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# Research report

Forum: [UNEP]

Issue: [Addressing the responsibility of member states  
on the topic of rising sea levels]

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## **Introduction**

The UN put out a report stating there is a code red for the earth's climate and temperatures. Amongst other things, the rising sea levels have progressed so far that they will be irreversible for centuries, if not worse. Rising sea levels causes danger to humans, animals, and entire ecosystems if we do not stop it. Immediate action needs to be taken. Many nations signed several agreements promising to take appropriate action and a lot of things have already been done or set in motion, so why is there now a code red? This is because the responsibility of individual member states is not stressed enough. Some nations would rather look out for their own economy, some simply do not have the funds to take action. Whatever their reason is, we need to address their responsibility now.

## **Definition of key terms**

### **AOSIS**

Alliance of Small Island States, the world's smallest islands and low-lying coastal countries, making up about a quarter of the world's countries.

### **Climate action summit**

A summit made by the Secretary-General António Guterres to bring everyone together to accelerate climate action, focusing on key sectors.

### **Global warming**

Changes in climate caused by an increase in the average atmospheric temperature, resulting from the greenhouse effect.

### **Greenhouse effect**

A process warming the earth's surface by letting greenhouse gasses absorb energy from the sun.

### **Greenhouse gasses**

Greenhouse gases include water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, ozone and some artificial chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbons.

### **GMSL**

Global Mean Sea Level

### **IPCC**

The intergovernmental Panel on Climate change was set up by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) to be an objective source on climate change.

### **Kyoto protocol**

The Kyoto protocol is a legally binding protocol developed countries to emission reduction targets. It was made in 1997.

## **Paris agreement**

The Paris agreement was made by the members of the INFCSS and aims to keep the global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius by taking more ambitious actions. It was made in 2015 in Paris and signed in 2016 in New York.

## **RSLR**

Relative Sea Level Rise

## **UNFCCC**

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is working to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations to levels where they are not dangerously interfering with the climate system anymore.

## **1.5/2 degrees Celsius**

The increase in temperature compared to the pre-industrial level.

## **General overview**

At first we need to take a look at why the sea levels are rising. The IPCC has said that the increase in sea levels between 1993 and 2018 is 7cm. Half of this comes from melting ice caps in the arctic and Antarctic because of the rising temperatures and the other half come from the increased concentration of greenhouse gasses. The greenhouse gasses heat up the water and therefore, the density of the water expands, making the oceans bigger and making the levels rise. The rising temperatures on earth also result from greenhouse gasses, caused by using fossil fuels, so the main problem is greenhouse gas emission.

The reason we need to prevent the sea levels from rising is because an increase that might seem small can do a lot of damage. Rising sea levels can cause floods, wiping out entire areas and everyone and everything in them. This can cause ecosystems to die. The rising temperatures also cause extinction in arctic species.

The IPCC said in 2018 that the levels will rise exponentially and in by the end of this century, there will be a 65cm increase, but since they announced the code red, things are only looking worse. We are nearing a 1.5 degrees Celsius increase in the earth's temperature, causing climate change to be sped up. The Paris Agreement stated that 1.5 was the preferred maximum temperature and anything over 2 degrees would be fatal. The code red also states that the current sea level is irreversible for centuries and will only get higher unless nations act now.

The world's smallest islands and low-lying coastal countries have set up an alliance, the AOSIS, to work together in combatting the sea levels. This is a hard task for them as many of them are still developing nations and since they are small they do not have a lot of leverage over bigger, developed nations. The Nations in the AOSIS will be the first to suffer from rising sea levels, while – even though they make up a quarter of the world's nations – they only produce about 1% of all the greenhouse emissions. Ambassador Ronny Jumeau, Permanent Representative of the Seychelles to the United: "Let's say my neighbour flooded my house entirely on his own, while I didn't contribute. Yet, I have to now borrow money from him, then pay him interest for the rest of my life, in order to clean the mess in my house

that he is responsible for. This is dishonest." This is why it is very important to address the responsibility that the developed nations have.

A lot of these bigger and/or developed nations have signed agreements such as the Paris agreements and the Kyoto Protocol, but most of them are not meeting their goals as they are putting their own economy first or people in the nation deny the seriousness of the issue.

## **Major parties involved**

### European union

The EU is producing a big part of the greenhouse emissions, but they are also doing well on fixing it. Most nations have a consensus on the validity of the rising sea levels and are aiding the climate goals of both their own nation and others financially. Next to that, some European nations are developing new technology to further help climate action.

### AOSIS

The Nations in AOSIS have the most to lose in this crisis. They are in favour of climate action, but do not have the resources or leverage to push this.

### Fossil fuel distributors

Fossil fuel is the thing that mostly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. The distributors earn a lot of money with their business and nations with a big natural supply benefit greatly from this. Most of them will be against stopping the use of fossil fuel.

## **Timeline of key events**

1997 Kyoto protocol made

2015 Paris agreement made

2016 Paris agreement signed

2019 Climate action summit

2021 Code red IPCC

2100 at least 65cm increase in sea levels

## **Previous attempts to solve the issue**

There have been several attempts to address the responsibility of member-states in improving the climate, which are the treaties previously mentioned. These have not worked to the desired extent because some were made for long term while the issue appears to need a solution faster than expected or because nations do not follow the requirements set by the treaties.

## **Possible solutions**

When looking for a solution, delegates should look to fix the following problems: some nations cannot take the required action due to lack of funds, some nations would prefer to look out for their own economy, a nation like The Netherlands, for example, would have to pay billions to meet their climate goals, but they will barely have an impact on climate change as a whole. The delegate has to choose to find a way to hold all nations accountable for this action, or to focus on the biggest polluters and argue that they have the most responsibility. In a resolution, it would be good for delegates to add a clause on what to do to help territories and people who currently suffer/previously suffered from the rising sea levels.

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*Further reading*

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/climate-change>