



UNEP STUDY GUIDE



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I. Welcoming Letters

a) Letter From Secretary General

Esteemed Delegates,

As your Secretary General, Nazlı Atalay, it is my high pleasure to welcome you all

to our United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Initially, I would like to extend my greatest thanks to each delegate for attending our conference and making it come true. Our team has worked endlessly day and night to achieve what we have today. I once again thank you all on behalf of my team and appreciate your attendance. It was such an amazing opportunity and experience to work together with such hardworking and amazing individuals. It is my most certain hope that this conference may be an amazing opportunity to discuss and hopefully solve the given challenges. Dear delegates, I wish for a conference in which each one of you actively engages and works together to combat challenging world issues.

CFLMUN'25, consists of 5 committees. Our academics team has worked day and night together to develop them. The agenda items for these committees have been specifically selected with well-thought discussions. For the UNEP, your topic has been selected as the Environmental Effects of Fast Fashion. I wish for a committee which each and every delegate actively contributes to the debates and discusses important details. I hope our USG's work guides you well thoroughly and makes each one of you fully comprehend the committee.

During each session, delegates will discuss environmental issues, social, economic,

political, and cultural spheres and widespread issues globally. Fast fashion has a significant environmental impact. According to the UN Environment Programme, the industry is the second-biggest consumer of water and is responsible for about 10% of global carbon emissions which is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. Unfortunately, the industry's problems are often overlooked by consumers. Delegates, I sincerely wish you all a great experience and kindly ask each one of you to read and fully understand the study guide for a greater experience.

It is my most sincere hope that a conference which each and every delegate considerately understands and validates these events and challenges will occur. I once again sincerely ask all of you delegates to thoroughly read and understand our study guide. Our team has worked hard to create it in the most explanatory and comprehensive way we could. We wish to have interesting, productive debates supported by rich research of yours which all stick to the main ideas of the study guide. I request all delegates familiarize themselves with their own individuals' policies.

At last, I once again wish you all a great and productive conference experience. We are more than happy to welcome you all. If you do encounter any struggles, please contact me via my email address for any kind of questions.

Kindest Regards,

Nazlı Atalay

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b) Letter From Under Secretary General

I proudly welcome you to the very first edition of CFLMUN as the Under Secretary General of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). I am truly excited to witness the energy, creativity, and diplomacy that each of you will bring to our sessions.

Allow us to extend our warmest welcome to each of you. We are looking forward to seeing you express your valuable ideas along with your dedicated peers in spirited debates.

This year's agenda, "Addressing the Environmental Effects of the Fast Fashion Industry," tackles one of the most pressing yet often overlooked threats to our planet. From water pollution and carbon emissions to microplastic waste and deforestation, the fast fashion industry has left an undeniable footprint on our environment. As young diplomats, you will be tasked with examining these urgent issues and finding solutions that are not only practical but also sustainable and globally inclusive.

Throughout the conference, we encourage you to engage actively, think critically, and cooperate meaningfully. Whether this is your first MUN or one of many, we are confident that you will leave this experience with stronger research skills, a deeper understanding of international environmental challenges, and perhaps even a renewed sense of global responsibility.

It is strongly advised that you carefully read the whole guide beforehand and be familiar with procedural formalities, as it will help you shine throughout the conference and have a smooth experience.

MUN is more than just debate — it is a place for growth, friendship, and developing your voice in the world. Please don't hesitate to reach out for any guidance or support as you prepare.

We look forward to meeting you all and watching your ideas come to life.

Kindest regards,

Under Secretary General

Melek Tekbaş

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II.Introduction To The Committee

Established in 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has since served as a neutral facilitator among member states, civil society organizations, the private sector, and UN agencies, enabling coordinated efforts to address some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing humanity.

UNEP is the United Nations' primary environmental authority, committed to developing transformative, global-scale solutions to the triple planetary crisis: climate change, the corruption of nature, land and biodiversity, and the crisis of pollution and waste.

Over the years, UNEP has played a critical role in promoting international cooperation across various environmental domains, including the restoration of the ozone layer and the protection of endangered species. Through scientific evidence-based policymaking, global cooperation, and effective defensiveness, UNEP continues to support all segments of society in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today, UNEP hosts the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the world's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters, characterized by its universal membership comprising all 193 UN Member States.

III. Historical Background

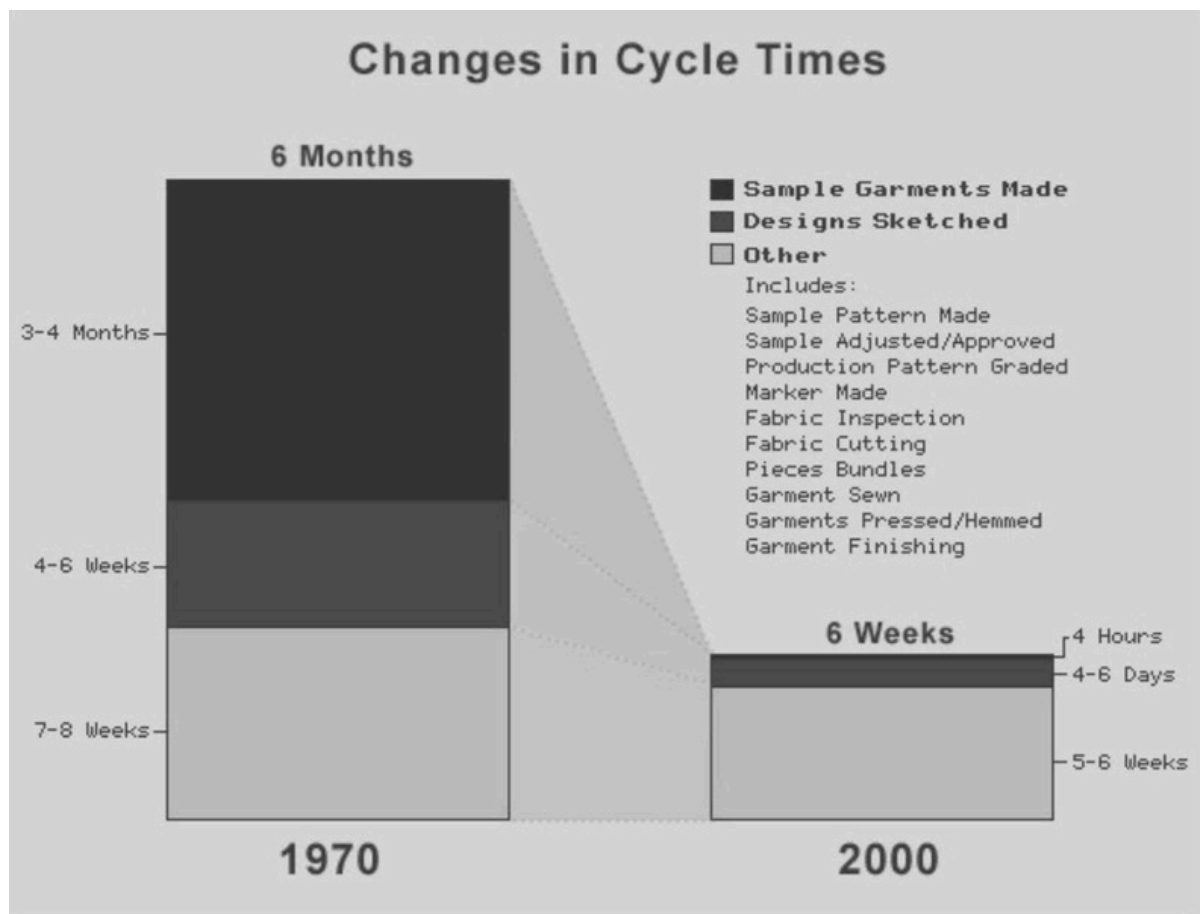
a) What Is Fast Fashion

Fast fashion can be defined as manufacturing affordable clothes that follow current fashion trends.

Fast fashion debunks the idea of repeating outfits and imposes the idea of buying products that can't be used after a limited number of uses. By either mindlessly providing more styles for consumption or cultivating a culture that continuously reminds consumers to buy more and more or buy new, the fast fashion industry has bred a culture of overconsumption. As a result, garments are produced using inferior materials to maximize profits and are often produced without regard to quality or craftsmanship, therefore having a shorter life cycle. Fast fashion typically also has reduced standards for labor and environmental practices to be as fast and cheap as possible. The fast fashion industry succeeds in accessibility and affordability in the immediate timeframe but the real long-term societal and environmental costs of fast fashion far exceed any immediate benefit or convenience.

b) The Cornerstone Of Fast Fashion

The emergence of fast fashion dates back to the 1830s, during the Industrial Revolution, when the invention of the sewing machine significantly accelerated production and reduced manufacturing costs.



By the 1960s and 1970s, the young generation had begun to create different types of clothing trends and use clothing as a personal expression. With the increasing demand for affordable clothing, textile mills opened across the developing world, and low-quality, mass-produced clothing has taken over. Purchasing new clothes became a hobby and a means of social status.

c) The Emergence Of The Term “Fast Fashion”

In 1990, The New York Times published an article using the term ‘fast fashion’ for the first time. The piece was about a new fashion retailer with a mission to transform a garment – from an idea in the designer’s brain to being sold on racks in stores, in only 15 days.

IV.Introduction To The Agenda Item:

Addressing The Environmental Effects Of The Fast Fashion Industry

Fast fashion has significant environmental impacts both during and after production. The fashion industry as a whole is responsible for 10 percent of carbon emissions, uses large quantities of water, and employs dyes and chemicals that pollute the environment. It also produces a lot of textile waste. Fast fashion in particular, with its low prices and poor-quality items, encourages consumers to discard an item of clothing even if it has been worn only a few times. The clothing ends up in landfills around the world, including in the so-called “clothing graveyard” in the Atacama Desert, Chile. Moreover, fast fashion companies primarily use synthetic fibers, such as polyester, nylon, and acrylic. All of these materials are inexpensive to produce, but they are derived from fossil fuels. Hence, items made from these materials are not biodegradable and will remain in landfills for centuries.



According to the UN Environment Programme, the industry is the second-biggest consumer of water and is responsible for about 10% of global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. Unfortunately, the industry’s problems are often overlooked by consumers.

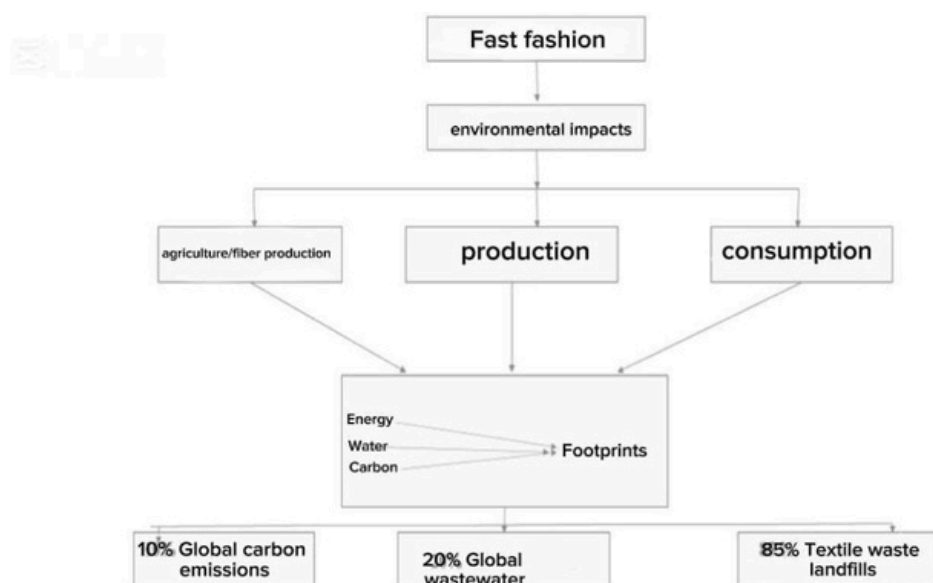
By 2015, the global apparel industry was expected to produce more than 400 billion square meters of fabric per year, representing nearly enough material to cover the state of California annually. These fabrics were produced from nearly 100 million tonnes of fiber and strand yarns, about 40% of which are agriculturally derived and 60% synthetic.

This scale of production directly establishes the scale of the industry's environmental impact. Although much work still needs to be done to fully characterize the size of the burden, there is a great order in terms of practices, including firms that are quite responsible. A rough analysis from 2009 estimates that the global industry consumes nearly 1 billion kWh of electricity, or 130 million tonnes of coal, making the apparel industry a significant contributor to global greenhouse emissions. For instance, this is roughly equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of over 90 million households, or burning enough coal to fill more than 1.3 million freight train cars.

One of the key resources used in the textile industry is water. According to a study, processing just one pound of textiles requires several dozen gallons of water-equivalent to over 400 pounds. When this rate of ingestion is applied to countries with saturated production, it becomes clear that the industry's water use and wastewater output account for a significant portion of available water resources. For example, in 2009, textile manufacturing ranked third among China's major industries in terms of total wastewater discharge, releasing over 2.5 billion tonnes, mostly from the dyeing and finishing stages of production.

The environmental damage caused by fast fashion production is cyclical.

Overproduction leads to excessive water use, resulting in the generation of wastewater. Surplus textile production leads to the increased administration of clothing, contributing to carbon emissions. It is an unprincipled cycle, but its impact is not limited to land and sea.



A significant part of the industry's impact falls on the quality of life of garment factory workers and the communities living in areas affected by textile waste and wastewater dumping.

The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry, accounting for 8% of global carbon emissions and 20% of global wastewater, with a 50% increase in greenhouse gas emissions expected by 2030. One of the negative impacts of fast fashion is the use of cheap, toxic textile dyes. This makes the fashion industry, along with agriculture, one of the largest polluters of clean water worldwide. It has a massive environmental footprint in terms of both production and disposal.

Furthermore, while clothing production requires significant amounts of energy and resources, it also relies heavily on toxic fabric dyes and other chemicals that debase freshwater.

a) Overuse Of Water

The fashion industry relies heavily on water to sustain its supply chain and is the second-largest consumer of the world's water supply. Cotton, the most important natural fiber in textiles, requires particularly high amounts of water. While some cotton is grown in rain-fed areas, nearly half of global production depends on supplemental irrigation, increasing pressure on local water sources. Fashion is often described as a "thirsty business" because it demands water at every stage—from irrigating cotton fields to washing clothes at home. Beyond cotton, other common materials such as polyester and viscose also require large amounts of water.

One of the main reasons fashion is responsible for such a significant share of global water consumption is the widespread use of cotton. According to the World Resources Institute, producing enough cotton for a single T-shirt can require up to 700 gallons of water, while a pair of jeans may need over 2,000 gallons. However, even shifting away from cotton does not eliminate the problem. Polyester, one of the most commonly used synthetic fibers, introduces its own environmental risks. While its petrochemical composition is problematic, an even greater concern lies in the microplastic fibers released with every wash.

A study by the Plastic Soup Foundation found that between 4,500 and 10,000 microfibers can be shed per gram of washed clothing, with roughly 40% entering the ocean. These microfibers are often ingested by fish and other marine organisms, eventually making their way up the food chain and posing risks to human health. Even more concerning, the fibers can absorb toxins such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which are then biologically magnified in larger species, including humans.

These environmental impacts highlight the urgent need for the fashion industry to transition toward sustainability. The sector's dependence on water-intensive production methods not only threatens already scarce freshwater supplies in vulnerable regions but also undermines long-term ecological stability by contaminating aquatic ecosystems. Communities near textile production sites face the greatest burden, with polluted waterways, health risks, and reduced access to clean water for agriculture and daily needs. Yet, when multiplied across major textile-producing nations, these localized challenges contribute to a global water crisis in which fashion plays a central role.

Fortunately, awareness is growing, and new solutions are emerging. Innovations such as water-saving dye technologies, advanced filtration systems, closed-loop viscose, and organic cotton offer promising alternatives. Additionally, shifting toward a circular fashion model-emphasizing durability, repair, recycling, and extending garment lifespans can significantly reduce the industry's water footprint while addressing its broader environmental and ethical costs

b) The Impact On Climate Change

The fast fashion industry has an important and increasing role in climate change. It relies on fossil-fuel-based materials like polyester, massive amounts of deforestation to make wood-based materials, and its usage of large amounts of energy and water makes it one of the most damaging industries to the environment in the world.

Every year, 70 million tons of trees are cut down to meet the fashion industry's demand for wood pulp used in fabrics like rayon, viscose, and other materials. That number is expected to double by 2034, accelerating deforestation in some of the world's endangered forests. According to research by the MacArthur Foundation, the fashion industry produces 1.2 million metric tons of CO₂ every year. In 2018, this resulted in more greenhouse gas emissions than the total carbon emissions of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. In fact, polyester, a plastic derived from fossil fuels, is used in approximately 65% of all clothing and requires 70 million barrels of oil annually. Additionally, the fashion industry uses large amounts of fossil fuel-based plastics for packaging and hangers. Plastic is made from oil and gas, and polyester is a thread that is woven from plastic and turned into fabric. Today, it is thought that more than half of all clothing produced is made from synthetic materials like polyester. These materials often cannot be broken down or recycled, which creates a significant plastic waste problem. As the world moves toward reducing fossil fuel use, an essential step in addressing climate change, the oil industry may expect a decline in profits.

Additionally, the entire structure of fast fashion is based around overproduction and excessive consumption. The shortened life of a trend pushes consumers to buy even more clothing and get rid of it even faster, creating more landfill filling and using more energy in constant manufacturing. The clothing is usually made from synthetics that don't decompose when they are thrown away. Most environmental harms stem from mountains of synthetics clumped together in a landfill, which, when incinerated or as they break down over time, release fumes and smells for Earth to deal with.

While the world seeks to reduce dependence on fossil fuels to combat climate change, fast fashion creates a fundamental disconnect. The economic model of fast fashion continues to be based on the use of petroleum-based textiles and reliance on unsustainable production. This choice of production undermines global climate initiatives and supports the economic basis of fossil fuel industries.

c) The Role Of Companies Like Temu And Shein

China-based online fashion retailer SHEIN has become one of the most visible names in fast fashion. SHEIN reported emissions of 16.7 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent across its total value chain in 2023. This figure clearly highlights the environmental impact of SHEIN's global logistics network, which relies heavily on air cargo to meet its fast delivery targets. Aside from the enormous carbon footprint, SHEIN also exemplifies the underlying environmental challenges of the ultra-fast fashion model. SHEIN's supply of thousands of new products every day drives an unsustainable level of resource extraction and textile surplus. Most clothing is synthetic fibers (like polyester, which is made from petroleum) that cannot be biodegradable or recyclable as they are. This results in massive amounts of synthetic clothing waste, which mostly end up in landfills or are burnt, causing greenhouse gases and toxic emissions into the air and soil.

Temu, another rapidly expanding e-commerce platform, operates on the same premise of high volume, low-cost, short-life-cycle fashion. Temu's business model is based on drop-shipping individual products from manufacturers, often in China, directly to consumers globally. This produces significant amounts of small-package air shipments and, consequently, much higher aviation-related carbon emissions. Rather than attempting to consolidate shipments and optimize logistics like traditional retail supply chains, Temu pursues speed and volume regardless of environmental conditions.

Both SHEIN and Temu depend on fossil fuels to operate in many ways—not only in shipping logistics, but also in production, packaging, and synthetic textiles. The fast

fashion cycle is further bolstered by the poor durability of clothing items purchased from these companies, encouraging consumers to embrace disposability—our buy-use-discard habits are becoming more normalized. SHEIN and Temu offer cheap, trend-driven clothing that makes environmental disregard an acceptable norm in the industry, allowing us to look good but feel bad about compromising ecological integrity. The effect on the environment is not limited to emissions and waste. When synthetic garments are produced, they can shed microplastics during washing, which pollute biota and waterways. The Plastic Soup Foundation states that each load of laundry may release thousands of microfibers, of which 40% may eventually enter the ocean. Hence, fast fashion consumption is directly linked to ocean pollution, which increases fast fashion's consequences for the global environment.

d) The Socio-Economic Impacts Of Fast Fashion

The rise of fast fashion in the 20th and 21st centuries has had far-reaching consequences, from numerous environmental impacts to the exploitation of garment workers. Fast fashion retailers move much faster than their traditional competitors. This means they can compress production cycles and get the latest designs to market quickly.

Labor Exploitation

Besides its environmental impact, fast fashion also tends to exploit the workers responsible for its production. Fast fashion brands and websites (such as SHEIN and Temu) are criticized and come into question for exploiting cheap labor in developing countries. Workers often face low wages, poor working conditions, and long, irregular working hours. Many workers lack job security, union rights, and basic labor rights. Suppliers of large chains, in particular, cannot provide safe working conditions in factories, which puts the health of workers at risk. The majority of clothing production takes place in countries in Africa, Asia, and South America that are struggling with post-colonial structural problems. Workers in these countries slightly have protection against long hours and unfair pay. Most of them are working 16 hours a day, which is against human rights, and earning a limited amount of money. When they refuse extra shifts, they are facing reprisals.

Garment workers also work in unsafe conditions, including windowless spaces, dangerously high temperatures, abusive managers, and exposure to harmful chemicals. Perhaps the most well-known incident that reveals these poor conditions is the Rana Plaza tragedy. In 2013, an eight-story building housing several garment factories

collapsed in Savar, Bangladesh, killing approximately 1,100 workers and injuring thousands more.

In the Global South, manufacturing centers such as Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, and Ethiopia employ significant numbers of women and girl workers, many from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. These workers have disproportionately experienced gender-based violence, workplace harassment, wage theft, and dangerous spaces. The fast fashion supply chain is designed in a way that should brands prioritize speed solely, it will push suppliers to low prices that may put workers' lives at risk, if only for profit. Child labor and forced labor are serious issues as well. In some areas, minors work in textile factories illegally, laboring for long periods for wages below a legal minimum. Additionally, even in areas where child labor is not technically present, young women experience wages that are very close to slavery, with no contract, and even if there is an abusive situation, they have no legal recourse.

To mitigate these issues, there is more attention from the global arena to regulatory frameworks that include mandatory due diligence laws, supply chain audits, and ethical sourcing policies. Also, consumer activism and media coverage, especially at the cost of disasters such as Rana Plaza, has moved some brands towards transparency and improved labor practices

e) Key Contributor Countries

People's Republic of China: China is a central figure in the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry. As the world's largest textile producer and exporter, China serves as the manufacturing base for many of the fast fashion brands, including ultra-fast fashion brands like SHEIN and Temu, which depend on low costs and quick-speed models made possible by China's cheap labor supply and considerable industrial base. There is a steep environmental cost. The textile industry is one of China's biggest water polluters and produces billions of tons of wastewater through dyeing and finishing processes. Both SHEIN and Temu mainly use petroleum-based synthetic fabrics like polyester, which derive from fossil fuels, contribute to microplastic pollution, and produce carbon emissions. China remains dominant in the ultra-fast fashion space in terms of production efficiency, AI-driven trends, and cross-border online shopping; however, it is confronted with increasing challenges regarding sustainability, labor practices, and regulatory compliance.

United States of America: The United States plays a significant role in the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry. The U.S. plays this role as a consumer, not a producer. Consumers in America are demonstrating a strong desire

for cheap, trendy clothing being produced overseas (very often China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam). This is certainly contributing to overproduction of fast fashion, overconsumption of resources, and increases in carbon emissions across global supply chains. Additionally, the U.S. has an excess of textile waste. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determines that Americans throw out over 11 million tons of textiles a year. Most textile waste ends in landfills or incinerators that produce greenhouse gases and release toxins into soil. Furthermore, fast fashion brands based in the U.S. don't consistently have full disclosure or transparency about environmental impacts and labor issues regarding their inventory suppliers, like Fashion Nova or Amazon. Further, the shipping and air-freight industry also compounds the carbon footprint of the country. In the U.S., there has been some progress in education and consumer awareness on issues linked to sustainable fashion, but there are still enormous barriers to managing imports, managing waste, and ultimately making steps towards 'circular' fashion systems.

People's Republic of Bangladesh: Bangladesh is one of the centers of textile production with its cheap labor. Workers work long hours, earn low wages, and work under unsafe conditions. Therefore, a safe working environment cannot be provided. Especially, chemicals used in dyeing and finishing processes seriously pollute water resources. The country's economy is largely based on ready-made clothing exports. This situation prioritizes speed and profit over sustainability.

Republic of India: The textile industry is one of the cornerstones of the country's economy. High amounts of water are consumed in production processes. Dyeing processes, in particular, pollute water resources. Most of the workers have to work for low wages. Long hours and unhealthy working conditions are common. The employment of women and children is a significant problem. Local manufacturers operate under price pressure from global brands.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam: Vietnam is a significant production center for fast fashion brands. Due to the developing infrastructure of industries and low labor costs, the country has become an attractive alternative to China for brands seeking low-cost production. Although labor rights are frequently violated, the environmental pollution caused by fast fashion cannot be prevented.

The Kingdom of Cambodia: Cambodia is one of the countries frequently chosen for low-cost production. The most common fast fashion brands produce in this country. Laborers receive low wages and working conditions are poor.

The Arab Republic of Egypt: Egypt stands out with its quality cotton and proximity to Europe. Producing cotton consumes a lot of water, and the rules that protect the environment are insufficient.

The Kingdom of Spain: Spain is the country where most fast fashion brands originated. Spain creates the newest fashion trends and has separated the fast fashion production model. It also has the responsibility of being a pioneer in the transition to sustainable fashion in Europe.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK): The UK is home to online fast fashion brands. Consumption is high, and clothes are used for short periods of time. The country has serious problems with textile waste. In recent years, owing to this problem, companies have been forced to become more transparent and sustainable.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Pakistan is an important production center for fast fashion brands with its cotton production and textile craftsmanship.

Production costs are low, so well-known brands have their production done here as well.

However, environmental controls are poor, and factories often pollute rivers. The country often comes to the agenda due to inhumane working conditions of workers.

V. Questions

1. *How does fast fashion production harm the environment and how can this damage be reduced?*
2. *How can the violation of workers' rights caused by fast fashion be corrected?*
3. *What steps can be taken to make consumer behavior more sustainable?*
4. *How can sustainable fashion be promoted as an alternative to fast fashion?*

5. *How can the environmental impacts of production facilities in developing countries be monitored?*
6. *What are the ways to reduce water and energy resources used during fast fashion production?*
7. *What production and consumption strategies can be implemented to prevent microplastic waste from entering the oceans?*
8. *What measures can be taken to reduce the carbon footprint of fast fashion brands?*
9. *What can be done to prevent child labor and ensure the rights of female workers?*
10. *What kind of programs can be implemented to change consumers' fast fashion habits?*

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