

Committee: UNESCO

Issue: Are Natural World Heritage Sites a common good?

Author: Mexico

The United States of Mexico is a Spanish speaking country situated in the southern part of North America, divided into 32 federal entities, one of which is the capital, Mexico City. Demographically, as the 10th most populous country in the world, as well as geographically, it bears a significant weight in all geopolitical matters. With a wide variety of landscapes and biodiversity, hosting up to 12% of all the world's species, the preservation of its territorial integrity is not a matter to be taken lightly. Environmental protection has made an appearance in Mexican law since as early as 1999, when it figured in the country's constitution; as of 2022, a healthy environment has been elevated to the status of a universal right. The Federal Republic's relationship with UNESCO commenced in 1945, when they participated in the drafting of the Preamble to the Constitutive Act of UNESCO and have since established 6 Natural World Heritage Sites.

Making up 3.6% of Mexico's GDP, hydrocarbon rents are essential to the economy, and faced with industrial and economic growth, the natural resources consumed and extracted in Mexico will not cease to increase in the coming years. With the state-owned energy company PEMEX being a pillar of the president, Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador's economic strategy for development in the PND (National Development Plan), infrastructure related to the hydrocarbon industry will be improved in coming years, and production will certainly continue to expand. Extraction of oil and natural gas mostly takes place offshore, with considerable production in the bay of Campeche, as well as in the coastal states of Tabasco, Veracruz, and Tamaulipas.

A conflict of interest arises as, on one hand, the government would like to uphold its climate agreements, and protect its natural areas so that future generations can make the most of the beautiful Mexican biodiversity, and conversely some Natural World Heritage sites, or Natural sites featuring on the UNESCO's tentative list are located near current or potential areas of extraction, such as the Cuatrociénegas Flora and Fauna Protected Area, which coincides with the Sabinas basin, an area rich in hydrocarbons, or the many sites situated in the area of the Gulf of California, a region said to be rich in natural gas and known for its oil extraction potential.

One issue that has been ever growing in past years is the proliferation of poaching, especially in the Sea of Cortez and the bay of Campeche, regions that coincide with Natural World Heritage sites or protected areas. Highly prized in Chinese Traditional Medicine, the totoaba, a native fish, and the sea cucumber have been almost pushed to extinction, as their extraction is extremely lucrative, giving way to the creation of an underground trafficking network and a very profitable illegal industry. Although bans have been in place for decades, they are hard to enforce, due to corruption, the size of the Mexican coastline and its fishing fleet, counting almost 100.000 small vessels; it is estimated that illegal fishing accounted for between 45% and — a staggering — 90% of official fish production in Mexico.

In addition, IUU fishing is not restricted to the totoaba and the sea cucumber. The prohibited use of gillnets to catch the former causes the entanglement of a rare species of porpoise, the vaquita, which has led the sea creature to extreme endangerment, with as little as 10 of them left. Whaling and the poaching of sharks is also quite common in Mexican waters, despite their illegality. As tensions heighten in the Pacific, with an almost perpetual clash of powers in the South China Sea, Mexico is faced with a dilemma. If they are to make efforts to eradicate the illegal practices and eliminate any trafficking to Asia, the demand will remain the same. Some global actors like China might take matters into their own hands, and send their heavily armed fishing fleets, like they have done in the past with Chile, Argentina, and Ecuador, in the Galapagos Islands.

Indispensable to the Mexican economy, representing 8% of the Latin-American giant's GDP, tourism is projected to grow 10-15% with respect to 2022 by the end of the year. As the second most visited country in the world, the state mainly attracts international tourists from developed, richer countries such as the US and Spain, as well as some South American countries. We can therefore consider this mass tourism, as it is lower cost than other tourist destinations, aimed to bring in as many people as possible. On top of being harmful to local communities, and pricing out locals, mass tourism can be extremely destructive towards the environment, creating vast amounts of waste that some administrations cannot dispose of correctly, as well as contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and

damaging ecosystems. Many areas relevant to mass tourism can be located near protected areas, such as in the states of Yucatan and Quintana Roo, as well as the Gulf of California. This means that the government is once again confronted with a conflict of interest, where an integral part of its economy also contributes to the destruction of its most important natural areas.

Mexico has one of the biggest agricultural productions in the world, with a large quantity of land being used to grow crops or to raise livestock. Although the sector is essential to the country, it can have some detrimental effects on the environment, contributing to deforestation and the introduction of invasive species. Illegal forms of agriculture also contribute enormously to the destruction of the environment, as narco-deforestation has become a more pressing issue in recent years. Due to the remoteness of some of these operations, hidden deep in thick forests, and the auto-destructive nature of these drug producers, it is incredibly hard to catch the people responsible and to prevent any damage to the ecosystems.

To combat the endangerment of the environment through the extraction of natural resources, key to the country's well-being, we believe that creating additional advisory bodies to the three already in place to provide countries taking part in the World Heritage Communal Fund with expertise on the ecological transition. This would be beneficial in helping countries reduce their emissions and their need for fossil fuels, thus helping protect the environment and Natural World Heritage Sites. We also believe that increasing the distribution of funds to countries that need them, such as ours, would be beneficial in fighting against climate change and in preserving our natural resources.

As already mentioned above, illegal activities such as poaching and narcotic related activities can have disastrous effects on the environment, endangering species and destroying habitats. To combat this problem, we believe that UNESCO should develop an environmental protection body, made up of trained individuals that are capable of patrolling and watching over several types of terrains and funded through the increase in contributions from member states. Faced with highly capable threats that infringe international jurisdiction, there is not much some countries can do to protect themselves; therefore, a protection body would be essential in conserving our most prized natural areas. To complement this addition, we stand by the idea of equipping this body with advanced satellite technology, as it is capable of monitoring terrain and its evolution, as well as detecting human impact on certain areas. This tool allows for precise tracking of land and sea and can perceive changes deep below the surface of the ocean.

As has been demonstrated, our climate and our biodiversity are crucial. Measures must be taken to protect it, as resource extraction, agricultural production, tourism, and illegal fishing pose huge threats to its prosperity. As the delegation of Mexico, we believe increasing funding to the World Heritage Communal Fund could greatly contribute to a healthier environment, allowing for more funds and to be distributed to countries that need them, and allowing for the creation of additional advisory bodies to provide expertise to countries that need it. This surplus in funding would also allow for the creation of an international protection body, equipped with state-of-the-art satellite technology, capable of deterring anthropological threats to protected areas.