

Delegation from the Republic of India
Position Paper for the United Nations Environment Assembly

The topics that are before the United Nations Environment Assembly are Environmental Sustainability In the Tourism Industry, and Addressing Marine Plastic Pollution. The Republic of India wishes to emphasize the importance of utilizing eco-friendly approaches and the severe dangers that come with ocean pollution. It is incredibly important that Member States further their cooperation and development towards these goals.

I. Environmental Sustainability in the Tourism Industry

In 2023, The Republic of India had over 9.3 million tourists. According to the World Travel and Tourism's Council (WTTC), tourists brought over 199.6 billion dollars in 2022. Ensuring environmental sustainability, specifically in the tourism industry, refers to the proper practice of promoting responsible tourism development that conserves natural resources, preserves cultural heritage, and benefits local communities. India's biggest concern is pollution, which is specifically rooted from industrial effluents and vehicle emissions, this stems from the high amounts of tourism in the country.

Internationally, India's involvement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), specifically in the Paris Agreement as a signatory, helped align India's goals of promoting green and climate-resilient tourism while integrating climate change mitigation strategies into its tourism policies. These efforts led to low-carbon transport, a push for eco-tourism and responsible consumption of resources. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) established the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) in 1999 which set guidelines regarding sustainable development of tourism. It explicitly focused on minimizing negative tourism impact on the environment. India, as a member, made it vital to adhere to the topics implemented by the UNWTO's GCET by creating policies on waste management, resource conservation, and the protection of heritage sites. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a financial mechanism that supports global environment sustainability projects. India is an active collaborator with the GEF, they have taken on several GEF-supported projects to enhance environmental sustainability specifically in the tourism sector. Their biggest project and popular tourist destination is the Ranthambore National Park which was built on the grounds of conserving biodiversity. Regionally, India is a part of The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Environment Action Plan. SAARC's action plan on climate change promotes eco-friendly tourism across the region, it focuses on natural resources and ecosystems that attract tourists. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSETC), in which India is an active member, focuses on disaster risk reduction, environmental management as well as sustainable development in South Asian nations. BIMSETC'S work on climate change adaptation supports sustainability in coastal areas such as Goa and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are tourist-heavy destinations. The Sustainable Coastal Management Initiative directly supports sustainable tourism by addressing environmental challenges such as coastal erosion and biodiversity loss. Nationally, India targets to promote eco-tourism in order to preserve national parks, natural resources, and historic sites from any touristic damage. India is known as "Incredible India" for its high levels of eco-tourism. In 2015, India endorsed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). India specifically utilizes SDG 12, responsible consumption and production, to promote sustainable tourism through India's National Ecotourism Policy. SDG 14, life below water, to emphasize the protection of marine ecosystems affected by tourism and this is addressed through Kerala's backwaters, which integrate conservation with community-driven tourism. An initiative launched by the Government of India, Mission LiFE which is aimed at encouraging individuals to adopt environmentally sustainable behaviors in their daily lives. Key goals for Mission LiFE is to raise awareness about the importance of sustainable consumption and production patterns and to promote the idea that every individual can contribute to environmental sustainability. Due to this initiative, Travel for LiFE stemmed and it focuses on encouraging travelers to make eco-friendly choices and minimize their environmental impact when traveling.

It is vital for fellow Member States to realize the importance of maintaining a healthy environment, conservation of natural resources and the overall prevention of destruction from historic sites. The Republic of India wishes to emphasize and remind Member States of the SDG 12 and 14 and hopes to

have Member States consider implementing certain environmental policies to better improve the potential dangers high tourist levels bring to their countries.

II. Addressing Marine Plastic Pollution

Every year, over 460 million metric tons of plastic are produced for a wide variety of applications. Of this, there is an estimated 20 million metric tons of plastic litter that ends up in the environment, which is expected to increase significantly by 2040. It is no secret either, that this plastic affects all land, freshwater, and marine ecosystems. This poses a grave threat to the stability of these ecosystems as well as our international progress to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6 (clean water and sanitation), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), and 14 (life below water) by 2030. This is especially pertinent when it is acknowledged that all the aforementioned goals are currently *off track*. It is also considerable to know that 40% of the surface of the world's oceans is covered in plastic. Especially, when it's discovered that in the first decade of the 21st century, more plastic was produced than ever before the year 2000. Presently, there is not one square mile of ocean surface that is free of plastic pollution.

Internationally, one of the leading organizations taking charge and leading Member States to tackle marine plastic is the International Whaling Commission (IWC). During the 68th annual conference in 2019, Member States, including India, passed a resolution to support the negotiations to adopt a treaty to tackle this issue. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that approximately 68% of cetacean species are affected by the million tonnes of plastic that enter the ocean every year. With 57 out of the 90 known cetacean species having reported plastic ingestion cases, along with all marine turtle species, and half of seabird and marine mammal species. More recently in 2022, Member States endorsed a resolution during the UNEA meeting in Nairobi to End Plastic Pollution with the expressed goal of reaching a binding agreement by the end of 2024. It's extraordinarily important that Member States tackle plastic pollution collaboratively because of the ill effects on human health and prosperity. Not only is the exposure to these substances harmful for us, but also for marine species; which can experience blockages in their digestive systems as well as affect the same systems that are harmed in humans. All in order to further the development of SDG 14. Regionally, many nations in South Asia have large tourism sectors. A part of that tourism is their beaches which plagued with plastic remnants that can range to sizes that can cause physical harm to humans. The absence of an effective policy in tackling solid waste management in the touristic regions of the global south can inhibit the growth of the economy in the global south. Nations that are a part of the Lakshadweep Sea ecosystem such as the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and India must begin curbing the effects of marine pollution. The dependency of the communities on the ocean makes them extremely vulnerable to the impacts of pollution. These nations are fortunate to be participating in the PROMISE project, a portion of the SWITCH Asia programme, which seeks the promotion of source-to-sea solutions to reduce marine littering. It has the explicit focus of assisting small and medium-sized entities that contribute to the tourism sector in their progress of waste minimization. Projects like these are incredibly helpful when we look at our progress towards completing SDG 12. Nationally, the Republic of India has decided to tackle the threat of marine pollution in a multitude of ways on both a national and local scale. Some actions taken include introducing rules in 2021 that would phase out the use of single-use plastics through the elimination of light weight plastic bags, plastic flags, candy sticks, etc. Other ways India has started cleaning up of marine pollution is by creating ways to intercept the plastic found in waterways, which is the most effective way of plastics entering our seas. Such measures of interception include the foundation of Bharat Clean Rivers Foundation, a non-profit organization with the task of developing plans to clean the waterways of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. All in the hopes of furthering the development of SDG 6.

It is detrimental that this committee fulfills its responsibility and expressed goal of passing a legally binding treaty aimed at tackling plastic pollution in our marine environments. The Republic of India fully encourages Member States to continue in their collaboration with one another to bring this to fruition. This treaty should include commitments to publish the findings of marine pollution and its status in our oceans. This is a start to minimize the amount of plastics we find in our ecosystems. India stresses to Member States that we continue our efforts to ensure the completion of the aforementioned SDGs; 6, 12, 13, and 14.