



GLOBAL ISSUES

As we head into spring, it feels like time for a fresh start and to shake off the winter blues. But it's also a time to reflect on the events of the last year or so – from the disaster in the Land of the Rising Sun to economic uncertainty around the world. There have been many events happening around the world that affect us all.

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ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS

In March 2011 a massive underwater earthquake **occurred**¹ off the eastern coast of Japan. This huge **shift**² in the earth caused a gigantic tsunami which washed over part of the island of Honshu (Japan's largest island), killing more than 15,000 people. **Consequently**³, nuclear reactors at the Fukushima power plant were severely damaged and radiation **leaks**⁴ caused damage to the environment not only in Japan, but also in other countries. The Fukushima drama once again raised the global question of nuclear safety. With the effects of the 1986 disaster in Chernobyl still present, experts and governments are now calling for tighter controls on nuclear power and agreements on common nuclear safety standards. Many people believe such safety standards should be agreed on in other energy sectors, too.

ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

A worldwide economic crisis first hit back in 2008. After a year of slight economic improvement, the world now nervously watches the Euro in crisis. Germany and France have taken up leadership roles in the hope of saving the currency. A **debt**⁵ crisis in Greece, Ireland and Portugal and potential problems in Spain, Italy and Hungary are affecting countries across Europe. Emergency meetings are being held and agreements are being written. However, it will be difficult to get all the EU countries to agree on financial reform.



ONLINE PIRACY

Online piracy is a hot topic. Countries like the USA have tried to protect copyrighted material online by creating new laws, closing file-sharing companies like Megaupload and arresting individuals. Internet companies like Google and Wikipedia are **opposed**⁶ to piracy but protested against the US government's **proposed**⁷ Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) because they fear it could be used to limit free speech. Groups like Anonymous have a more liberal **approach**⁸. They believe people can share whatever they want, even if it is copyrighted material. In January 2012, the group made headlines by hacking a number of governmental and big business websites in protest against SOPA, and Megaupload being shut down. In response to Anonymous' activities as well as other protests, the law was not passed for now. Around the same time, the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) was ratified by most members of the European Union. The aim of the agreement is to coordinate globally the prevention of the sale of counterfeit (= copied) goods from fashion to software. The signing of ACTA has led to a series of protests, which caused the governments of some countries to reconsider their support for the treaty... for now.



GLOBAL GARBAGE

As the world population expands so does the amount of **waste**¹⁰ people produce. While there are countries or regions that have invested heavily in modern waste-management technologies, innovative recycling and waste reduction programs, others have chronic problems with garbage. A few years ago, when the **landfills**¹¹ in **Naples**¹², Italy, were filled with trash **beyond their capacity**¹³ and people started setting fire to piles of trash in the streets, the waste was transported by train to Hamburg, Germany, a city with a high-tech waste-management system. Mexico City was less lucky than Naples. When the city closed its biggest **dump**¹⁴ in December 2011, nearby cities refused to accept its waste. We can only hope that the 70 million tonnes of waste buried at the dump doesn't end up in one of the world's oceans. The **closure**¹⁵ of the dump in Mexico has highlighted a global issue with serious **consequences**¹⁶ for health and the environment.

CONSUMERISM

An inclination to buy 'stuff' is called consumerism. Many people believe **excessive**¹⁷ consumerism promotes a 'throwaway' society, where things are only used once, or are in fashion for a short time. They believe this **contributes**¹⁸ to the Earth's environmental problems. Other people believe that consumerism is necessary to keep the economy working. Over-production, **processing**¹⁹, and the **consumption**²⁰ of goods leads to excessive **exploitation**²¹ of natural resources (e.g. wood, fossil fuels, water), environmental degradation (e.g. the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest) and creation of toxic byproducts from factories, while the use of products themselves (e.g. cars) creates pollutants and immense production of waste. Furthermore, **inequalities**²² in consumption between the highest-**income**²³ and the poorest countries highlight such issues as poverty and hunger, but also, for example, the rise in obesity. In other words, we all have to pay for rising consumption levels, but some more than others.



POPULATION GROWTH

In October 2011 it was reported that the seven billionth person was born. Our planet is already struggling to support the people who live here now. How will we be able to feed, clothe and house even more people? About 10,000 people are born every hour! All these people put pressure on the earth's natural **resources**⁹ and they also produce waste. However, experts believe that the problem is not a lack of food, but how it is distributed across the globe.



→ LET'S PRACTISE

TALKING ABOUT AN ISSUE / GIVING OPINIONS

I. Choose one of the issues discussed in the article and speak about it using the following points:

CAUSES PRESENT SITUATION
CONSEQUENCES POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

POSSIBLE ANSWER

Economic uncertainty: The banks are making huge profits, while the world is in a global financial crisis – people are angry that a few people and governments have caused lots of us to live in financial difficulty. The consequences for most of us are job insecurity, lack of money and higher cost of living. Possible solutions are to monitor the banks, limit public spending and control debt.

II. Choose one statement and express your agreement / disagreement. Give reasons and examples.

- A) I believe we should all be able to share files on the internet.
- B) I believe my life would change a lot if all file-sharing sites were closed.
- C) I believe some materials are more in need of censorship than others.

Possible answer: A) The internet was designed for free speech, to communicate with people around the globe. It's my personal expression and right. It is wrong for large companies to control the information we share.

VOCABULARY

- ¹ to occur [ə'kɔː] – odehrát se
- ² shift [ʃɪft] – posun
- ³ consequently [ˌkɒnsɪkw(ə)ntli] – následně
- ⁴ leak [li:k] – únik
- ⁵ debt [det] – dluh
- ⁶ to oppose [ə'pəʊz] – být / stavět se proti
- ⁷ proposed [prə'pəʊzd] – navržený

- ⁸ approach [ə'prəʊtʃ] – přístup
- ⁹ resources [rɪ'sɔːsɪz] – zdroje, zásoby
- ¹⁰ waste [weɪst] – odpad
- ¹¹ landfill – zavlážka (odpadu)
- ¹² Naples [ˈneɪp(ə)lz] – Neapol
- ¹³ beyond their capacity [brɪ'jɒnd] – přes limit
- ¹⁴ dump [dʌmp] – skládka
- ¹⁵ closure [ˈklɔʊzə] – uzavírka, uzavření

- ¹⁶ consequence [ˌkɒnsɪkw(ə)ns] – následek
- ¹⁷ excessive [ɪk'sesɪv] – nadměrný
- ¹⁸ to contribute [kən'trɪbjʊ:t] – přispívat
- ¹⁹ processing [ˌprəʊsesɪŋ] – zpracování
- ²⁰ consumption [kən'sʌm(p)ʃ(ə)n] – spotřeba
- ²¹ exploitation [ekspləɪ'teɪʃ(ə)n] – využívání
- ²² inequality [ɪnɪ'kwɒlɪtɪ] – nerovnost
- ²³ income [ɪn'kʌm] – příjem