

Cerritos Fall Conference 2019

# OHCHR

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Topic: Toxic Waste

Director: Jeffrey Hwang

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October 12, 2019

To Delegates of Cerritos Novice 2019 Conference

Dear Delegates,  
Welcome to Cerritos Novice 2019!

It is our highest honor and pleasure to welcome you all to our annual novice conference here at Cerritos High School. On behalf of the Cerritos High School Model United Nations program, we are proud to host another year of this long-standing conference, where you will become more knowledgeable on international issues, participate in intellectually stimulating discussions, and create new and everlasting friendships.

The CHSMUN program continues to compete around the world as a nationally ranked MUN program. Our delegates utilize diplomacy in order to create complex solutions towards multilateral issues in the global community. Our head chairs are selected from only the best seniors of our program, undergoing a rigorous training process to ensure the highest quality of moderating and grading of debate. Furthermore, all the topic synopses have been reviewed and edited numerous times. We strongly believe that by providing each and every delegate with the necessary tools and understanding, he or she will have everything they need to thrive in all aspects of committee. We thoroughly encourage each delegate to engage in all of the facets of their topic, in order to grow in their skills as a delegate and develop a greater knowledge of the world around them.

Our advisors and staff have put in countless hours to ensure delegates have an amazing experience at the conference. Our greatest hope is that from attending CHSMUN 2019, students are encouraged to continue on in Model United Nations and nevertheless, inspired to spark change in their surrounding communities. With 31 high school committees and 2 middle school committees, CHSMUN 2019 will provide a quality experience for beginners to learn, develop, and grow as delegates.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact us! We look forward to seeing you at CHSMUN Novice 2019!

Sincerely,

Brianna Roldan and Tess U-Vongcharoen

Secretary-Generals

# OHCHR

## Toxic Waste

### **A Note From the Director**

Delegates,

Welcome to the 2019 Cerritos Novice Conference! My name is Jeffrey Hwang, and I am your director for OHCHR. After being in the CHSMUN program for all 4 years of high school, I am glad that I have been able to experience a variety of committees; however, UNEP and UNODC have been my favorite to committees to participate in. Outside of MUN, I am an active volunteer at the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific where I have worked before as an exhibit interpreter and member of its Harmful Algal Bloom Citizen Science Team. Right now, however, I am working as the logistics department leader for the Aquarium's Teen Science Cafe Committee which is a student-run team that prepares educational science nights and workshops for low income students around Long Beach. Apart from that, I am also the vice president and project manager of the Benefit Concert Group which is a student-run nonprofit group that plans monthly item drives and an annual charity concert to raise money for the Long Beach Rescue Mission homeless shelter. When I'm procrastinating, I love binge watching anime and shows. Right now, I'm obsessed with the Rising of the Shield Hero and Attack on Titan. I hope you guys will have a fun and educational experience at this conference this year! Good Luck!

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Hwang

Director, OHCHR

### **Committee Introduction:**

First established in 1945, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) is the main United Nations office directed to preserving and promoting human rights as directed by the UN Charter. Primarily it serves to uphold the "three essential pillars": security, development, and human rights on both the regional and global scale. The organization is divided into the TESP/DD, CTMD, and the FOTCD. The Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division (TESP/DD) is tasked with creating policies, capacity building tools, and advisory tools in order to support the mainstreaming and tackling of human right violations. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanism Division (CTMD) focuses its efforts on assisting the Human Rights Council and other human rights treaty parties. Lastly, the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD) regulates and

implements the TESPDD's guidelines and policies. Together the OHCHR cooperates with governments and other UN committees to increase human rights discourse and encourage more third parties to conduct research and educate on more ways to mandate human rights. It also partners with governments providing technical training and governmental reform (court and legislative reform) to ensure human rights are prioritized in every member state globally.

## Background:

Today, the international community is under mass industrialization and technological advancement which has undoubtedly spurred economic growth; however, it has also concurrently developed an increase in toxic pollutants circulating. Generally, toxic waste is any harmful chemical byproduct or any chemical waste material that can be lethal or poisonous upon exposure. This includes any pollutant that is radioactive, explosive, carcinogenic (causing cancer), mutagenic (damaging chromosomes), teratogenic (causing birth defects), poisonous, or bioaccumulative (toxins increases in concentration under exposure) if consumed, inhaled, or absorbed (by skin). Often because of improper disposal, it has become an environmental and public health crisis for nearby communities and ecosystems. With more than 400 million tons of toxic waste being produced annually, safely dealing with the production of toxic waste has become a large international issue.

Toxic waste, though usually from unregulated manufacturing, can result from laboratories, agriculture, or hospitals that do not safely dispose of their equipment and materials. These goods contain heavy metals and toxic chemicals that can even be found in household items, such as paints, pesticides, broken electronics, aerosol products, and batteries. Despite the lethal nature of these goods, poor enforcement of health, and recycling policies has allowed consumers to carelessly throw these pollutants away in spite of the apparent health risks- some of which they do not even know of. This lack of sufficient awareness and education in conjunction with little governmental regulation and civilian awareness has contributed to a rise in contamination in recent years particularly in impoverished nations under rapid development. For example in Serbia, the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency or SEPA estimates that 130,000 to 220,000 tons of toxic materials are generated annually. In response, however, the Serbian government has yet to invest in processing grounds while being 25-30 years behind in environmental laws. This has caused an accumulation of benzene deposits underground in village wells nationwide due to a culture of negligence and little to no effective repercussions concerning environmental crimes. Serbia is not alone, as both developing and developed nations like China, where 85 percent of toxic waste is not handled correctly, face national environmental dilemmas.

Developing countries contribute to this problem as well due to their economic reliance on the agricultural sector. Their large-scale pesticide use has exposed farmers, communities, ecosystems, and natural resources to potent agrochemicals (chemicals used in agricultural industries) that can devastate people's health who come into contact with these contaminated crops. The World Health Organization even reports that these same agrochemicals cause approximately 355,000 unintentional deaths annually either from contaminated water, food, or direct exposure. This is coupled with the fact that several third-world countries are not able to afford waste management centers which has allowed many civilians to resort to open-air burn

pits. Open-air burn pits are unfiltered fire pits used to burn unwanted waste, which has shown to pose long-term and short-term health complications to exposed people and spread toxins into surrounding soils. These toxins that contain fine particles from petroleum, chemicals, medical waste, metals, and paints have shown to cause skin irritation, burning, respiratory and cardiovascular issues, and increased risk for cancer and asthma. With toxic waste becoming an emerging health problem for both developing and developed nations, all governing bodies must address these diverse causes.

Another source of toxic waste is the underground waste trade where some third-world countries have even been subject to illicit dumping or have chosen to import scrap plastics from developed nations. Often transnational organized crime has significantly contributed to this global waste trade with waste trafficking, which often leaves poorer nations with more mass pollution and economic deficit than before. Waste trafficking is the illicit export of waste and pollutants to usually developing nations which disrupts the nation's sustainable resource management and damages the recipient nation's environment and human health. A primary example of this is the mass dumping of e-waste (electronic waste) into West Africa and several other Southeastern Asian nations. By illicitly dumping and ignoring health and waste guidelines, these recipient nations are introduced to a range of harmful substances such as lead, chromium, PCBs, (polychlorinated Biphenyls), and brominated flame retardants that can severely stunt nervous, immune, and digestive system growth for children exposed to prolonged chemical exposure. In spite of these major health issues, many developing nations and crime organizations rely on the waste trade as a cheap source of income where children, adults, and low-income families are employed to extract and find precious metals in unsafe electronic waste dumps. Not only are these workers inhaling these heavy metals and walking through fragmented waste, but they are using several unregulated incineration techniques to extract these metals, which directly cause toxic gases to be released into the nearby vicinity. All of which has increased the health complications of these communities either through direct poisoning, indirect inhalation or consumption of contaminated food or water.

## United Nations Involvement:

The UNEP has taken much action first through the BRS Conventions or the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions which were the first major series of environmental treaties that sought to improve health and environmental protections from toxic waste. In 1989 the Basel Convention addresses pollutant "lifecycles" from the production to disposal of the material which was later reinforced by the UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research) launching capacity building projects that helped with the ratification of the Ban Amendment. The Ban Treaty prohibited member states from exporting toxic waste to areas without waste management plants; this was ratified in Cote D'Ivoire and Guinea consequently. Meanwhile the Rotterdam Convention ensures that member states would establish clearer importation and exportation guidelines through open discussion on including more product warnings and handling guidelines as it would minimize toxic material from being incorrectly disposed. The Stockholm Convention focused on regulating the spread and exposure of persistent organic pollutants (POPS); POPS are chemicals widely instilled in the environment that usually concentrate in fatty tissues which lead to poisoning. Together, the Basel, Rotterdam,

and Stockholm Solutions served as the United Nations primary frameworks specifically on dealing with toxic waste pollution.

Since then, UNEP has also collaborated with INTERPOL to establish the ENFORCE program or Environmental Network for Optimising Compliance on Illegal Traffic Program. The ENFORCE program focused on maximizing border patrol and more vigilant port checks to minimize the chances of illicit chemical and waste smuggling into impoverished nations from wealthier nations. In conjunction with increased national security, ENFORCE has created an E-Learning Module which provides vocational training for law enforcement officials in order to meet the objectives of the Basel Convention. Just recently in 2016, the UNEP passed resolution 2/7 which promotes meeting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by more political awareness and efficient implementation of the Agenda's goals. The 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals are 17 global goals the United Nations has sought to achieve by 2030 ranging from poverty to climate change and more.

Apart from the United Nations, several non-governmental organizations have also tackled this situation through a successful combination of awareness, funding, and action. One example is the nonprofit Global Greengrants which uses its grantmaking model to fund local environmental grassroots in addressing each issue happening to the region respectively. In 2004, for instance, it supported the SDCEA or South Durban Community Environmental Alliance based in a remote province of Durban, South Africa. The SDCEA is a coalition of sixteen local environmental rights organizations increasing awareness and informing nearby communities on the dangers of toxic spills, air pollutants in hopes of preventing people from being exposed to these health hazards. Together the organizations were able to advocate against the air and water pollution in their village.

## Bloc Positions:

**Western Bloc:** The Western Bloc predominantly covers economically stable nations in Europe and North America who tend to be the main producers and exporters of toxic waste into foreign nations. Often these nations tend to have excessive consumer culture which results in high accumulation of toxic waste since the manufacturing and direct disposal of these products occur in Western Blocs. Though these nations do have solid domestic environmental regulation controlling the private sector and sanitation services, much of toxic waste is left accumulating. Delegates within the western bloc should consider more methods to minimize the production of such harmful chemical byproducts and alternative reuse methods for these goods.

**Latin American Bloc:** Latin America and the Caribbean has one of the highest population concentrations in urban areas, with 80 percent living in metropolitan areas. With mass overcrowding and open environments, this has been open to both mass domestic and foreign dumping. Right next to the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and the Caribbean islands have become the main destinations for waste transport. Domestically, lax public health regulations have enabled factories and people to dump trash into rivers, marshlands, and holes, which caused spikes in cancer, birth defects, nerve damage, and blood disorders for those exposed since the late 1900s. Moreover, mass governmental corruption and easily-bribed port

inspectors have also increased rates of illegal waste dumping. This is a probable cause because of Latin America's growing foreign debt and economic crises. As a result, governments are often tempted by cash contracts from private European and American companies either promising large cash sums or public infrastructure in exchange for dumping.

**African Bloc:** The African Bloc has little to no effectively enforced health codes and waste management protocols. This has caused a buildup of landfills which increased soil and water contamination heightening risks of food-borne and chemical-related illnesses. Due to few legal repercussions, West Africa has become a modern destination for illicit electronic waste dumping according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UNEP studies even suspect that 60 to 90 percent of this waste is dumped into West Africa either because of illegal dumping and trading from transnational crime groups. A prime example was the 2006 Probo Koala Incident, where a Dutch waste disposal company illegally unloaded several tons of waste into the Abidjan harbour, This intoxicated millions of residents causing illness and persistent nausea and headache. Primarily due to little law enforcement and poor finance, African member states have previously relied on international action plans such as the Bamako Convention which directed attention to reforming African nations from being subject to unregulated dumping grounds. Along with regional awareness groups and non governmental organizations, African nations must maintain economic growth and face mass transnational crime organizations when dealing with toxic waste.

**Asian-Pacific Bloc:** Due to mass industrialization and modernization, many Southeast Asian and East Asian nations have had to take into account the accumulation of toxic pollutants either because of little to no disposal methods from large-scale manufacturing and unmonitored dumping grounds. Often as a result, many asian nations have increased regulations and investigations against waste smuggling into their borders and even established stricter guidelines concerning scrap imports. In 2018, China, for instance, established the "National Sword" policy banning 24 types of solid waste which included toxic plastics and mixed papers for a stricter contamination level standard against pollution and in 2013 established the "Green Fence" which involved increased border security to prevent waste smuggling and import regulations over scrap metals, plastics, and other waste materials. This has even been followed by Vietnam and Thailand where officials are considering permanent scrap plastic ban, since Thai ports experienced a stark increase in American plastic scrap exports from 4.6 million to 132.8 million pounds of plastics in only one year. Though Asian governments are far from fully tackling toxic pollution either due to little prioritization or financial issues, they have begun legal steps to counter waste trafficking in the long run and it is expected to increase in the next few years.

## Basic Solutions:

In order to effectively tackle toxic waste, delegates should not only address solutions that pertain to dealing with the effects of toxic waste, but also the causes of toxic waste itself. Remember that toxic waste is a multilateral environmental issue that has deep connections to the economic conditions of both impoverished and developed nations thus requiring more long-term responses. Moreover, waste contamination can have lasting health and environmental impacts

such as birth defects, natural resource poisoning such as unclean water and crops which calls for longer-lasting solutions. Effective solutions that address the consequences of toxic waste should target removing these pollutants in a safe way and minimizing further contamination without heavily affecting communities and the environment negatively. If the proposed solution involves chemical or biological treatment, it is crucial to ensure that these will not impose any ecological or further health issues in the future. For example, an effective solution is bioremediation which uses organic enzymes to consume toxic contaminants in a cyclic process. This would allow dumping grounds to be cleansed while, transforming intoxicated soils into usable land again. Proposed solutions that tackle the causes should have greater complexity as delegates should take into account the economic impact on the producer's nation and the waste recipient's nation. For example, in West Africa, if there were significantly less waste being illicitly imported, what would impoverished families do for a new source of income if they couldn't sort waste for metals to sell anymore? Some solutions should involve education and awareness, as well as finding alternative method to reuse or recycle products which would be more feasible than solely reducing the production of a certain good.

## Questions to Consider:

1. Has your country established any past legislation, policies, or international agreements to minimize the production and effects of toxic waste? If any, what were they and how effective was it?
2. How can your nation encourage more new toxic waste regulation codes and policies to be made and how would they be better enforced? Where and who would these regulations be directed at?
3. What steps can be done to stop governments from importing waste and discourage the development of dumping grounds for overseas companies?
4. How can communities combat transnational crime organizations and waste smuggling? What economic effects does it have on civilians and what economic incentives can be provided instead?
5. What are the main sources of toxic waste in your nation? How does it affect the economy, environment, and surrounding communities?
6. What methods can be used to better process or reuse products while being affordable and efficient for developing nations?

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