



Committee: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Topic: The environmental implications of the extraction of natural resources in Antarctica

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I. Committee Background

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is a committee of the United Nations (UN) which “coordinates environmental activities and assists developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices.” It was established after the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 (Environment & Society, 2004). UNEP’s headquarters are located in Nairobi, Kenya and it has dozens of regional offices located around the world. Currently, the committee’s mission is to “provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.” Some of UNEP’s major achievements have been the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, the creation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 1992 and the development of the International Cyanide Management Code in 2002 (Who We Are, UNSDG, 2020).

II. Topic Information

A) History of the Topic

Antarctica is the Earth's southernmost continent. Around 98% of Antarctica is covered in thick sheets of ice. According to the Dirección Nacional del Antártico, it is

the coldest, driest and windiest continent, making it difficult for humans to inhabit. Antarctica is mostly unpopulated and those that live there reside in research stations scattered across the continent. The continent is composed of many unique types of algae, bacteria, fungi, plants, and animals such as mites, nematodes, penguins, seals and tardigrades (DNA, 2016). Antarctica is the only area in the world where the land is not officially owned by anyone. Instead, Antarctica is governed by the Antarctic Treaty, which was written in 1959 and adopted in 1961. So far, it has been signed by 27 countries. Moreover, an additional 17 countries have agreed to abide by the Treaty in order to participate in research missions in Antarctica. The treaty bans land ownership, requires that information is shared openly and that all science done in Antarctica is for peaceful, non-commercial purposes (Marks, Exploratorium, 2020).

Antarctica is a continent that is believed to have an abundance of natural resources. These possible resources include copper, silver, nickel, gold, platinum, iron ore, molybdenum, cobalt, chromium, zinc, manganese lead, titanium, nickel and uranium (Greenpeace, 2020). Scientists believe these resources can be found in Antarctica because "known metalliferous fold belts that are found in Australia, Africa, and South America seem to have continuations in this continent according to the general principles of plate tectonics." So far, these minerals have not been extracted, however, some countries are calling on the mining ban to end since mineral and fuel resources are depleting in other parts of the world (Thomas, AZO Mining, 2012).

The Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources Activities (CRAMRA) Treaty was signed in 1988 by the Antarctic Treaty member states to "regulate and define a responsible approach to future mineral exploration activities in the continent." Countries such as China, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States have expressed their interest in exploring the region for minerals and

fuel. According to AZO Mining, an effort to extract resources from Antarctica would be expensive and dangerous due to its distant location and inhospitable environment (Thomas, AZO Mining, 2012). Since Antarctica is quite far from other countries, companies extracting resources would need to use multiple forms of transportation and machines. This, coupled with the actual drilling into the earth, would further contribute to global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer. Furthermore, the mining of oil in the region could cause a dangerous leakage that could pollute the water and kill the many unique species that live in Antarctica (Sancta Maria College, 2012).

B) Current Issues

France: France was one of the first Antarctic Treaty signatories in 1961 and is a consultative party with voting rights capable of taking decisions on the Antarctic. As of now, France has two Antarctic research stations: Dumont d'Urville station, in the Adelie Earth coastal region, and Concordia station, located on the Antarctic high plateau. Equally important, the country has national resource energy that controls both of these stations called the Institut Polaire Française Paul-Emile Victor (IPEV). However, taking into consideration that the Concordia station is Franco - Italian, it is called the Programma Nazionale di Ricerche in Antartide (PNRA). Established in 1992, the IPEV is a Brest based Public Interest Group consisting of nine members: the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the CEA, the CNRS, the Ifremer, the CNES, Météo-France, the French Southern and Antarctic Countries (TAAF) and the French Polar Expeditions. Moreover, its principal goal is to identify, organize, support and implement national and international science and technology initiatives in the polar, northern and southern regions (Sénat, 2020).

Turkey: A team of Turkish scientists have now established temporary research centers in Antarctica. The researchers are said to begin to plan their third 30-day expedition to the continent of Antarctica in 2016 and travel to study the impact on climate change. The Antarctic Treaty, which happened on December 1st, 1959, was signed by twelve nations, however, Turkey was not involved during the signing. While the scientific interest of Turkey in Antarctica goes back to the mid-1960s, according to Burcu Özsoy, who led expeditions to the South Pole, its work has gained a rapid pace over the past three years. Turkey managed to establish a land base in the last expedition, which happened in February of 2017, and several states say that Turkey has done more than other countries in the last three years. Currently, Turkey has three locations in Antarctica named after three Turkish scientists: Atok Karaali, Professor Umran İnan, and Tilav Cirque (Yinanç, Hurriyet Daily News, 2019).

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom (UK) is among the original twelve nations that signed the Antarctic Treaty. The UK remains a leader in the Antarctic Treaties System (ATS), which is the system that establishes rules and regulations that are expected to be followed within the Antarctic Treaty. The 1994 to 2013 United Kingdom Antarctic Acts highlight the long-term commitment of the country towards the ATS. Currently, Britain has the British Antarctic Territory (BAT) as their oldest territorial ownership. The BAT is a UK Independent Territory, managed by staff in the Polar Regions Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office located in London (British Antarctic Survey, 2020). The BAT has no local population and the area presence is provided by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), which operates three research stations and the United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT), which maintains Port Lockroy, Britain's first permanent Antarctic Base (UKAHT, 2020).

C) UN Action

The United Nations Weather Agency has started a two-year international plan to close gaps in polar forecasting capacity and improve further environmental safety including Antarctica as one of the main priorities. While polar conditions keep changing, it affects our world's weather, even more, thus the United Nations has taken action on creating various organizations, such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), Committee of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes (COMNAP), Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), and many more. Yet, according to Petteri Taalas, the Secretary-General of WMO, "because of teleconnections, the poles influence weather and climate conditions in lower latitudes where hundreds of millions of people live". Later on, Petteri added that "warming arctic air masses and declining sea ice are believed to affect ocean circulation and the jet stream, and are potentially linked to extreme phenomena such as a cold spell, heatwaves and droughts in the northern hemisphere" (UN News, 2017). However, a small group of nations believe Antarctica can become a strong provider of resources in the near future, causing nations to be extremely focused on keeping Antarctica safe. Yet, treaties get created to avoid the exploitation of natural resources as well, therefore Antarctica's way of being handled is becoming more of a controversial topic (BAS, 2020).

III. Essential Questions

1. Where is Antarctica? Why is it important to the environment?
2. Which natural resources exist in Antarctica?
3. How would the extraction process harm the environment in Antarctica?

4. Is your nation involved in Antarctica? If so, in which way?
5. Is your country interested in extracting natural resources in Antarctica? If so, how?
6. What is the United Nations doing to address this issue?
7. Which other organizations are working on this problem? Is your country working with any of them? If so, which ones?
8. Are there any international treaties or conventions which would prevent or limit the extraction of natural resources in Antarctica? If so, does your country belong to any of them?

IV. Quorum

- Afghanistan
- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- Egypt
- France
- Germany
- India
- Iran
- Israel
- Japan
- Kenya
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Nigeria

- Pakistan
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Syria
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom
- United States

V. Resources

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