

Introduction to International Environmental Law

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(A concise, structured overview for study or quick reference)

1. What Is International Environmental Law?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A body of rules, principles, and institutions that govern the protection of the global environment and the sustainable use of natural resources across national borders.
Scope	Addresses transboundary pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, hazardous waste, marine protection, and the sustainable development of natural resources.
Nature	Primarily soft law (treaties, conventions, declarations, guidelines) supplemented by hard law (binding treaties, customary international law, judicial decisions).
Key Goal	To prevent, mitigate, and remedy environmental harm that transcends the territory of a single state, while balancing economic development and sovereign rights.

2. Historical Development

Period	Milestones	Significance
Pre-1945	Limited bilateral agreements (e.g., 1909 <i>Convention on the Control of the Smuggling of Cultural Property</i>).	Early recognition that some environmental issues cross borders.
1945-1972	Formation of the United Nations; 1962 <i>UN Conference on the Human Environment</i> (Stockholm).	Established the UN as the central forum for global environmental governance.
1972-1992	1972 <i>Stockholm Declaration</i> ; 1979 <i>Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution</i> (CLRTAP); 1982 <i>UN Convention on the Law of the Sea</i> (UNCLOS).	First wave of multilateral environmental treaties; introduced the “polluter-pays” principle.

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Period	Milestones	Significance
1992? 2002	1992 <i>Rio Earth Summit</i> (Agenda 21, Rio Declaration, UNFCCC, CBD, Basel Convention).	Integrated environment and development; solidified concepts of sustainable development and common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).
2002? present	2002 <i>Johannesburg Plan of Implementation</i> ; 2005 <i>Kyoto Protocol</i> ; 2015 <i>Paris Agreement</i> ; 2022 <i>UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15)</i> .	Strengthening of climate regime, biodiversity targets, and emerging issues such as plastic pollution and climate? justice.

3. Core Principles

1. **Sovereignty and Responsibility** – States have the right to exploit their own resources but must ensure activities do not cause environmental harm to other states.
2. **Precautionary Principle** – Lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to postpone measures to prevent environmental degradation.
3. **Polluter?Pays Principle** – The party responsible for pollution should bear the costs of prevention and remediation.
4. **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)** – All states share the duty to protect the environment, but developed countries bear a greater share of the burden due to historic emissions and greater capacities.
5. **Sustainable Development** – Development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.
6. **Inter?generational Equity** – Obligation to preserve the environment for future generations.
7. **Public Participation and Access to Information** – Stakeholders must be involved in decision?making and have access to relevant environmental data.

4. Major International Instruments

Category	Key Treaties / Agreements	Year	Main Focus
Climate Change	UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) Kyoto Protocol	1992	Stabilize greenhouse?gas concentrations.