



Background Paper

Committee: WHO

Topic B: Legalization of Fracking Regarding its Health Consequences

Chairs: Natalie De La Peña Sanchez and Oscar Iñaki Rodriguez Diaz

Fracking is the controversial process of the extraction of oil and gas by drilling down into the earth, where a high pressured chemical mixture releases the gas inside the rocks. Fracking refers to how the rock is fractured during this process. This technique has been very controversial because while it produces more jobs and natural gas there are some environmental issues brought by fracking too. The first problem is that the chemical mixture requires about 8 million gallons of water which is a huge amount that could be used for many other things. During the fracking process many chemicals and methane gas leak in to ground waters and contaminate them. This water is used as drinking water supply for nearby local communities. Over 1,000 registered cases have been reported of water contamination near fracking zones and also sensory, respiratory, and neurological damage to people that have ingested the contaminated water. It has been reported that in drinking-water wells near fracking areas the concentration of methane is 17 times higher than in normal wells. In addition the waste fluid left from fracking evaporates into the atmosphere and creates contaminated air, acid rain and the deterioration of the ozone layer. This in turn leads to health problems in affected communities such as asthma, headaches, high blood pressure, anemia, heart attacks and cancer, as well as damage to the reproductive and immune system. A study by the Colorado Department of Environmental and Occupational Health discovered that women who live near fracking zones are 30% more likely to have babies with heart defects. The UN stated that fracking produces cleaner energy than oil and coal but this technique might not be the best for the poorest countries. Janvier Nkurunziza, leader of the UN Conference of Trade and Development, said that the UNCTAD report didn't state if fracking was good or bad because it depends on many factors which vary in each country. Fracking creates water and air pollution that causes serious health and environmental problems in the communities established near fracking areas.

Fracking is a concern around the world. The nation most in favor of fracking is the USA, although it has some states where it is illegal, it is widely occurring in other states around the country. Many countries have deemed fracking legal, such as Canada, the UK, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Ireland, China, among others. But on the other hand, many delegations have the clear objective to ban fracking practice, mainly because they have suffered earthquakes, environmental issues, and even infected people because of the chemicals released which contaminated water, such as France (which is the most outspoken country against fracking), Australia, Indonesia, and Germany. Countries such as Mexico and Colombia, which are in political transition, are deciding if hydraulic extraction should be legal. Right now, the controversy is at its highest peak, since many delegations are suffering the consequences of fracking and the legal status of it is changing around the world. The UN have been debating about fracking in the economies of the world, based on scientific facts and environmental and economic analyses. The UN came to a number of conclusions surrounding the controversy, the main outcome was to continue investigating fracking and developing it to create better methods to reduce environmental hazards. In the eyes of the UN, fracking actually gives many nations economic income and it rapidly develops their energy producers, especially natural gas, which is defined as a useful "bridge fuel". However, the UN sent a report to many nations stating that energy resources exploitable by fracking will be exhausted by 2030, 30 years before its original prediction. Although the UN acknowledges that fracking is very useful, the statements say that fracking must not be the first energy option of a nation, because of its negative effects on the environment and its exhaustibility. Furthermore, the organization recommends developing countries to avoid exploiting fracking so fast.

Fracking is an innovative technique for the extraction of oil and natural gas. It is controversial because it has yet to be determined whether fracking is good or bad, taking into account that it causes health and environmental damage. Countries who have practiced this technique for many years are now noticing the consequences. Even the nations who practice it claim the benefits are worth the risks. This process is still in an exploratory phase in most countries. It is important to discuss the legalization and control of fracking because although it has many benefits it also has many disadvantages.

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