continue to protect the environment.

Additionally, the document asked that countries were to sustainably develop only if environmental protection was to be integrated in this development. Although most countries failed to address many of the environmental goals and policies of the declaration, it is important to acknowledge that the document successfully increased global awareness of pressing environmental issues and acted as a catalyst in the movement towards a more sustainable world.

Agenda 21

Also a product of the UNCED, Agenda 21 acts to further promote sustainable development. It is a nonbinding action plan which specifically addressed

promoting health and creating a more sustainable population through more sustainable decision making (Section I), Conserving and managing developmental resources (Section II), Strengthening the role of major groups such as children, women, local authorities, and workers (Section III), and working on means of implementing science and technology transfer (Section IV). Ultimately, acting as a vital step in bringing the world closer to sustainable development.

Development goals and linked sustainable development with its effect on health.

Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

The Johannesburg Plan of implementation was a UN commitment to the successful implementation of Agenda 21. The plan calls upon member nations to take strides towards aforementioned sustainable development. Additionally, the plan asked that all involved countries ensured both *sustainable production and consumption patterns*. The plan centered around a 10 year program whose main objective was to improve sustainable production and consumption patterns. Although it is difficult to pinpoint whether or not the Johannesburg Plan of implementation was successful, it has helped with the adoption of Millennium

Bloc Positions

Armenia

The Democratic Republic of Congo

France

Germany

Indonesia

Kyrgyzstan

Lebanon

Luxembourg

Malaysia

Norway

Peru

Philippines

Spain

Thailand

United States

Argentina

Bulgaria

Chile

Croatia

Cyprus

Egypt

Finland

Greece

Hungary

Iran

Iraq

Ireland

Jordan

Lithuania

New Zealand

Pakistan

Portugal

Sweden

Switzerland

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