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**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific:**

**East Asian Environmental and Land Issues: Senkaku Islands**

Authors: Oscar Buchanan, Sonja Pardee, Dillon Hunter

Editor: Dillon Hunter

BACKGROUND GUIDE

**Topic: Senkaku Islands**

**Council Background**

Land disputes in East Asia have become incredibly eminent when dealing with global politics in today’s society. Starting in 1947 in Shanghai, China, the UNESCAP council, originally called “ECAFE” standing for (Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East), became a foundation for developing a stronger and more stable East Asia. Then changing in 1974 to ESCAP to reflect the economic AND social needs of the area, ESCAP then joined with the general assembly of the United Nations, to broaden the mandate set by the original council. Since then, the UNESCAP council has helped to solve and prevent many past disasters and issues that have occurred in the Eastern Asia BLOC, and has remained a beacon for peace in the area. The main focuses of the council include disaster prevention and response, macro-economics and social issues, and recently has become a buffer between countries when discussing major land disputes in Eastern Asia. Because East Asia is such an essential part of the world in terms of economics and general social issues, countries included in the council are not just located in Eastern Asia. Some of the larger countries in the council include France, United States, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, which all remain active in discussions and negotiations dealing with East Asian affairs.

**Pertinent Information**

The Senkaku Islands consist of 8 islands located in the East China Sea between Japan and China . They are also referred to as the Diaoyu Islands. These islands are uninhabited, considered a terra nullius, or neutral territory. They are currently controlled by Japan. The Senkaku islands are disputed by China, Japan, and Taiwan.

This dispute is significant because the Senkaku Islands are in the vicinity of important shipping lanes, rich fishing grounds, and potential oil and gas reserves. The Islands are located in an area of contest between the US and China for military command in the region**.**

**History of the Issue**

While this issue is of specific interest to Japan, Taiwan, and China, the United States also is invested in the issue. After World War II, Japan forged its claims to several territories including the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan , as was laid out in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco. After the creation of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951, the islands were held by the United States. In the 1960s UNESCAP, then called ECAFE, surveyed the area surrounding Senkaku and found potentially rich oil deposits. ECAFE released its findings in 1971, at the same time that the islands were transferred back to Japan. After the findings were released, Chinese and Taiwanese governments began to express interest in the Senkaku Islands.

 China is also invested in this issue. The 1951 Treaty of San Francisco also returned Taiwan was also returned as a province of the Republic of China. China has stated its belief that the Treaty should have also returned the Senkaku Islands. In the 1970s, China began to make it more clear that they wanted to have control over the islands. In 1978, the then Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping addressed the then Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda. During a meeting between China and Japan before ratifying the Japan- China Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Vice Premier Deng stated that China did not want to discuss the matter of the Senkaku Islands at that time. He instead wanted to leave the issue for future generations to decide, essentially “shelving” the issue. The Japanese Prime Minister did not respond to the idea at the time. In April 1992, China enacted a law in which it referred to the Senkaku Islands as part of its own territory. Japan stated a strong opposition to this act because it directly opposes the Chinese idea of “shelving” the issue. Since that time, the Japanese have made it clear that they think shelving the issue is out of the question.

 Taiwan is greatly affected by the dispute over the Senkaku Islands, as well. Taiwan has used the area surrounding the islands as a fishing area. Since the 1990s, Japanese and Taiwanese authorities have met many times to negotiate fishing rights.

 Also, the United States is a part of this issue. After World War II, the US and Japan built a security alliance that was formalized in 1960. The agreement provides the US with military bases in Japan. In return, Japan would be defended by the US in the event of an attack. So, if attacks were to break out between China and Japan, the US would be expected to support Japan. United States President Obama has confirmed that the agreement with Japan does apply to conflict over the Senkaku Islands. He has also stated that escalation of this conflict would harm all parties involved.

**Recent Action**

In the past, the dispute had been tabled for future generations to discuss. However, in 2012, Tokyo’s governor offered to buy the islands. Japan quickly made a counteroffer to buy 3 of the islands from the private owner. In 2013, Japan successfully bought the islands off of the owner. This angered China, and the country started sending economic ships through territory Japan claims it has the rights to. China also announced a special air zone in which planes in the airspace above the islands must comply with Beijing airspace regulations. Japan publically stated it would ignore these actions. However, in 2014, Japan made a concession to China over the Senkaku Islands to open up a channel of discussion, by publically noting that a dispute does in order to retain ties with China.

 Japan believes that the Senkaku Islands are theirs due to international law. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Islands were not conceded in the San Francisco Treaty, they were placed under US administration as part of the Nansei Shoto Islands. Japan also readily points out that China and Taiwan only made a claim to the Senkaku Islands after oil and petroleum reserves were found underneath them. China has claimed that the islands have been historically part of their nation. The UN has accepted to review China’s claim to the islands despite Japan’s objection. As the dispute continues, protests in China caused tensions to rise. Japan and China both support peace in the East Asian region, but both have increased patrol vessels around the island.

**Questions to Consider**

1. How should the claims be reviewed by the United Nations?
2. How could tensions caused by the Senkaku Islands land dispute be dealt with?
3. What should be done with the Senkaku Islands until the issues are resolved?
4. Which country has rights to the oil and shipping in the Senkaku Islands?

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