ATLANTA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
MODEL UNITED NATIONS

AISMUN VII
Background Guide

Committee: UNDP (The United Nations Development Programme)

Topic: Beyond the Industrial Legacy: Achieving a Just Transition from Carbon Emissions and 'Forever Chemicals' (PFAS).

AISMUN CONFERENCE

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Letters from Our Chairs

Dear delegates,

Welcome to AISMUN VII! Throughout this conference, you will participate as a member of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), contributing your insight as one of the 170 countries in this division. As you explore the complexities of this topic, we encourage you to consider different perspectives and ideals countries may bring to the discussion. We hope this committee will be a space for thoughtful debate and collaboration where every delegate is able to share their ideas!

As your chairs, Eva Schoen (Senior), and Iman Mukhtar (Junior), (who have both been in MUN since 8th grade!) are excited to guide you throughout the conference and hear the different approaches you bring to the committee. We encourage you to come prepared, remain open-minded, and most importantly, be willing to engage with different perspectives beyond your own. Remember that Model UN is not only a great opportunity to strengthen your public speaking and critical thinking skills, but a great way to meet new people and make friends! We wish you the best of luck, and cannot wait to meet you all!

Sincerely,
Eva Schoen & Iman Mukhtar

Introduction to the United Nations Development Programme

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the United Nations' lead agency on international development dedicated to ending poverty, reducing inequality, and promoting sustainable development. This branch of the United Nations was established in 1965 as a subordinate program to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which worked to coordinate economic and development assistance to developing nations following World War II. The UNDP was formed by merging the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, which provides guidance, sans funding, to emerging nations, and the United Nations Special Fund to assume the role of financing this economic growth.

The UNDP works in 170 countries and territories in support of bettering the lives of people in every corner of the world. The actions of this branch continue to take place while still remaining mindful of the environmental impacts of our actions on the planet. They work with member nations, multilateral development banks, as well as private companies to devise tactics to reduce poverty and promote economic growth. The focus of this program is split into three main areas: sustainable development, democratic governance and peacebuilding, and climate and disaster resilience. The sustainable development sector works in aiding countries' to improve living standards and economic opportunities; while making sure it is available and maintainable for future generations. The democratic governance and peacebuilding sector facilitates the creation of governments and institutions that are inclusive, accountable, and remain peaceful while supporting societies in preventing and recovering from conflict. Lastly, the climate and disaster resilience sector focuses on helping countries prepare for and respond to climate-related threats and natural disasters.

Through the alignment of these principles, the UNDP supports countries in addressing global obstacles and simultaneously contributing to the long-term development of numerous nations. Its work recognizes that economic, environmental, and social issues are frequently interconnected and require solutions that take into account the needs of different communities. The United Nations Development Programme works closely with governments and international partners to aid states in engineering strategies that promote progress and inclusive growth. Today, these priorities continue to take effect as nations navigate the environmental consequences of industrial innovation and consider how to move towards a sustainable future.

Key Events

- **1938–1940s:** DuPont invents PTFE (Teflon), starting the post-WWII industrial expansion of PFAS and heavy fossil-fuel reliance.
- **1963–1967:** U.S. Navy and 3M create Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF), standardizing PFAS in firefighting worldwide and causing vast groundwater contamination.
- **1972:** U.S. Clean Water Act passes, establishing industrial effluent limits while synthetic chemicals like PFAS remain unmonitored.
- **1975–1978:** Internal corporate studies confirm PFAS bioaccumulation in blood, keeping toxic risks hidden from the public for decades.
- **1988:** IPCC is established by UNEP/WMO, formalizing the global scientific governance of carbon emissions.
- **1998:** Corporate evidence submitted to EPA and the Tennant lawsuit expose decades of internal research on PFAS contamination.
- **2009:** Stockholm Convention adds PFOS to Annex B, marking the first major multilateral restriction on "forever chemicals."
- **2015:** Paris Agreement & UN SDGs adopted, linking climate action (SDG 13) with clean water (SDG 6) and responsible production (SDG 12).
- **2019:** Stockholm Convention lists PFOA for global elimination, alongside ILO guidelines safeguarding workers in polluting industries.
- **2021–2022:** UN declares a clean environment a human right and bans PFHxS under the Stockholm Convention.
- **2024:** U.S. EPA establishes national drinking water standards for PFAS and Superfund liabilities, setting a global legal precedent.
- **2025–2026:** Stockholm Convention expands listings to long-chain PFAS; EU enforces universal PFAS restrictions; UN/UNDP prioritizes transition financing for developing nations

Beyond the Industrial Legacy: Achieving a Just Transition from Carbon Emissions and 'Forever Chemicals' (PFAS).

Industrialization has been recognized as a catalyst for economic expansion and improved standards of living across the globe. However, many approaches that were put in place to facilitate this advancement have generated environmental consequences that persist in affecting both human populations and natural ecosystems. As nations pursue mitigating these consequences, the global community confronts the fundamental challenges of establishing a balance among environmental preservation, economic advancement, and the fulfillment of requirements for impacted communities.

One major environmental consequence associated with industrial expansion is the perpetual release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The reliance on fossil fuels for energy generation, transportation, infrastructure, and manufacturing operations precipitates accelerated climate change on a planetary scale. An additional category of industrial compounds has emerged as a distinct yet interconnected concern. Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl substances, more commonly referred to as PFAS or “forever chemicals”, have become prevalent due to their excellence in thermal, aqueous, and lipophilic resistance. Their persistent presence in environmental systems has raised concerns about long-term contamination.

Addressing these challenges requires considerably more effort than substituting only detrimental practices. Nations must evaluate the financial implications of industrial innovation and simultaneously account for the considerations of populations whose economic circumstances are dependent.

Different Parties Involved

- Sovereign Governments & Country Coalitions
    - High-Income Developed Nations (e.g., EU Member States, US, Japan)
    - Developing Nations & G77 / China
    - Small Island Developing States (SIDS) & Vulnerable Frontline Nations

- Multinational Corporations & Industry Sectors
    - Chemical Manufacturers (e.g., 3M, Chemours, BASF, Solvay)
    - Downstream Manufacturing & High-Tech Industries (Semiconductors, Automotive, Aerospace, Textiles)
    - Fossil Fuel & Energy Sector

- Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) & Multilateral Bodies
    - UN Development Programme (UNDP)
    - UN Environment Programme (UNEP) & Stockholm Convention Secretariat
    - International Labour Organization (ILO)

- Civil Society, Labor & Frontline Communities
    - Labor Unions & Worker Coalitions
    - Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) & Environmental Advocacy Groups (e.g., ChemSec, IPEN, Greenpeace)
    - Impacted Local Communities & Indigenous Peoples

Key UN Suggestions and Actions

The United Nations Sustainable Development Programme has emphasized the need to consider the socioeconomic and political aspects of environmental reforms and their impact on a just green transition. In the UNDP's own guide to Political Economy Analysis for Just Green Transitions (September 2026), it recommends posing six questions to consider when designing policies: What, Who, Why, Where, How, and So What. In particular, the guide suggests focusing on a "who has a stake in what happens or does not happen in the reform process, what incentive do different agents have, what decision-making sites matter, and what resources are available to different agents." The UNDP notes that testing this approach in Country Offices and national partners has helped these entities to learn more about the challenges that reform policies pose and find ways to make their implementation more equitable.

Focusing on energy reforms in particular, the UNDP's February 2025 policy paper, created in cooperation with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), highlights the need to consider Small Island Developing States' (SIDS) particular circumstances and opportunities to achieve sustainable energy access and economic growth. The UNDP is currently working with its Sustainable Energy Hub to support its Country Offices in engaging in policy dialogues and influencing processes related to energy transitions, with a focus on technology and finance.

In addition, the UNDP has been supporting the global institutional, regulatory, and technical environmental policy framework, such as the Montreal Protocol. According to the UNDP, its own interventions have contributed to and accelerated "the phasing out of ozone-depleting substances by 120 countries, preventing the release of 67,000+ tonnes of these harmful chemicals into the atmosphere annually." Furthermore, the UNDP's work has helped to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5.08 billion tonnes of CO2-equivalent, with the UN reporting that it has provided technical assistance to nations to address their hydrofluorocarbon emissions and develop policies to reduce them.

Simultaneously, the United Nations has sounded the alarm on the potentially irreversible consequences of the environmental damage caused by PFAS and other persistent chemicals, with a UN News report (September 2026) highlighting the health and environmental impacts of PFAS. In particular, the article notes that these "forever chemicals" can persist in the environment for hundreds of years and that exposure can occur during the manufacturing process, in the water and food chain, and in consumer products. Moreover, the article states that levels of PFAS were detected in umbilical cord blood and breast milk, threatening the offspring's health. The UN has highlighted the need to prevent toxic pollution's impact on the climate, ecosystems, and societies and pledged to reduce the dangers they pose to public health and the environment.

The report also stressed that the disproportionate burden of these chemicals is shouldered by populations in industrialized states and that exposure occurs mainly through industrial sources. According to the article, PFAS pollution affects vulnerable populations, including women, children, Indigenous peoples, and people of African descent, and occurs due to emissions, trade, and the import and export of contaminated waste. The report highlights the need to address the issue through a human-rights-based approach but also to consider the ethical implications for industries and the population's economy. The report concludes by prompting industrialized nations to question their previous participation in emitting these harmful substances, and whether these countries' commitment to green development and sustainability is not hypocritical.

Guiding Questions/Sources to Use

Guiding questions to consider during research and resolution writing:

- What are the main sources of carbon emissions and PFAS contamination in your assigned country?
- What regional blocs or multilateral coalitions does your nation align with on climate and chemical regulations?
- What alternatives currently exist to replace PFAS in everyday products and major manufacturing sectors?
- What domestic infrastructure gaps prevent your nation from adopting non-toxic or low-carbon technologies immediately?
- How do proposed international bans on PFAS or carbon-intensive goods impact your country's major import/export partnerships?
- How can countries safely dispose of existing stockpiles of "forever chemicals" and clean up contaminated water sources?
- Who has a stake in what happens or does not happen in the reform process?
- What incentives do different agents have, and what resources are available to each?
- What decision-making sites matter?
- What measures can prevent polluting companies from moving their operations to countries with weaker environmental regulations?
- What defines a truly "just" transition for a nation whose economy relies almost entirely on legacy fossil fuels or chemical manufacturing?
- How can international frameworks enforce compliance with chemical safety and carbon-reduction targets without encroaching on national sovereignty?
- How can international frameworks ensure that frontline, marginalized, and Indigenous communities have direct decision-making power in UN policy processes?

Sources to use:

- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)
- The Paris Agreement (2015)
- Minamata Convention on Mercury
- UNDP Climate Promise & Just Transition Guidelines
- UNEP Global Chemicals Outlook II
- UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
    - SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being
    - SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
    - SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
    - SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- UNEP Chemicals and Pollution Action Branch

- International Labour Organization (ILO) Guidelines for a Just Transition
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Reports

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