

Forum: Environment Commission I

Issue: Implementing the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment

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Introduction

The Langkawi Declaration on the Environment was outlined by the members of the Commonwealth nations on October 21st, 1989, in Langkawi, Malaysia. The Langkawi Declaration is often regarded as one of the first serious attempts to evaluate the harm on the environment that the past industrial developments brought about. The Langkawi Declaration acknowledges a variety of environment problems such as but not limited to greenhouse effect, depletion of ozone layer, extinction of species, rise in sea level and land degradation.

While the Langkawi Declaration introduces the main problems that are detrimental to the environment and provides a relatively thorough guideline to resolve such problems, the practicality of the solutions is put into question. For instance, even though the developed nations in the Commonwealth, such as UK, Austria and New Zealand, have the willingness and ability to implement the suggestions raised in the declaration, many developing countries still regard the declaration as a burden to their development. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate the Langkawi Declaration more actively within the context of sustainable development.

Definition of Key Terms

The Commonwealth Nations

The association of sovereign nations to work toward a common goal. It is primarily composed of nations that were the past colonies of the Great Britain, and the Great Britain itself.

Sustainable Development

Development that provides people with a better life without sacrificing or depleting resources or causing environmental impacts that will undercut the ability of future generations to meet their needs. (Wright 700)

General Overview

Major environmental issues outlined in the Langkawi Declaration

Below is the list of some major environmental issues that are emphasized by the Langkawi Declaration. Please keep in mind that there are more of these issues in the actual document, and the ones listed below are only the most typical ones.

Greenhouse effect

The carbon dioxide (CO₂) is a by-product of the combustion of fossil fuels including oil and coal. Since the human dependency on the fossil fuel is still conspicuous, the emission of carbon dioxide emerges as a serious issue that must be alleviated. CO₂ level in the atmosphere has grown from 280 ppm in 1900 to over 375 ppm in 2004. Indeed, the same level is increasing by 0.4 % per year (Wright 5). Carbon dioxide gas is transparent to incoming light from the sun, and it absorbs the heat energy radiated by the earth. As a result, the increase in the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere slows down the cooling effect of the earth, which features the main problem of the greenhouse effect.

Extinction of species

The growing human population suggests the need to alter forests, grasslands, and wetlands into agricultural and urban land. Consequently, the species that inhabit those places are doomed to face extinction. Also, pollution is also threatening hundreds of flora and fauna. There are 1.75 millions species that have been described and classified, and 1,000 species are endangered worldwide (Wright 7).

Rising sea level

Global warming contributes to the rise in sea level by thermal expansion and melting of glaciers and ice fields. Sea level has risen between 0.1 and 0.2 meters during the 20th Century, and it is rising 2 mm every year (Wright 552). The nations that are consist of low-land or small islands, such as the Netherlands and the Maldives, are exposed to the direct threat of the rising sea level. Of course, the scale will expand globally as this situation continues.

Analysis and evaluation of the methods outlined by the declaration

The Langkawi Declaration does effectively outline the various issues that threaten the environment. Some solutions, such as the one that emphasizes the connection between the nations and the Intergovernmental Panel on the Climate Change (IPCC), are reasonably feasible. However, considering the range of issue it contains, the specific methods to implement suggested policies are too general or vague. Besides, it is also observable that the clauses outlined provide few incentives to the developing nations to be motivated. A successful resolution on this declaration must contain some

specific clauses that suggest practically how would the policies outlined work, as well as the ones that provide motivation for the developing countries to participate in the procedures.

Timeline of Events

The Langkawi Declaration on the Environment was announced on 21 October 1989, by Commonwealth Heads of Government at Langkawi, Malaysia. The timeline of topics the declaration contains will not be elaborated since it is difficult to consolidate a clear timeline out of the vast variety of topics.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Since the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment contains a vast array of environmental topics, the relevant resolutions are mainly on one of the topics. Some resolutions mention the significance of the Langkawi Declaration in the perambulatory clauses.

- Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind, 22 December 1989 **(A/RES/44/207)**
- Possible adverse effects of sea-level rise on islands and coastal areas, particularly low-lying coastal areas, 22 December 1989 **(A/RES/44/206)**

Bibliography

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