

Greenhouse gas emissions from the airline industry have increased by over 87% since 1990¹. The airline industry is now responsible for nearly 10% of carbon emissions. For a majority of people, airline travel is their largest “environmental sin².” A round trip flight from New York to Europe or Los Angeles creates between two to three tons of carbon-dioxide per passenger. A 2014 study found that there were about 102,465 flights per day internationally, adding up to 3.4 million a year³. Included in that number are countless private jet flights and sparsely populated commercial flights.

The Paris Climate Agreement attempts to keep the increase in temperature as caused by greenhouse gasses to below 2° C above that of the preindustrial era⁴. Scientists fear that anything above that increase will have dire environmental consequences and hypothesize that this increase may be irreversible. The rate of airline emission creation continues to increase by more each year and threatens to offset the progress the Paris Accords have made.

Many plans have been suggested over the years to reduce the impact of emissions created by jetliners. There have been attempts to reduce the amount of flights each year, efforts to create more fuel-efficient jets, and tax plans proposed to add cost to each plane ticket to create funding for emission cleanup¹. A European effort to create a tax plan for commercial flights, charging an extra 5% by the ticket, was shot down in 2013 after an uproar by US airline companies who claimed the tax took money out of American’s pockets and placed them in US coffers. The idea was proposed by the European Parliament.

¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-06-1862_en.htm

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/27/sunday-review/the-biggest-carbon-sin-air-travel.html?mcubz=3>

³ <https://garfors.com/2014/06/100000-flights-day-html/>

⁴ http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

As your country's representatives to UNEP, you should consider a way to limit carbon emissions from jets while also considering the economic consequences that a solution might have. Consider also whether resolutions would affect large countries the same way it would affect small countries, or whether any resolution would focus more heavily on larger economies. Your goal will be to work alongside the delegates of other countries to pass a well thought out plan to influence this upward trend in emissions. Consider the role that the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) plays in the world as well as the power of the United Nations as a whole.

Best of luck,

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Helpful Resources:

The Paris Agreement- http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

UNEP Climate Change Page- <http://www.unep.org/climatechange/>

The Functions and Powers of UNEP- <http://www.unep.org/about/>