



NHSMUN

**UNESCO**

**UPDATE PAPER**

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**Sofia Velasco**  
**Renata Venzor**

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)! My name is Mei Kanada, and I am pleased to be one of your Assistant Directors for Session I. This is my first year on staff for NHSMUN, but it is my third time attending NHSMUN overall. I represented the Republic of Korea at UNESCO in 2023 and then again for COP in 2024. I am beyond excited to see you all excel at the conference, and I look forward to hearing your incredible ideas!

I was born and raised in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i but currently live in Japan. I am a freshman at Waseda University in Tokyo, where I am studying at the School of International Liberal Studies. I am incredibly passionate about educational equity, entrepreneurship, and diplomacy so I hope to eventually find a career that effectively pairs my interests in those fields. Outside of school, I enjoy playing tennis and pickleball with friends, thrifting, exploring new places to eat, listening to music, as well as videography!

Public speaking was something that intimidated me at the beginning of high school. But I took this opportunity to challenge myself and decided to join my high school's MUN club in my junior year. It soon became one of my favorite activities in school and greatly strengthened my networking, research, and presentation skills. Although committee sessions can be intense, don't forget to enjoy the process of connecting with your fellow delegates and exploring potential solutions together!

The Update Paper encompasses recent developments and information regarding "Fostering Climate Resilience in Small Island Developing States" and "Sustainability within Cultural Events." Both topics offer endless opportunities for valuable conversations and innovative solutions. I look forward to meeting you all in March and wish you the best of luck!

Best regards,

Mei Kanada

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Assistant Director, Session I

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Fabiana Lorenzo and I am thrilled to be one of your Assistant Directors during Session 1 in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization! I am beyond excited to meet you all and hear all of your enriching ideas during our time together in March.

I've been involved in Model UN for the past four years and have enjoyed every experience. This is my first year as NHSMUN staff, but it will mark my third time attending the conference as I was a delegate for two years. First, representing Belarus in the Food and Agriculture Organization and the next year as China in the United Nations Human Rights Council were incredibly enriching experiences. I was also the Director-General of my school's MUN conference, and after graduating, I became a faculty member for my school's delegation. MUN has helped me polish my public speaking skills while allowing me to enhance and further develop my ability to think and act effectively on my feet.

I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and have lived there my whole life. I am preparing to depart from my home country to study Music Production in the US. As you may suspect, I am a big fan of music. I love singing and playing the guitar and the piano. I enjoy Latin music, pop, and old indie rock bands, and one of my favorite artists is Tame Impala (fun fact: his best album is my lockscreen picture). Outside of my musical world, I work as a summer camp counselor and a music teacher for little kids. I adore the beach. It is my ultimate happy place. I also love hanging out with my friends, cooking my favorite recipes, and focusing on learning fun facts about medicine and science.

All of us Assistant Directors are super excited for all of you to read this Update Paper, it will help you to comprehend both topics further and to learn about recent developments regarding both. I look forward to seeing debate, creative ideas, and leadership during the conference and can't wait to meet you.

Best of luck!

Fabiana Lorenzo

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Lauren Adams, and I am thrilled to welcome you to NHSMUN 2025! I am this year's Session 2 Assistant Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This is my first year as a member of NHSMUN staff, and my fifth year being a part of MUN. I came to this conference for the first time two years ago and have been a delegate in the Legal Council and in UN-Habitat. In high school I participated as a delegate, presiding officer, and Secretary-General of my school's club. Working on the other side has been an absolute pleasure to help create an incredible experience for you, delegates.

I am a freshman at Baylor University in Texas, majoring in Political Science with a double minor in History and Women and Gender Studies. I am a member of the Baylor Model UN Team, as well as a Student Senator. I am very interested in environmental studies and climate change and enjoyed getting to learn more about Small Island Developing States (SIDS) while researching and writing this update paper.

My time as a member of MUN has been very special to me. I have learned so much about the United Nations and the world at large and have been able to connect with international communities in new ways. I enjoy going to conferences, having meaningful conversations with people worldwide, and creating innovative and collaborative solutions. I hope all of you take advantage of this opportunity to work with your peers and promote new strategies for working together.

Everyone here at NHSMUN cannot wait to see all of you and hear your ideas! I hope you take the time to research these topics and prepare for the conference thoroughly. This will be an even better experience if you get fully involved and actively participate. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or any of the directors!

Good Luck!

Lauren Adams

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Ishaan Shetty and I am excited to welcome you guys to NHSMUN 2025! I am another one of this year's Session 2 Assistant Directors for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This is my first year as a member of NHSMUN staff, and my fourth year being a part of Model UN. I first came to NHSMUN in 2022 during my sophomore year of high school, and I was a part of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. I became more involved in my school's Model UN as I went through high school. I had the opportunity to host two conferences at my high school as well.

I am a freshman at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, majoring in Finance. In college, I am a part of 812 Consulting, Texas Hold'em Club, and a bunch of finance organizations on campus. However, I try my best to stay immersed with global affairs and have a curiosity for learning about sustainable development.

Take advantage of the opportunity to learn and do research. However, also try to really get to know your peers and learn about their respective backgrounds. Finding a place that gives you the chance to work with like-minded peers from all over the world is extremely hard. The best advice I can give you is to genuinely listen to your peers. Engaging in an open discussion on your own, unique ideas is the best way to learn. That being said, I hope you guys have the chance to enjoy NHSMUN as I have.

We can't wait to see all the hard work you guys have put into preparing for this committee. If you have any questions regarding this committee, college, or finance please feel free to reach out. I'd love to help!

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UNESCO

NHSMUN 2025

# TOPIC A: FOSTERING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN SIDS

Photo Credit: MODIS Land Rapid Response Team, NASA GSFC

## Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face several challenges, including natural disasters, other environmental challenges, and misinformation. These challenges cause SIDS to face economic and social problems, which, combined with misinformation, can become even more complex to solve. To address these issues, SIDS must have access to accurate information.

This paper will first examine the G20 summit and its outcomes specific to SIDS. It will focus on UNESCO's Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change. The initiative has the objective of fighting disinformation campaigns that prevent progress on climate change efforts.<sup>1</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated in 2022 that climate disinformation undermines scientific results. This creates uncertainty and more risk in fighting climate change.<sup>2</sup> Climate information integrity means people can trust climate data, campaign details, and how funds are managed and spent. A key component to achieving the Global Initiative for Information Integrity goals is having clear communication between members. Working to foster relationships and communication between governments, the public, and scientific groups is crucial to creating solutions. It will also help further UNESCO's goals and foster climate resilience in SIDS. When communication includes correct information about initiatives and problems that communities still face, feasible solutions are more likely to result.

This paper also conducts a case study on Vanuatu, a SID in Oceania. Vanuatu has been an active member in gaining international legal recognition of climate change. Vanuatu is part of the Carbon-Free Energy Compact. The compact works with members to take action to move in the direction of universal sustainable energy.<sup>3</sup> Although Vanuatu is a small country, it has proved to be a leader in becoming carbon neutral. Although Vanuatu has been diligently working to counter climate change, unavoidable climate disasters still

threaten the state the most. This case study explains how these climate disasters affect the citizens and how they prepare for these disasters. It also explains some initiatives Vanuatu has supported, such as clarifying laws and increasing punishment for lack of follow-through. Overall, this case study showcases the pressing need for global commitments to alleviate climate change's impacts on vulnerable states.

By considering these updates, delegates should work together to find solutions that aid SIDS in securing a sustainable future even during the climate crisis.

## Outcomes of the G20: UNESCO Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change

The Group of 20 (G20) brings together the largest economies in the world to discuss critical challenges in the global economy.<sup>4</sup> In November, Brazil hosted the 18th G20 Summit to address several agendas, including social integration, energy transition, and accelerating climate action.<sup>5</sup> On accelerating climate action, the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change was created at the Summit. The Initiative was created to secure funding from States and international organizations to promote research and action for accurate information on climate issues.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, the Initiative will finance an in-depth research network that will debunk disinformation related to climate change on social media. It will also support journalists and researchers investigating

1 UNESCO, "G20: Leaders' Summit: Brazil, UNESCO and UN Launch Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change," News release, last modified November 19th, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/g20-leaders-summit-brazil-unesco-and-un-launch-global-initiative-information-integrity-climate>.

2 UNESCO, G20: Leaders' Summit: Brazil, UNESCO and UN Launch Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change."

3 "24/7 Carbon-Free Energy: Methods, Impact & Benefits," 24/7 Carbon-Free Energy, January 2, 2025, <https://gocarbonfree247.com/the-movement/>.

4 "What Is the G20 and Why Does It Matter?," World Economic Forum, November 15, 2024 <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/g20-summit-what-you-need-to-know/>.

5 "2024 Brazil," G20, November 2024, <https://g20.org/summit-and-logos/2024-brazil/>.

6 "Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change," United Nations, accessed January 24, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/information-integrity/>.



Prime Minister Keir Starmer attends the opening session of the G20 Summit in Brazil on November 18, 2024 in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil.  
Credit: Number 10

climate issues.<sup>7</sup> Climate disinformation is spreading at an alarming rate through social media, messaging apps, and the use of generative AI. Altogether, this creates a lack of trust in the scientific community and difficulty effectively responding to the climate crisis. Moreover, environmental journalists are at risk of attacks. In 89 countries between 2009 and 2023, 749 journalists and related media outlets have been attacked covering ecological issues.<sup>8</sup> Over 15 years, 44 environmental journalists covering these issues have been killed. This has happened mainly in Asia and the Pacific, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>9</sup>

Climate disinformation is influencing public opinion and affecting the actions taken at all levels of society, from individuals to communities and influential policy makers. The Climate Action Against Disinformation and Conscious Advertising Network conducted a study on this in 2022. It demonstrated that there are many misconceptions regarding climate change.<sup>10</sup> Examples include that 33 percent of the population in the United States and Australia think that the climate has

permanently changed. They believe that global warming is not caused by human activity. In the United Kingdom, 29 percent believe that a majority of scientists do not agree on the cause of climate change.<sup>11</sup> These misconceptions are a result of our digital expansion. While our increased connectivity has its benefits, it also creates new risks in the accuracy of our information. Scientists and public officials need to closely monitor content algorithms and content created through generative AI. These rapid developments in our information space create risks of spreading misinformation. Therefore, projects like the Global Initiative for Information Integrity will help safeguard accuracy in climate research.

Information integrity creates further initiatives to promote science-based research. One example of these additional initiatives is called ‘Verified for Climate.’ They work to engage communities with a trusted messenger, make the issue visible to large audiences, and increase global cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Members of this initiative are working in many different ways. The preservation of wetlands the ending of fast fashion, to stop

7 Haui Roa, “Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change,” UNESCO, November 20, 2024 <https://www.unesco.org/en/information-integrity-climate-change>.

8 UNESCO, *Press and planet in danger: safety of environmental journalists; trends, challenges and recommendations* (Paris: UNESCO, 2024). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389501/>.

9 UNESCO, *Press and planet in danger: safety of environmental journalists; trends, challenges and recommendations*

10 Victor Galaz et al, *AI could create a perfect storm of climate misinformation* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2023), <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2306.12807>

11 Galaz et al, *AI could create a perfect storm of climate misinformation*

12 “Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change,” United Nations, December 18, 2024 <https://www.un.org/climatechange/information-integrity>.



the spread of false information are some examples.<sup>13</sup> Further efforts are shown through the partnership with wikiHow and Verified for Climate. They have worked together to offer tools and resources designed to provide reliable and truthful information on the subject of climate change.<sup>14</sup>

Google has also partnered with the United Nations (UN) to make sure that accurate information about climate change is shared online.<sup>15</sup> All of this is in support of “Our Common Agenda,” an agenda that outlines actions that support agreements and Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>16</sup> These recommendations are designed to help governments and tech companies establish guidelines to promote factual information.<sup>17</sup> By enacting these initiatives, UNESCO works to equip all countries, especially SIDS, with equitable access to essential climate information.

The success of UNESCO’s Global Initiatives relies on continuous collaborations between member states, international organizations, and non-governmental partners. Combining various resources, finances, information, and research can help improve the initiative’s effectiveness and longevity. Moving forward, member states can work together to ensure that the plans outlined in the G20 conference are carried out. They should look for ways to make implementation feasible for many countries. This will increase the integration of information integrity worldwide, greatly helping foster climate resistance in SIDS.

## Case Study: Vanuatu seeking legal recognition

Despite their environmental focus and minimal contribution to climate change, Vanuatu is one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable states. They face significant risks from tropical cyclones, rising sea levels, and temperature increases. This has resulted in extreme rainfall patterns with terrible states of drought and flooding. All of these factors have heavily contributed to rising sea levels in Vanuatu. This makes them amongst the most endangered SIDS that face the threat of being wiped out. Vanuatu is at the forefront of the UN initiatives advocating for climate resistance measures in SIDS. Vanuatu has recently had notorious issues with rising sea levels. And this is no fault of their own, as it contributes to less than 0.001 percent of the world’s total emissions.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Vanuatu has been working towards being carbon neutral by joining the Carbon-Free Energy Compact.<sup>19</sup>

The Carbon-Free Energy Compact is a set of rules that countries and private companies can follow to commit to greener practices. These rules give an outline to companies and countries involved to promote practices and the implementation of greener industrial growth. The mission is to have all parties reach an end state of condition where they operate on a fully decarbonized electricity system. They have the goal of changing how energy is sourced and to create policies designed to speed up these changes.<sup>20</sup> Vanuatu is already net negative for greenhouse gas initiatives.<sup>21</sup> The forest area on the island removes more than ten times the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted by its citizens.

13 “Verified for Climate” champions: Communicating science and solutions,” United Nations, January 2, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/voices-from-cop28/verified-climate-champions-communicating-science-solutions>.

14 “WikiHow Teams up with Verified to Empower People With Climate Information,” United Nations, June 28, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/verified-wikihow/>.

15 “Google Teams up With UN For Verified Climate Information,” United Nations, October 5, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/google-search-information/>.

16 “Summary of Secretary-General’s Report “Our Common Agenda,” United Nations, January 2, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/summary.shtml>.

17 <https://indonesia.un.org/en/236014-our-common-agenda-policy-brief-8-information-integrity-digital-platform/>.

18 “CO2 emissions (metric tons per capita),” World Bank Group, Accessed December 25, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC>

19 “Republic of Vanuatu takes bold step towards sustainable future by joining 24/7 carbon-free,” Sustainable Energy for All, last modified April 20, 2023, <https://www.seforall.org/news/republic-of-vanuatu-takes-bold-step-towards-sustainable-future-by-joining-247-carbon-free>

20 “24/7 Carbon-Free Energy Compact, 24/7 carbon-free energy compact”, *Go Carbon-Free 24/7*, December 27, 2024, from <https://gocarbonfree247.com/>

21 Global Green Growth Institute, Vanuatu Low Emissions Development Strategy, Vanuatu: Global Green Growth Institute, 2023, <https://gggi.org/report/vanuatu-low-emissions-development-strategy/>.



Vanuatu's sinking Port Vila is depicted here, highlighting the dangerously low elevation next to the seas.

Credit: eGuide Travel

Despite their efforts and commitment to a greener community, residents of Vanuatu have had to vacate their homes, and farming has become extremely difficult. As a result, they have also been practicing disaster preparedness in addition to their green practices.<sup>22</sup> This is seen across SIDS around the world and continues to be a pressing issue. For example, Tuvalu is expected to be fully submerged by the year 2050 as a result of climate change.<sup>23</sup> Without immediate action, this pattern will continue. Such disasters affect SIDS right now and shortly. However, the problems SIDS faces are issues that even non-SID territories will face in the future as well.

The UN Office for Disaster and Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has outlined plans based on disaster risk reduction from the Sendai Framework. The Sendai Framework is a plan focused on adopting measures according to their differing risk of disaster. The framework is divided into four priorities. The first one is understanding disaster risk. The second one is strengthening disaster risk governance. The third one is investing in disaster risk reduction. The fourth one is enhancing preparedness for

response and recovery.<sup>24</sup>

Vanuatu has strongly advocated climate action and has criticized UN bodies and developed countries for evading responsibility at General Assemblies and COP summits. In 2021, Vanuatu started its campaign to establish that countries had legal obligations to prevent environmental harm that could affect other states.<sup>25</sup> In COP 26 they urged countries to meet their USD 100 billion annual climate finance target for vulnerable countries. In March 2023, the UN General Assembly (GA) adopted a resolution that sought advisory services from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to clarify the obligations of states. This meeting will clarify regulations regarding countries causing and failing to prevent climate change. This is considered as a landmark for international litigation due to climate change.<sup>26</sup> This decision came from the 2022 UN GA declaring the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

This would be the first time a resolution requesting the ICJ

22 World Bank, Vanuatu country profile. Climate Knowledge Portal, Retrieved December 27, 2024, from [https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/country-profiles/15825-WB\\_Vanuatu%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf](https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/country-profiles/15825-WB_Vanuatu%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf)

23 UNDP "A Landmark Moment; Tuvalu is Lifted Above Sea Level." Undp CCA, November 2023, <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/landmark-moment-tuvalu-lifted-above-sea-level>

24 UNDRR, "Sendai Framework, UNDRR Focus Area In Action - Small Island Developing States (SIDS)" last accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/sendai-framework-action/small-island-developing-states>

25 "COP26 Vanuatu engagement program," Government of Vanuatu, last accessed January 25, 2025, [https://docc.gov.vu/images/publications/reports/COP26\\_Vanuatu\\_Engagement\\_Program\\_2021.pdf](https://docc.gov.vu/images/publications/reports/COP26_Vanuatu_Engagement_Program_2021.pdf)

26 "The ICJ's Advisory Opinion on Climate Change: What Happens Now?" Climate Law Blog, last modified March 29, 2023, <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/climatechange/2023/03/29/the-icjs-advisory-opinion-on-climate-change-what-happens-now/>.

was adopted in the UN. Given the precedent set by this case, delegations can create solutions with far-reaching effects. The outcomes of this hearing have the potential to vastly influence the power that SIDS has on a global stage. This should be considered when voicing their climate concerns. The legal recognition of damages done by major polluting countries could reshape blocs and impact accountability globally. The first meeting with the ICJ, under the success in March 2023, started in December 2024. Ralph Regevanu, the Vanuatuan Special Envoy for Climate Change and Environment, opened the discussion. He also represented the Melanesian Spearhead Group to the ICJ. Regevanu brought forth the issue of responsibility for countries regarding climate change mitigation. The Melanesia Spearhead Group consists of the four Melanesian governments. The governments are of Papua New Guinea, The Republic of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and a representative of the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of New Caledonia. This group is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1986. They collaborate on sustainable development, economic growth, and governance.<sup>27</sup> The premise for this hearing is to provide “authoritative guidance” to learn more about the climate change crisis and listen to the opening arguments of governments.<sup>28</sup>

Currently, it is unclear if the meeting will lead to executing measures that will punish countries that do not act on climate change. There is no historical legal backing, and the ICJ cannot move as quickly as the situation demands. The final decision from the ICJ will be made in 2025, and while much can be speculated, it is evident that the decision will significantly impact future climate plans.

## Conclusion

SIDS face many challenges related to the environmental crisis occurring in their territory. The international community is helping SIDS address this crisis. During their most recent meeting, members of the G20 discussed various strategies

to help SIDS overcome the consequences of climate change. Actions such as the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change are promising ways to counter climate change effects in these States.

Judicial cases in international courts also provide insight into the international community’s perspective on how climate change affects SIDS. Vanuatu recently petitioned the ICJ for legal recognition of the adverse effects it has experienced through climate change. Developments in this case have shown the interrelation of cultural, economic, and social impact that SIDS suffers daily. This case generates a strong legal background that other countries can use to defend themselves. The right to a healthy environment is a fundamental human right that people living in SIDS often encounter. The developments of this case will generate a strong precedent for protecting this and other human rights.

UNESCO delegates must consider the importance of fostering climate resistance in SIDS in preserving culture. If any of these States are further affected by negative climate change conditions, the world risks losing many cultures and traditions them. Equipping them with the necessary tools and providing them with support from the international community must be of the utmost importance.

<sup>27</sup> “Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat,” Melanesian Spearhead Group, last accessed January 25, 2025, <https://msgsec.info/about-msg/>.

<sup>28</sup> “International Court of Justice hearings on climate obligations: Summary and brief analysis,” International Institute for Sustainable Development, last accessed January 25, 2025, <https://enb.iisd.org/international-court-justice-climate-summary/#brief-analysis-icj-hearings/>.



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**TOPIC B:  
SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN CULTURAL EVENTS**

Photo Credit: Jumzchino

## Introduction

Cultural events are key to promoting communities' longevity and unique heritage. They often positively impact the diversity and comprehension of various cultures. However, these events usually harm the surrounding environment and ecosystems. These impacts prompt the crucial discussion of maintaining and promoting cultures while protecting the environment that these cultures call home.

According to the UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer, from January to September 2024, international tourism levels reached 98 percent of 2019, with 1.1 billion international tourists.<sup>1</sup> International tourism refers to tourism that crosses national borders. It is projected that international tourism levels will meet post-pandemic levels by the end of 2024.<sup>2</sup> This resurgence in tourism is beneficial from an economic perspective. Yet this tourism activity further contributes to climate change. Although exploring world cultures and preserving heritage remains of utmost importance, environmental impact must be monitored. Countries with recent increases in tourism, such as Japan, must balance the economic benefits, ecological impacts, and preservation of culture.

Having innovative developments to promote cultural sustainability is crucial. A great example of this is the implementation of Intercultural Dialogues in different initiatives around the world. ICD is a key component of the newly established Pact for the Future. It helps ensure that both culture and the environment are sustained, and cultural events can continue to contribute to positive change within communities while enhancing the methods to maintain a sustainable environment.<sup>3</sup>

## Ecotourism: An Analysis of Tourism Impacts in 2024

There are many reasons why people are eager to travel to Japan. Some include weakened yen, innovative tourist attractions, delicious food, and vibrant culture. Although tourism is an essential component of many economies, like Japan's, its impact on cultural preservation and environmental sustainability must be carefully monitored. With the arrival of tourists, culture can be at risk of appropriation, and the ecosystems can be disturbed. Tourism's impacts on culture and the environment can be analyzed by looking at Japan as an example. The country's agreement with the United States to carry out a tourism-boosting plan has ultimately led to over-tourism and concerns about its sustainability. Tourists often flock to cultural events in Japan, such as *Gion Matsuri*. This is a traditional Japanese festival that was initially dedicated to the gods during a disease outbreak.<sup>4</sup> While cultural appreciation is embraced in Japan, the over-tourism that these cultural events attract must be managed ethically to ensure their prosperity.

A Memorandum of Cooperation between the US and Japan was signed on November 29, 2023. It marked January 2024 to March 2025 as the official U.S.-Japan Tourism Exchange Year.<sup>5</sup> It considers environmental, economic, and educational prosperity accomplishments and continuing efforts made by Japan and the U.S.<sup>6</sup> The U.S.-Japan Tourism Exchange Year 2024 has led to many initiatives that motivate tourists to visit popular destinations and spend large amounts of money.

1 "World Tourism Barometer" Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness Department of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), last modified December 20, 2024, [https://pre-webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-12/Barom\\_PPT\\_Nov\\_2024.pdf?VersionId=om9iglvs81Vpi16Z0QE4.fZaTpPrKODK](https://pre-webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-12/Barom_PPT_Nov_2024.pdf?VersionId=om9iglvs81Vpi16Z0QE4.fZaTpPrKODK).

2 Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness Department of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) "World Tourism Barometer."

3 United Nations General Assembly. Resolution 79/1, The Pact for the Future, A/RES/79/1, September 22, 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/272/22/pdf/n2427222.pdf>.

4 "Gion Matsuri," Japan National Tourism Organization, accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.japan.travel/en/spot/83/>.

5 Public Relations Office - Government of Japan, "The U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024 — an Initiative Designed to Reinvigorate Tourism Exchanges between Japan and the United States."

6 "The U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024 — an Initiative Designed to Reinvigorate Tourism Exchanges between Japan and the United States," Public Relations Office - Government of Japan, October 2024, [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/hlj/en/october\\_2024/october\\_2024-09.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/hlj/en/october_2024/october_2024-09.html).

Japan is still recovering from the consequences of the global pandemic. Because of this, the cultural exchange between Japan and the U.S. has been a great way of promoting cultural heritage and boosting economic activity. However, Japan must simultaneously consider the toll that over-tourism is taking on the environment.<sup>7</sup> This Memorandum of Cooperation is a non-legally binding mutual acknowledgment.

On September 23, 2024, the U.S.-Japan Tourism Celebration Event was held in New York. This event highlighted the ongoing cultural exchange through the theme “Bonds Across the Ocean”. This event was attended by notable leaders within the tourism sector, such as Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.<sup>8</sup> At this event, the prime minister discussed the recent UNESCO World Heritage Site registration of the Sado Island Gold Mines. The upcoming Osaka Expo 2025 was also discussed. This expo is a future-oriented event that promotes intercultural dialogue by exhibiting innovative technologies from over 160 countries. Cultural heritage, youth agency, and the promotion

of the Sustainable Development Goals are at the center of it.<sup>9</sup> Events such as the Osaka Expo 2025 foster spaces where essential conversations regarding the sustainability of cultural events and simultaneous environmental preservation can occur. Additionally, the U.S.-Japan Tourism Celebration Event showcased authentic aspects of Japanese culture through the serving of Japanese cuisine and a karate performance.<sup>10</sup> While the U.S.-Japan Tourism Year’s purpose is to increase mutual tourism, the Japan National Tourism Organization, alongside its Japanese and American counterparts, is striving towards an increase in sustainable tourism. Uplifting local businesses, indigenous culture, and the environment is something they strive for.<sup>11</sup>

Japan has worked to recover from many of the economic challenges it faced after the global pandemic. From January to September 2024, Japan consistently ranked high in tourism performance. It was the fifth best-performing destination in the Asia Pacific region and fourth best-performing

7 “The U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024.”

8 “JNTO and JTA Mark U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024 with Gala New York Event Attended by Japanese Prime Minister,” Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), September 25, 2024, <https://www.japan.travel/en/us/press-release/jnto-and-jta-mark-u-s-japan-tourism-year-2024-with-gala-new-york-event-attended-by-japanese-prime-minister/>.

9 Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), “JNTO and JTA Mark U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024 with Gala New York Event Attended by Japanese Prime Minister”; “New Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan Pamphlet Now Available,” Japan Association for the World Exposition 2025, September 10, 2024, <https://www.expo2025.or.jp/en/news/news-20240809-02/>.

10 Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), “JNTO and JTA Mark U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024 with Gala New York Event Attended by Japanese Prime Minister.”

11 Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), “JNTO and JTA Mark U.S.-Japan Tourism Year 2024 with Gala New York Event Attended by Japanese Prime Minister.”



Tourists visiting the popular Shibuya Crossing located in Tokyo, Japan

Credit: Syced

destination in tourism receipts worldwide.<sup>12</sup> On top of the promotion through the U.S.-Japan Tourism Exchange Year, Japan's soft diplomacy is the main contributor to this influx of tourists. They do this by promoting cultural events such as *matsuri* and traditional Japanese tea ceremonies.<sup>13</sup> Through *matsuri*, Japanese traditional festivals, people can participate in wearing traditional clothing, dancing to *taiko* drums, and tasting authentic Japanese street food.<sup>14</sup> Japan's largest *matsuri*, *Gion Matsuri*, takes place in July. It attracts large crowds to Kyoto from across the globe each year.<sup>15</sup> Dating back to 869, each year, the festival selects a young boy to be the "messenger to the gods."<sup>16</sup> The *Gion Matsuri*, like many other festivals, often includes many food vendors throughout the streets, ultimately accumulating large amounts of waste. In 2013, the total amount of waste produced was approximately 57,330 kilograms.<sup>17</sup> To reduce this number, the festival took on the challenge of reducing waste through the *zero gomi* initiative. The initiative consisted of shifting to reusable tableware and implementing waste-sorting eco-stations.<sup>18</sup> After eleven years of this initiative, in 2024, the amount of waste has been reduced by 44.6 percent. In 2024, the *Gion Matsuri* produced 31,760 kilograms of waste.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, 204,400 pieces of reusable tableware have been introduced, signaling positive changes being made by the initiative.<sup>20</sup> Although there remains room for improvement, the event's sustainability efforts serve as inspiration for other *matsuri* in Japan. This ultimately contributes to the protection of cultural events whilst reducing negative impacts on the environment. This solution avoids erasing the cultural heritage and purpose of the festival. It does so by combining a damage-control and

sustainable-option replacement-oriented approach to increase environmental sustainability and promote cultural event longevity.

In addition to Japan's cultural events that have been carefully preserved throughout centuries, ecosystems and natural monuments have also been preserved. Due to the large resurgence in the number of tourists visiting Japan, there is an increasing challenge of overtourism.<sup>21</sup> In areas like Kyoto, overtourism is leading to labor shortages, densely packed areas, and disrespectful actions from tourists.<sup>22</sup> Efforts are currently being made to reduce overtourism. For instance, Yamanashi Prefecture has added an entrance fee and set a limit as to how many people are allowed to climb Mount Fuji in one day.<sup>23</sup> Although not a designated cultural heritage site, Mount Fuji remains one of the most famous symbols of Japan. It attracts tourists worldwide, even to simply take a photo of the mountain. This popular tourist attraction may sound insignificant at first glance but has gained large traction through social media in recent years. The view of Mount Fuji standing behind a Lawson convenience store has become especially popular.<sup>24</sup> This convenience store, located in the small town of Fujikawaguchiko, has become a famous photo-taking location. This brings hundreds of tourists to the specific convenience store each day.<sup>25</sup> Tourists would often litter the area and disobey rules set in place.<sup>26</sup> In May of 2024, officials installed a black net covering the famous view due to the overwhelming amount of tourists and disturbances.<sup>27</sup> These efforts seemed to have been effective, as there was a significant reduction in people visiting the convenience store

12 Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness Department of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) "World Tourism Barometer."

13 "Cultural Experiences in Japan," Japan National Tourism Organization, accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.japan.travel/en/guide/cultural-experiences/>.

14 Japan National Tourism Organization, "Cultural Experiences in Japan."

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17 Elisabetta Porcu, "The Gion Festival in Kyoto and Glocalization," *Religions* 13, no. 8 (July 27, 2022): 689, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080689>.

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21 GR Japan, *Navigating Japan's Overtourism Challenge - Your Key to Sustainable Success* (Tokyo: GR Japan, September 2024), 1-3, <https://grjapan.com/sites/default/files/content/articles/files/20240917%20GR%20Japan%20Industry%20Insight%20Overtourism.pdf>.

22 GR Japan, *Navigating Japan's Overtourism Challenge - Your Key to Sustainable Success*.

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24 Lilit Marcus, "Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier," CNN Travel, August 21, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/21/travel/japanese-town-removes-its-fuji-blocking-barrier-intl-hnk/index.html>.

25 Marcus, "Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier."

26 Marcus, "Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier."

27 Marcus, "Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier."

area.<sup>28</sup> A few months later, on August 15, 2024, the officials removed the net due to strong winds without making a formal announcement to the public.<sup>29</sup> As of now, there are no plans in place to reinstall the net, but this may change in the near future.<sup>30</sup> While there is a common idea that Japan is a clean, urbanized, and organized country, tourists do not always obey, respect, or are aware of the rules and customs of a given country. All countries must think about how tourism can potentially damage cultural events and surrounding ecosystems and how leaders can cultivate innovative solutions to ever-changing problems.

As for how Japan can move forward through the challenges of sustainability and overtourism, the Osaka Expo 2025 plans on integrating similar reusable tableware to those used at the *Gion Matsuri*.<sup>31</sup> The Expo is also considering requiring foreigners to pay a “tourist tax,” similar to the Kyoto accommodation tax. However, it is important to notice that the Expo’s idea and an additional public transportation cost could be seen as discriminatory. Therefore, Japan is continuously on the search for practical and ethical solutions to reduce over-tourism.<sup>32</sup> Another great initiative is the pilot program CopenPay. It has promoted positive reinforcement for tourists by rewarding them with free entrances or access to food and activities in exchange for participation in eco-friendly actions.<sup>33</sup> Pilot programs are small-scale experimental programs that are used to assess the feasibility of larger-scale implementations.<sup>34</sup> The CopenPay pilot program spanned from July to August of 2024, and data is currently being analyzed. However, it is considered as a different approach to solving over-tourism and may offer a source of inspiration for other countries facing similar challenges.<sup>35</sup>

Another way in which Japan is looking to utilize the damage-control approach is to divert large amounts of tourists to more rural or lesser-known locations.<sup>36</sup> While overcrowding can be reduced in the most popular areas, such as Tokyo and Kyoto, maintaining the ecosystems and culture of the rural or less explored areas is still challenging. It should be considered that these areas might also be Indigenous land. Additionally, through the use of digital transformation, Japan can continue to monitor tourism and create innovative solutions utilizing new technologies.<sup>37</sup> All things considered, while Japan continues to tackle the challenges of over-tourism while confronting other issues, ongoing efforts to promote cultural events sustainably provide hope to other countries looking to do the same.

## Recent Developments: Intercultural Dialogue

Most of the conflicts and wars throughout human history stem from intolerance, which is often brought on by ignorance and lack of understanding between diverse groups.<sup>38</sup> 90 percent of disputes worldwide happen in countries with low intercultural dialogue.<sup>39</sup> Intercultural dialogue (ICD) can be defined as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with differences. Said differences can include ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Heritage based on mutual understanding and respect is also part of ICD.<sup>40</sup> It provides for the sharing of ideas and differences to develop a deeper understanding of different perspectives and practices.<sup>41</sup>

According to UNESCO, ICD offers a unique opportunity

28 Marcus, “Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier.”

29 Marcus, “Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier.”

30 Marcus, “Japanese Town Quietly Removes Its Mount Fuji-Blocking Barrier.”

31 “Good Clean Fun,” Nikkei Asia, accessed December 24, 2024, <https://ps.asia.nikkei.com/unlock/202309/goodcleanfun.html>.

32 Nikkei Inc, “Good Clean Fun.”

33 “CopenPay,” Visit Copenhagen, accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenpay>.

34 Donald M. Arnold et al., “The Design and Interpretation of Pilot Trials in Clinical Research in Critical Care,” *Critical Care Medicine*

37, no. 1 (2009): S69–74, <https://doi.org/10.1097/ccm.0b013e3181920e33>.

35 Visit Copenhagen, “CopenPay.”

36 GR Japan, *Navigating Japan’s Overtourism Challenge - Your Key to Sustainable Success*.

37 GR Japan, *Navigating Japan’s Overtourism Challenge - Your Key to Sustainable Success*.

38 “Intercultural Dialogue,” United Nations, accessed December 23, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/inter-cultural-dialogue>.

39 Daniel Pascoe Aguilar, “The Power Of Intercultural Communication And Dialogue,” *Forbes*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2024/06/03/the-power-of-intercultural-communication-and-dialogue/>.

40 “Intercultural Dialogue,” European Commission, accessed December 23, 2024, [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/intercultural-dialogue\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/intercultural-dialogue_en).

41 United Nations, “Intercultural Dialogue.”



for participants engaged in global values, a pathway towards meaningful engagement, and the understanding of different perspectives.<sup>42</sup> As a revolutionary form of communication, ICD can contribute to increased acceptance of others. Thus satisfying the goal of peaceful coexistence between various cultures.<sup>43</sup> The power of ICD is that it can take many constantly evolving forms. They can be verbal or non-verbal, in-person or virtual, between two or more people, or between groups.<sup>44</sup> ICD, when supported by an enabling environment, can help achieve peace and develop sustainable societies as it can be implemented anywhere and remain effective.<sup>45</sup> To increase collaboration and peace, intercultural dialogue must be reinforced and prioritized.<sup>46</sup> ICD fosters social cohesion and helps create a sustainable environment.<sup>47</sup> Experts who come up with highly influential and groundbreaking studies state that intercultural communication is the ideal way to enhance personal and community growth. It also contributes to mutual empathy and understanding, global citizenship,

increased adaptability, and cultural competence.<sup>48</sup>

The impact and influence of ICD is recognized worldwide. For instance, both the European Union and the Council of Europe fully promote ICD, as evidenced in their policies and programs.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Council of Europe has taken multiple actions contributing to ICD. One example can be seen in the Declaration on ‘The Future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy: AGENDA 2020’. This was done in recognition that tolerance is the guarantee of an open society and acknowledging that Europe’s rich heritage is characterized by cultural diversity.<sup>50</sup> Multiple countries are also excelling at practicing ICD through structures, values, and processes. UNESCO has developed a Framework for Enabling Intercultural Dialogue, with data from over 160 countries. This framework serves as a guide to identifying some countries that stand out for their positive performance in the areas that facilitate the presence of ICD. It also explains why they stand

42 “What is Intercultural Dialogue,” Unesco, last modified April 20, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/en/what-intercultural-dialogue>.

43 Unesco, “What is Intercultural Dialogue.”

44 Unesco, “What is Intercultural Dialogue.”

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46 Daniel Pascoe Aguilar, “The Power Of Intercultural Communication And Dialogue.”

47 United Nations, “Intercultural Dialogue.”

48 Daniel Pascoe Aguilar, “The Power Of Intercultural Communication And Dialogue.”

49 “Intercultural Dialogue,” Youth Partnership, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/intercultural-dialogue>.

50 Youth Partnership, “Intercultural Dialogue.”

Summit of the Future in New York City, New York,  
 September 23, 2024

Credit: U.S. Department of State





There, concrete steps to take account of future generations in the decision-making are considered.<sup>68</sup> It is committed to more meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in the decisions that shape their lives, especially at the global level.<sup>69</sup> In the area of sustainable development and financing, the Member States recommitted to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>70</sup> The Pact also acknowledges the need for Member States to begin to consider how to advance sustainable development beyond 2030.<sup>71</sup> On climate change, it calls for accelerated efforts on the environment. This includes the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns, the conclusion of a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution, reversing biodiversity loss, and protecting ecosystems.<sup>72</sup>

The Pact for the Future strongly promotes ICD indirectly, as many of its goals, like peace, sustainable development, and environmental safety, can be facilitated through ICD.<sup>73</sup> The pact also states multiple actions that include the protection of culture or sustainability.<sup>74</sup> Action 13 is an example of a culture-focused action as it moves to promote inclusion and tolerance.<sup>75</sup> This action includes “eradicating religious discrimination, countering racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia in all their manifestations” to protect different cultures. Action nine is an example of one of the environmental actions as it states to “[...]Strengthen our actions to address climate change.”<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, the Pact for the Future holds actions that are directly related to sustainable development within cultural events like Action 11. This Action states to protect and promote culture as an integral component of sustainable development.<sup>77</sup> Its goal is to ensure that culture remains sustainable. Therefore, it plans to integrate culture into economic, social, and environmental development policies and strategies. All of this while ensuring adequate public investment in the protection

and promotion of culture.<sup>78</sup> Action 11 also takes direct steps towards the efficient practice of ICD. As stated, it “Promote[s] and support intercultural and interreligious dialogue to strengthen social cohesion and contribute to sustainable development.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, documents like this, which include and promote IDC, are key to spreading tolerance around the globe. Therefore, it facilitates interactions and discussions that require an understanding of different cultures to be successful and efficient. Understanding other cultures is a vital element that needs to be present when discussing the sustainability of cultural events; this will ensure that while looking for sustainable practices, culture is never lost.

## Conclusion

If countries do not adapt their cultural events into more sustainable practices, the environment will continue to suffer. Nevertheless, these events need to practice adaptations while ensuring their culture’s essence is maintained. It is crucial to understand that many of these cultural events have been passed down from centuries ago and completely changing the agenda and norms of these events should not be the priority. Rather, it is important to find innovations, such as implementing ICD ways to reduce negative impacts on the environment while maintaining the vibrancy of these cultures. Finding a balance and maintaining an open mind to new ideas is the key to the solution.

The sustainability of cultural events paired with the pressing issue of climate change presents a large challenge that requires several solutions. To generate innovative approaches to maintaining cultures and surrounding ecosystems, delegates must emphasize intercultural dialogue, pilot programs, and implementing environmentally sustainable alternatives that

68 United Nations, “United Nations Adopts Ground-Breaking Pact for the Future to Transform Global Governance.”

69 United Nations, “United Nations Adopts Ground-Breaking Pact for the Future to Transform Global Governance.”

70 United Nations, *Pact for the Future: What it Delivers*.

71 United Nations, *Pact for the Future: What it Delivers*.

72 United Nations, *Pact for the Future: What it Delivers*.

73 Unesco, “What is Intercultural Dialogue.”

74 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 79/1, The Pact for the Future, A/RES/79/1 (Sep. 22, 2024), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/272/22/pdf/n2427222.pdf> .

75 A/RES/79/1, 12.

76 A/RES/79/1, 8.

77 A/RES/79/1, 11.

78 A/RES/79/1, 11.

79 A/RES/79/1, 11.

do not infringe upon pre-existing cultures and traditions. Countries like Japan and its *Gion Matsuri* are clear examples of cultural events that are shifting towards a greener future whilst emphasizing the importance of maintaining traditions.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, not only are these components crucial to making progress, but accountability measures are equally as necessary, ensuring that pledges and pacts are met and that sustainability is not seen as a short-term but long-term goal. As delegates tackle this issue, it is important to maintain respect for the diversity of cultures whilst presenting multifaceted perspectives and solutions that not only showcase the importance of sustainability within cultural events but enact positive change for centuries to come.

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