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Economic and Social Council Issue #2: The question of the social and economic consequences of fast fashion and overconsumption on LEDCs

Overconsumption is the “the action or fact of consuming something to excess” ("Overconsumption"). Fast fashion is the “reproduction of clothing that is rapidly produced by mass-market retailers at low cost” (UNSW).

The fashion industry is currently responsible for up to 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, consumes vast amounts of water and has plenty of harmful chemicals which can damage and hurt those working with them ("Fast fashion fueling"). Such problems arise from companies which value profit, rather than sustainability and respect for workers, causing social and economic issues. Currently, 80 billion pieces of clothing are consumed worldwide every year, a 400% increase from twenty years ago (“Fast Fashion Getting”). Furthermore, around 85% of these articles end up in landfills each year. Additionally, the fast fashion industry employs approximately 75 million workers worldwide. Of those workers it is estimated that less than 2% of them make a living wage ("Fast fashion fueling"). Moreover, it is crucial to note that the fast fashion industry has grown drastically in the last couple of years. It is now a $150.82 billion industry, growing 10.74 billion from 2024 ("Environmental Impact").

The biggest fast fashion country producers consist of China, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Indonesia ("Beneath the Seams"). Statistics show that the biggest fast fashion consumers are the United States, Australia, China, and generally women ("Fast Fashion"). Most of these companies produce mass amounts of clothing and fail to pay or underpay workers, while disrespecting their rights. This often results in modern human slavery, with many consequences and violations to human rights. Conditions which workers are placed in are often inhumane and can result in various incidents. The biggest factory incident recorded was Rana Plaza on April 24th, 2013. The eight-story building, where workers were placed to work, collapsed killing 1,134 people and injuring thousands more. Such incident helped shed a light on the cruel conditions in fast fashion factories and increased political pressure to help change workplaces ("Rana Plaza"). Nevertheless, many workers have no choice but to work in horrid conditions to make ends meet. One worker in India stated, “We are basically here to earn and survive” ("Beneath the Seams"). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of factories led to over a million garment workers being fired, increasing homelessness, food insecurity and violence ("Beneath the Seams").

Considering the environment, overconsumption and fast fashion is one of the most significant human practices in destroying the planet ("How Overconsumption"). Overconsumption has also seen a steady increase in the last couple of years and has countless lasting effects on the earth. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

predicts that by 2050, polluted air will kill 3 times as many people compared to 2000. According to World Wildlife fund, plastic in the ocean is set to quadruple over the next 10 years ("How Overconsumption"). Additionally, many clothes end up in landfills, which cause waste and are also partially responsible for global warming. Some studies indicate that 10% of carbon emissions come from the fast fashion industry ("Behind the seams").

UN Climate Change has placed much effort into reducing the fast fashion industry and ensuring environmental impacts are limited. For example, in 2018, they gathered fast fashion stakeholders to ensure that net-zero greenhouse gas emissions are achieved by 2050 ("Fashion Industry"). Nevertheless, much greater effort is needed to reduce the effects of the fashion industry in the world. Therefore, it is crucial to shed awareness of the dangers of fast fashion and come to a general consensus on how to limit its consequences.

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