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| Forum: | General Assembly 3 (GA3): Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural |
| Agenda: | On measures to ensure the protection of endangered animals and prohibition of the exploitation of them for benefit |
| Student Officer: | David Jo |

Committee Introduction

My name is David Jo and this is my first time chairing and my fellow chairs are Edison Ou Yang and Sandy Lin. The General Assembly 3 (GA3) is one of the six Main Committees of the UN General Assembly which was founded in 1948 and formally, referred as the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of international issues including peace and security. As made clear from the role of the committee, GA3 committee responsible in acknowledging the intrinsic value of biological diversity and its various contributions to sustainable development and human well-being, and recognizing that wild fauna and flora in their many beautiful and varied forms are an irreplaceable part of the natural systems of the Earth which must be protected for this and the generations to come. Thus, Delegates in the GA3 committee should try to suggest solutions and measures that will be in accordance with their country's policy and aim at a sustainable development, while ensuring the protection of endangered animals and prohibition of the exploitation of them for benefit.

Introduction

Despite continued conservation efforts, the status of many endangered species remains unchanged. The convention on international trade in endangered species of wild animals are the primary treaties tasked with protection of endangered species. When making economic choices, the impact they have on endangered species is more often than not neglected. It is more cost-efficient to abuse the endangered species of wild animals than to try to take advantage of man-made ones that often demand more time and money. Whether it is from exploitation of natural resources that are essential to the survival of certain species or utilizing the species for human needs such as buying and selling animals for economic purposes, human activity is responsible for endangering a lot of species and even having made some go extinct.

It is thought that our planet is going through its 6th mass extinction crisis and it is the first one where a specific species is solely responsible, humans. While this may not be an immediate threat to our planet, future generations will have trouble with facing additional species go extinct, the more our planet will be losing species of wild animals, that have a unique purpose in keeping the environmental equilibrium intact. Governments and organizations all over the world are troubled with this alarming phenomenon and are looking for ways to solve it. Although there is a massive effort to fix the problem, there is still not enough work going into preventing it mostly due to economic reasons. It should be said that the money that isn't being put into properly handling the situation at the moment will be multiplied in the future and it will be unavoidable since the consequences will be dire. It is therefore necessary to review current policies that are in effect about the matter and revise the methods with which we are tackling the issue as an international society.

Key Terms

Wildlife - The total of species, including animals and plants, that inhabit a region independently of humans and most of the times under natural conditions.

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species - A list of the criteria that classifies species as endangered as well as a status report of the animals, plants and fungi that are thought to be in relative risk of extinction.

Extinction - When the last member of a species is known to have died.

Endemism (Endemic species) - When a species is unique to a certain region or country

Functional Extinction - When the population of a species has been reduced significantly to the point where they cannot reproduce due to a plethora of possible factors

Extinct (EX) - Species with no remaining alive individuals.

Extinct in the Wild (EW) - Species with survivors only in captivity that have no alive individuals in the wild that are free living.

Critically Endangered (CR) - Species that are facing an immense threat of extinction in the immediate future.

Endangered (EN) - Species that are in the risk of extinction sometime in the near future.

Vulnerable (VU) - Species that are very likely to become threatened in the medium future.

Near Threatened (NT) - There is a chance for these species to be classified as threatened in the near future.

Least Concern (LC) - When there are no direct risks for the species' survival.

General Overview

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists 7123 species as endangered and 4734 species as critically endangered. Despite modern technology and scientific advancement, humans remain inextricably reliant on the environment. Healthy ecosystems regulate the climate, manage nutrients and waste, control floods, afford coastal protection, and provide food, freshwater, fuel, medicines, building materials, fertile soils, and breathable air. Biodiversity loss jeopardizes this in ways we do not yet understand. As such, it is a problem of global concern. The arrival of the industrial revolution and the forces of globalization lead to exploitation of the endangered species in a manner that was unprecedented in scale and unsustainability. In modern times the problem has continued to grow; in 2000 only 1451 and 1228 species were listed as endangered and critically endangered respectively.

In a historical context, the endangerment of species has largely been due to the natural changes within their environment, but in a modern context, humans have been the major cause of endangerment. The destruction of habitat has been the leading factor in species endangerment. Approximately 80% of all extinctions to species has been attributed to the destruction of habitat. This destruction is accelerated by the expansion of cities, the requirement of resources and the need for larger quantities of agricultural land. Overexploitation comes as humans use species for their own benefit, either through hunting, clothing, medicine, or trophies. Although trophies and medicine are only a minimal threat to the natural world, their selected targeting of already endangered species such as the rhinoceros and tiger is what makes it an immense threat to already dwindling population numbers.

The introduction of alien species by humans has also had a disastrous impact on ecological systems historically. Introducing new predators has distorted food chains and damaged the environment. This has been seen with the introduction of the Signal Crayfish across Europe, as well as the domestication of European animals in Australia during the colonial period.

India

India is a country with a very large biodiversity. They are hosts to an approximate 6.5% of the world's identified wildlife species and to numerous endangered organisms that vary from the categories of vulnerable to critically endangered. Wildlife is crucial to the population of India because it not only sometimes serves as a national symbol, but it is also tightly connected to daily life. The Indian Government has been actively trying to protect wildlife. They have created more than 120 national parks, a big number of wildlife sanctuaries and bio-reserves and 4 of 35 biodiversity hotspots that exist in the world.

USA

As it is natural due to its great size as a state, America is host to a very diverse wildlife and also numerous endangered species. It has been recognized that USA's rich wildlife is of great value to the lives of people and to scientific research. The US FWS (Fish & Wildlife Service) has initiated the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in USA after it passed in Congress. America constantly seeks ways to aid its biodiversity and has many bodies actively working at it. What is worthy of being noted is that this is a state with very intense economic activity. This often leads to exhaustion of natural resources with acts such as deforestation, which destroy the natural habitats of a lot of animals and sometimes leads to further endangerment of certain species.

China

China is among the world's first countries when it comes to the number of endangered species it hosts. It should be noted that China has acted towards protecting its wildlife, mostly with its Wildlife Protection Law which was enacted in 1989 to minimize damage to nature and especially endangered species. It sadly hasn't been enough since China's continuous economic growth poses a great threat to animals since mankind's territorial expansion happens in the detriment of natural habitats. In China there is also a very strong activity when it comes to illegal trades and poaching of animals and though the state is trying to combat the issue, it does not seem to be sufficient.

Russia

Russia's biodiversity is also very rich due to the country's vast size which allows for a lot of different terrains with different conditions for different animals to live. Similarly, to China though, In Russia there is a concerning loss of natural habitats due to human activity and illegal poaching. Russia is notorious for its illegal trade in animal fur and falcons. Siberian Fur trade specifically has bloomed significantly to a point where it is difficult to be properly controlled and poses a serious threat to a lot of species.

Australia

Australia mostly due to its nature as an island, has a biodiversity that consists mostly of endemic species. Australia is known to have the worst mammal extinction rate in the world while also having a very high number of endangered species (over 1700). Australian Wildlife Conservancy which was founded about 10 years ago is Australia's largest private landowner with the purpose of protecting wildlife and actively acts when it comes to direct salvation and conservation of species. All in all, Australia's wildlife is very important to our world's biodiversity due to the number of animals and different species that it houses.

Brazil

Hosting the Amazon Rainforest, Brazil is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. However, a combination of hunting, habitat loss, and increased populations of feral species has led to 304 species being classed as endangered, 152 as critically endangered and 14 becoming extinct. Illegal deforestation is a major concern, as government tries to manage Brazil's emerging economy and deal with an entitled and burgeoning middle class.

Iceland

The above examples are to be contrasted with Iceland, where there are only 8 endangered species, critically endangered species, and extinct species. Damage to land-based organisms is largely attributable to environmental factors, such as erosion stemming from over grazing and clearing of the birch woodlands, over 95% of which have now been lost, with the remainder covering only 1% of the surface. A failure to protect endangered species would lead to a loss of the variety that we rely upon in ways that we do not yet understand. Just as bees fertilize our crops and forests sequester carbon, other species may play equally vital yet unknown roles in maintaining Earth as a useful resource for humanity.

Timeline

| Date | Description of event |
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| Late 1960s | <p>The Endangered Species Preservation act of 1966 established a federal list of endangered species in the U.S. and outlawed the harming of listed species. It also established the authority for the Secretary of the Interior to acquire land important to conservation. The Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 expanded the list to include endangered species worldwide and expanded the protections of these species.</p> |
| 1973 | <p>In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was signed into law. This was the most comprehensive legislation protecting endangered species to be established in the United States. The Bill expanded the powers and responsibilities of creating the endangered species list, required the designation of habitats of endangered species as “critical habitats,” or areas vital to the conservation of a species, expanded the authority of agencies to protect endangered species, and bolstered legal protections for endangered animals.</p> |
| 2013 | <p>UN’s proclamation of the World Wildlife Day. The third of March was chosen as it is the same day as the adoption of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an international agreement regulating the trade of wildlife and wildlife products.</p> |
| 2022 | <p>World Wildlife Day is focusing on conservation with the theme of “recovering key species for ecosystem restoration.” Over 8,400 species of flora and fauna are critically endangered, with tens of thousands more considered endangered or vulnerable. The extinction of even one of those species could have devastating consequences. Biodiversity, the variety of natural life in an area, is vital for the planet’s wellbeing, as well as humanity’s. As species go extinct, biodiversity declines, which leads to increasingly vulnerable ecosystems.</p> |

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Particularly Goal 7.B, “reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss”. A failure to protect endangered species would result in further extinction and loss of biodiversity, making this topic critical to the fulfillment of these goals. Extinction is fundamentally incompatible with sustainability, as it marks the permanent loss of a natural resource. The central treaty on this point is Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which aims to ensure international trade in specimens does not threaten the survival of species in the wild. CITES functions to prohibit trade in certain species. As a result, it has been criticized for its negative approach wherein trade in all species is permitted unless specifically prohibited. This leaves a heavy burden on member states to quickly evaluate different species and their suitability for exploitation. Despite the progress made, CITES has been criticized for failing to address the full range of causes the endanger species including habitat loss and human poverty. It seeks to prevent unsustainable exploitation rather than

promote sustainable use. Further, it has no market based mechanisms to address that which creates the market. While this does not negate the achievement that CITES is, it provides a clear path forward for future UN action and consensus building.

- The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) at the forefront of stopping the degradation of the world's natural resources is the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) which has a general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In the first instance, WWF aims to conserve habitats which are under threat. In some circumstances, this alone is not enough and WWF takes steps to promote regulation of their harvest. Within the UN framework, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the lead body. Its work “encompasses assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions” and “trends as well as strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment”. UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) assesses biodiversity and supports policy making. Similarly, UNEP's International Ecosystem Management Partnership (IEMP) aims to be a resource and knowledge hub for policy makers in developing nations. Given that many of the endangered species reside in developing nations which are under-equipped to address the problem, WCMC and IEMP play a vital role in empowering states to act.

Possible Solutions

The emphasis in the MDGs on protection of endangered species

The emphasis in the MDGs on protection of endangered species is continued in Sustainable development goal 15 which, among other things, seeks to halt biodiversity loss. Delegates should pay close attention to goals 15.5, 15.7, 15.8, & 15.c when considering possible solutions. Particularly, there is an emphasis within these sub-goals on ending poaching, reducing the degradation of natural habitats, and countering feral species.

Poaching remains a critical issue. According to WWF, the illegal wildlife trade is worth approximately \$20 billion annually. One of the most affected groups is those species that produce ivory, namely rhinoceroses and elephants.

Consideration of Climate Change

The degradation of natural habitats will inevitably endanger many species. As world leaders prepare for climate change talks in Paris, the effects of rising global temperatures are already putting pressure on ecosystems around the world. Moreover, conversion of land to agriculture and urban sprawl have a major impact on natural habitats. The Brazilian experience of how roads through rainforests can facilitate illegal logging is an important lesson on how development must be cautious to avoid indirect consequences.

Consideration (Australia)

Feral animals and plants also continue to have an impact on endangered species in both developed and developing nations. In Australia, feral cats have put over 100 native species survival in jeopardy and caused the extinction of several. In the delicate ecosystems of the Galapagos Islands, the damage is yet to be seen, but active steps have had to be taken to address the 36 vertebrate, 750 plant and 543 insect species that have been introduced by foreign vessels and the tourism

industry. This highlights how the issues facing states vary with the extent of introduction of foreign species.

Consideration (China)

China is determined to crack down on the ivory trade, but is mindful of the strong demand coming from within its burgeoning middle class. The creation of an ivory registration system in 2004 provided the government with a mechanism to crack down on the illegal trade, but resulted in a substantial increase in sellers that made enforcement of existing controls more problematic, especially given that illegal trade is still being carried out by many registered sellers.

Consideration (Africa)

Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, is acutely concerned with the slimming populations of rhinoceros, elephants, and other safari animals. Being both a major source of tourism and an integral part of indigenous cultures, loss of these species would be hugely detrimental. The challenge will be to assist these largely fledgling nations to utilize these natural resources in a sustainable manner.

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