

Hanyang Model United Nations VIII

Chair Report

Committee: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Chairs: Taerin Kim, Yujin Kim

Agenda: Tackling the issues related to the export of waste from developed countries to developing nations, including improving regulations and enhancing international cooperation for waste management.

1. Committee Introduction



The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global authority on environmental matters. Throughout the history of over 50 years, UNEP has endeavored to inspire, inform, and enable nations and individuals to enjoy improved quality of life, while preserving a sustainable future for the next generations. Founded one year after the historic United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the UNEP has emerged as a cornerstone for the United Nations system of global environmental governance and cooperation.

UNEP has been addressing the triple critical planetary crises, which are climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These environmental crises are threatening our everyday survival. The world needs urgent, meaningful, combined, and collective action to solve these problems. UNEP is uniquely positioned to address the triple planetary crisis. With its experience, expertise, dynamic programs, forward-thinking strategy, and dedicated staff, UNEP guides nations on the right path toward a sustainable planet. As global environmental challenges intensify, UNEP's work has never been more essential.

Since the environmental challenges have no borders and are too large and too complicated for any single entity to address alone, UNEP has been collaborating closely with governments, environmental conventions, the scientific community, academia, private sector, civil society, international and regional organizations, global funds, the financial sector, philanthropies, individuals, UN entities and others. During the last five decades, it has worked in firm association with governments, civil society, private business concerns, and UN agencies on issues ranging from the restoration of the ozone layer and protection of the oceans to greening and economic growth that is inclusive of all. ("UNEP – Your Partner" 4). UNEP works in partnership with its 193 member states and other stakeholders through the UN Environment Assembly, the highest level of global decision-making authority on environmental issues, reinforcing the organization's capacity to set the global environmental agenda.

Under its mandate, the committee promotes dialogue among member states, promotes science-based decision-making, and ensures environmental concerns are prioritized in international discussions. Through its various programs on issues such as supporting the transition to low-carbon and resource-efficient economies, strengthening environmental governance, and safeguarding ecosystems, UNEP embodies multilateral cooperation for effective solutions ("UNEP – Your Partner" 6). Its scope involves UNEP's integrated strategies that address the triple planetary crisis while supporting all 17 SDGs. Through the promotion of circular economies and decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation, UNEP accordingly supports countries to do more with less and enhance the quality of life with reduced strain on resources for coming generations ("About Us").

The key role of the UNEP committee also involves acting as a vehicle for interborder partnerships by knitting the necessary inputs from scientists, policy thinkers, and non-governmental organizations into the formulation of comprehensive and farsighted policies. This integrated approach allows developing countries to gain access to vital tools, technologies, and financial mechanisms that are essentially required for sustainable development. Such collaborations prove UNEP's commitment to South-South and triangular cooperation in enhancing the world's potential for much better management of environmental concerns ("UNEP – Your Partner" 5; "About Us"). In addition, UNEP depends upon scientific evidence from credible sources, which means that the work of the committee is based on credibility itself. Grander reports, such as the Global Environment Outlook and Making Peace with Nature, assist in aligning national policy with global sustainability objectives in keeping with UNEP's vision for a pollution-free, climate-stable world ("UNEP – Your Partner" 8).

The Committee emphasizes that environmental sustainability is inseparable from economic and social development, per the SDGs. UNEP's work in public advocacy, education, and partnerships brings awareness and motivates action to help member states and communities make a difference. Committee meetings themselves, whereby member states can consult with one another and negotiate solutions, cement those commitments into concrete progress. The special position of UNEP allows it to broker complex issues, build consensus among its member states of 193, and collective action as a core strategy. In support, of the acceleration of climate change impacts and resource depletion, UNEP is committed to aligning committee discussions with its Medium-Term Strategy for relevance and effectiveness in addressing contemporary environmental crises ("UNEP – Your Partner" 11, 15-16; "About Us").

2. Agenda Background

Waste export, especially in the form of hazardous and electronic wastes (e-waste) is being transferred from developed to developing nations. The presence of waste, especially hazardous and electronic waste exported from developed to developing nations, presents critical concerns regarding global health, environmental sustainability, and social equity. This is attributed to the fact that the rate at which developed nations generate large quantities of waste due to high

industrial production and consumption levels. For example, the United States generated more than 139,000 tons of hazardous waste annually during the 1990s (Pratt 581-585). To avoid disposal costs and circumvent stringent domestic regulations, such countries export wastes to less regulated developing countries. This is variously described as "toxic waste colonialism," which shifts environmental burdens from richer to poorer nations and perpetuates global inequalities" (Pratt 583-585; "Handling E-Waste" 1147).

Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, 1989, was thus instituted to deal with the exportation of hazardous wastes. It provides that hazardous waste exports are only to be allowed if there is full informed consent from recipient nations and that management of waste should be carried out in an environmentally sound manner (Basel Convention Text 5-16). Yet despite the comprehensiveness, gaps abound, and enforcement remains loose enough that exports have continued via mislabeling and routing through third countries to disguise origin.

E-waste is considered one of the significant fractions of hazardous wastes showing the magnitude of the problem. It is said that e-waste from developed countries, which contain valuable and toxic materials like lead, cadmium, and mercury, still finds its way into developing nations in the informal sectors of recycling. In these sectors, safety measures are minimal or absent, which results in severe environmental contamination and health risks to workers, and also to the local communities with grave health risks. This is further compounded by the fact that most recipient countries have limited infrastructure to handle these wastes and often lack regulatory oversight ("UNEP Implementation of Resolution 3/7" 4).

a. Historical and Current Context

The environmental hazards of waste exports only became widely known in the 1980s, when scandals such as the Koko toxic waste scandal in Nigeria brought the risks of poorly controlled transboundary waste shipments to the public eye. These scandals provoked an international response in the form of the Basel Convention. The convention was weakened, though, as major industrialized powers routinely circumvented controls

by taking advantage of loopholes in its implementation and monitoring process (Pratt 583-584; Basel Convention Text 10).

Over time, an attempt to make international governance tighter with the introduction of more and more rules and regulations. Basel Ban Amendment, adopted in 1995, came into force in 2019. It bans all hazardous waste exports from OECD countries to all non-OECD countries for final disposal or recycling. While this amendment marked progress, not all signatories have ratified it, leading to inconsistent application and enforcement (Basel Convention Text 15-16).

Other efforts also developed at a regional level to supplement the Basel regime. The Bamako Convention, in 1991, banned the import of hazardous waste into African nations and further strengthened regional cooperation in addressing such issues. However, these measures have not been successful in preventing such shipments to developing countries on account of the financial benefits and colossal cost of environmentally appropriate management in developed nations due to this convention. (Pratt 600-603; "UNEP Implementation of Resolution 3/7" 7).

3. Previous Actions

This was a global response to the export of hazardous e-waste from developed to developing countries that have been evolving over the last decades. There has been a serious international, regional, and national response to set up measures aimed at diminishing the impacts on the environment, society, and health due to waste mismanagement. There is also a foundation for ongoing improvements in waste management practices.

a. International Frameworks and Treaties

This was followed by the Basel Convention in 1989, which is considered the most significant measure so far adopted concerning the movement of transboundary wastes. Events such as the Koko toxic waste scandal in 1988 in Nigeria, in which more than 8,000 drums of hazardous waste were dumped by an Italian company, prompted the

Basel Convention to introduce some essential controls. This convention called for exporting countries to get prior informed consent from the recipient nations before shipping hazardous waste. The consent was, in turn, to guarantee that the waste would be managed in an environmentally sound manner (Basel Convention Text 5-16; Pratt 583-584). The Basel Convention was meant to protect developing nations from becoming sites for dumping hazardous materials and couldn't uniformly be enforced among the member states.

To address these deficiencies, the Basel Ban Amendment was adopted in 1995. The Basel Ban Amendment barred the export of hazardous waste from OECD countries to non-OECD nations for any form of disposal or recycling (Basel Convention Text 15-16). Although a milestone accomplishment, it has not been able to realize its complete potential due to its patchy ratification, through which some nations have been able to exploit its inadequacies (Pratt 600).

The follow-up work to bring the approach to waste management to an international level was the Joint Conferences of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions held in 2013. The conferences brought about harmonization in hazardous substances and waste management practices. This again demonstrated that similar policies at the international level are needed to protect both human health and the environment (UNEP, "Implementation of Resolution 3/7" 6-7).

b. Regional Initiatives and Cooperation

Coming alongside these, international agreements have taken the lead in making efforts to curb the menace of waste export. The Bamako Convention of 1991 among African nations represents the perceived weaknesses of the Basel Convention. It has strictly prohibited the import of toxic waste into Africa and was an expression of regional self-sufficiency in environmental management as well as a lack of faith in the Basel regime on hazardous wastes for protecting environmental and health standards in the Third World (Pratt 603; Basel Convention Text 12). The Bamako Convention has

been a forerunner for regional empowerment where states, through collective action, can save their vulnerable areas from turning into dumping sites.

The European Union, too, has been busy implementing superior standards of waste management. The EU Waste Shipment Regulation (EC No. 1013/2006) augmented the framework of the Basel Convention by placing strict controls and documentation on waste exports. These have indeed been useful in bringing down illegal exports of waste from the member nations and leading the regulatory practices of the region so far (Ghosh et al. 695).

The establishment of the Asian Network for Prevention of Illegal Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes has also contributed largely to this region. Supported by the United Nations Environment Programme, this network has facilitated cooperation among regional governments to share data and carry out joint inspections, thus preventing the illegal importation of waste. This has helped to further national efforts to achieve international standards and consequently enforce compliance within the region (UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 25).

c. National Policies and Actions

Countries affected by hazardous waste importation have devised some national policies to counter the adverse effects by ensuring safer waste processing.

i. China's National Sword Policy (2018)

Until the year 2018, China was the recipient of recyclable and hazardous waste coming from every country around the world. However, in that year, the National Sword Policy set a high standard for the quality of waste being imported and banned many types of low-quality recyclables. The policy led developed nations to rethink their ways and methods of dealing with waste since exporting their waste to China was not an option anymore. It marked a critical turning point in international waste flow and increased demands for better domestic recycling infrastructure in the countries exporting wastes themselves (Ghosh et al. 695).

ii. India's E-Waste (Management) Rules (2016)

Significantly, India has also revised rules and regulations in the shape of the E-Waste (Management) Rules, in 2016, which incorporated Extended Producer Responsibility, which requires the manufacturers to establish mechanisms for collection and safe disposal of electronic products themselves. These rules and regulations were supposed to formalize e-waste processing and make the recycling process less hazardous, but due to the dominance of the informal sector in recycling, many unsafe methods are still applied (Kumar 7-8; UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 18).

iii. Ghana's Hazardous and Electronic Waste Control and Management Act (2016)

One of the major e-waste recipient countries in the world, Ghana, enacted the Hazardous and Electronic Waste Control and Management Act in 2016. It imposes a recycling fee on imported electronics and requires substantial licensing to be issued to importers and processors for proper management. It calls for more formal recycling facilities and places Ghana in the lead in balancing economic activities with environmental protection (UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 19).

d. Contributions from Non-Governmental Organizations and Advocacy Groups

NGOs have been at the forefront of promoting better waste management practices and exposing the failures of the regulatory regime:

i. Basel Action Network (BAN)

The Basel Action Network has also played an important role in highlighting the weaknesses of existing regulatory frameworks. BAN has been undertaking and reporting investigations into illegal shipments of waste and misclassification of waste. In other words, BAN pressed for practices that were

loopholes from the Basel Convention. Its advocacy has been indispensable in forcing governments and international agencies to slack regulations (Pratt 609; “Handling E-Waste” 1152).

ii. Greenpeace

Greenpeace has focused much on the issues of environmental justice, ensuring that dumping sites were located within poor communities. The organization documents through photography the pollution in the region where the affected are living and advocates for better regulations. The credit has been field research and public campaigning and raising the issue of hazardous waste on the global environmental policy deliberation (ISWA 8).

iii. Collaborative Research Initiatives

The collaboration among UNEP, NGOs, and universities has been instrumental in providing information that undergirds much of the waste management policy. Reports, such as the Global Waste Management Outlook provided by UNEP, represent an important look both at challenges and opportunities in managing waste. Such studies have shed light on policy decisions and emphasized the nexus between good waste management and the SDGs (UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 9; UNEP, Your Partner for People and Planet 3-5).

e. UNEP’s Role in Ongoing Efforts

UNEP continues to play a central role in supporting countries in the management of waste in a sustainable manner and in line with global environmental goals.

i. Capacity Building and Technical Assistance

UNEP’s capacity-building programs put a premium on technical training and financial assistance to the developing countries to build infrastructures for waste management within their respective countries. IN 1994, the UNEP also

initiated South-South cooperation among countries that belong to the same category of problems concerning their solid wastes. The agency allowed countries to consult with each other on policies and strategies to manage their generated wastes more effectively (UNEP, Your Partner for People and Planet 4).

ii. **Linking Waste Management to the SDGs**

UNEP's policies align waste management strategies with the broader framework of the SDGs. The organization highlights that achieving goals such as "Good Health and Well-being" and "Climate Action" depends on reducing waste and adopting sustainable practices. Hence, this calls for integrated approaches toward globally coordinated action on the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 11).

iii. **Public Engagement and Education Campaigns**

UNEP has championed public engagement, such as through World Environment Day, to raise awareness about the issues of waste management. Through such campaigns, community involvement is encouraged, by narrating individual and corporate responsibilities, inclusive of governmental, towards achieving sustainability in waste matters (UNEP, Your Partner for People and Planet 6).

f. Challenges and Barriers

Despite these initiatives, various challenges hinder the effectiveness of waste management efforts:

i. **Regulatory and Enforcement Gaps**

The Basel Convention's enforcement varies widely among signatories, enabling loopholes through mislabeling and transshipment tactics (Pratt 605; "Handling E-Waste" 1150-1152).

ii. **Economic Pressures**

Developing nations often accept hazardous waste due to economic incentives despite the long-term environmental and health consequences. The financial benefits from waste imports create a dependency that is difficult to break (Pratt 488).

iii. **Informal Recycling Sectors**

Informal waste processors in countries like India and Nigeria operate outside formal regulatory systems, using primitive techniques that expose workers and the environment to harmful substances (Kumar 6-8; "Handling E-Waste" 1153).

iv. **Technological and Resource Limitations**

Limited access to modern waste management technologies and inadequate funding further restrict the ability of developing nations to process waste safely and sustainably (UNEP, "Implementation of Resolution 3/7" 5).

4. Possible Actions and Solutions

a. Increased densification of international regulations

The Basel Convention can be better implemented as more stringent to allow all member states to compulsorily be part of the Ban Amendment and to shut those existing loopholes that are currently exploited regarding waste classification; this approach is being supported (Pratt 607; Basel Convention Text 15). This, as duly planned by UNEA initiatives, will make sure that it gives equal attention to the management of waste at the level of national strategy development and ensures greater coordination towards compliance with international standards and oversight mechanisms ("UNEA Res. 1/5" 3-4). This would be further fortified in global regulatory frameworks through the creation of an autonomous review body for periodic audits and transparent reporting.

b. Capacity building in developing countries

The developing world further needs increased financial and technical assistance to improve waste management infrastructure. This is about constructing formal recycling facilities but also covers providing training programs that bring informal sector workers into safer, regulated systems (Kumar 8; Ghosh et al. 694). International partnerships with different bodies, NGOs, and local communities can manage their waste effectively. That is, through grants or loans for financing infrastructure or workshops in capacity building on sustainable practices.

c. Technological solutions to improve transparency

Digital tracking of wastes using blockchain would offer complete transparency and traceability of the shipment of wastes. Whereby, blockchain technology secures data on the movement of wastes and allows for immutable and trustworthy mechanisms for tracking accountability (“Handling E-Waste 1152). To this, governments can add real-time GPS tracking and standardize digital technology stands to be an obstacle in the practice of illegal waste management because it records an open book, which is very difficult to misrepresent.

d. Encouraging accountability within the private sector

The diverse array of EPR policies across the globe would place the burden on manufacturers for the entire product lifecycle. This, in turn, would drive greener designs and more adequate waste disposal (Kumar 8; Basel Convention Text 9). International organizations might even grant tax benefits to companies or offer various kinds of recognition should they achieve specified standards in sustainability. EPT policies would also involve strict penalties for non-compliance, placing the responsibility on the manufacturer for successful recycling and waste minimization.

e. Public awareness and community involvement

The public education process about the hazards of toxic waste processing would also create a bandwagon effect, spreading public demand for less harmful ways of waste handling (“Handling E-Waste” 1153). Governments and NGOs can begin education

campaigns through workshops, school programs, and public information sessions to make the citizens aware of the right way to dispose of waste. Sharing best practices and success through mass media and social sites will provoke environmental responsibility.

Furthermore, community-led monitoring programs could be established to report noncompliance and help collaborate with local authorities for effective enforcement.

5. Defining of Key Terms

a. Toxic Waste Colonialism

The term is the process in which rich countries export toxic wastes to poor nations that either have slack environmental laws or are economically desperate (Pratt 583-584). In most cases, there are instances of gross environmental destruction and health hazards for communities of the developing world because they lack the capacity and infrastructure for the proper disposal of hazardous waste.

b. Circular Economy

It is an economic model that, where possible, generates minimal waste, whereas resources are utilized most effectively by the continuous reusing, recycling, and repurposing of products and materials (UNEP Global Waste Manage Outlook 2024 7). This was different from the traditional linear economy, whereby production is followed by a take-make-dispose pattern. In this case, the circular economy bases its idea on a closed-loop system where natural resources are preserved and there is a decrease in environmental impact.

c. Informal Waste Sector

The informal waste sector includes non-regulated activities of waste processing, is not subject to formal control, and is usually carried out by unsafe methods (ISWA 8; UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 5). The laborers within this sector are frequently unprotected in their work, under alarming health risks, and are contaminated

by the environment. Despite all these difficulties, the informal sector makes a very important contribution to collection and recycling, particularly in developing nations.

d. Triple Planetary Crisis

The term defines interconnected crises in climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution driven by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption (UNEP, Your Partner for People and Planet 3). This calls for an issue that must be tackled with a three-pronged approach: each of these issues must be addressed at the same time, putting in perspective the sustainable development and protection of the environment.

e. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

EPR refers to the policy system in which the producers are made responsible for the products they produce at every stage, starting from design to production, and their final decomposition (Kumar 8). This responsibility thus urges the manufacturing companies to produce goods, which could be more easily recycled or disposed of without being harmful to the environment.

f. Sanitary Landfill

A sanitary landfill is an engineered waste disposal site that is designed to safely store waste while minimizing environmental impact to as low as possible (UNEP Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 6). With constructed protective liners and leachate collection systems, landfills prevent contaminants from leaking into the surrounding soil and water. Good management of sanitary landfills reduces environmental damage and public health harm from waste disposal.

6. Key Questions

- a. How can international regulations be enforced uniformly across all member states?
- b. What kind of economic incentives can be provided to developing nations for them not to accept hazardous waste?
- c. To what extent does technology have a role in facilitating more transparency and monitoring compliance with environmentally sound waste management?
- d. How are the informal waste sectors brought into the range of formal recycling systems with proper safety standards?
- e. What practices guarantee better accountability from the multinational companies exporting their waste?
- f. How could regional agreements, such as the Bamako Conventions, be expanded to include more integrated waste management?

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