The role of Greenpeace in environmental protection and the challenges it faces

دور منظمة السلام الأخضر في حماية البيئة وتحدياتها

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Abstract:

Environmental issues have become among the most pressing concerns of the present time, in view of the negative impact resulting from human actions, whether by natural or legal persons. This has made intervention necessary in order to protect and preserve the environment in its various components, following the growing awareness of the right of present and future generations to live in a healthy environment. This has prompted members of the international community, particularly non-governmental organizations, including Greenpeace, which since its establishment has worked to entrench environmental protection and mobilize public opinion around the necessity of safeguarding it.

Key words: Environment, Greenpeace, media, early warning, public opinion mobilization.

Introduction:

The world has witnessed a growing awareness of environmental issues at various levels and across different spheres. This is due to a range of factors that have contributed to rising levels of environmental pollution, climate change, the increasing depletion of natural resources, encroachment upon green spaces and their reduction, and damage to the ozone layer. Added to this are the irresponsible practices of business organizations, particularly in manufacturing and marketing activities, which constitute a major cause of these problems. As a result of these global developments, associations and bodies have emerged worldwide calling for the preservation of the environment, and social responsibility has appeared as a logical and practical response to these challenges. Greater emphasis has been placed on the environmental impacts of products and on consumer protection.In 1960, the first green wave for environmental protection emerged in the United States of America, led by groups opposing harm to the environment. The second green wave of the environmental protection movement arose through government action, with the implementation of laws and regulations during the period from 1970 to 1980.

Green groups, or what is known as the green movement, are among the largest and most active non-governmental organizations at all levels and operate on an international scale. Among the most prominent of these is Greenpeace, which is considered one of the leading non-governmental organizations exerting pressure on those responsible for environmental harm. It is an organization recognized by states due to the role it plays in promoting the protection of the environment and its components and in rejecting activities that are harmful to it.

On this basis, the following question arises: what role has Greenpeace played in achieving environmental protection, and what are the main challenges it faces in carrying out its mission?

1-The Concept of Greenpeace

Under this heading, the discussion addresses the definition of Greenpeace, as well as an examination of the circumstances surrounding its emergence and the events that accompanied its establishment at the international level.

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1.1- Definition of Greenpeace

Greenpeace is defined as a global environmental organization that does not seek profit. It works to change public opinion and patterns of living toward practices that preserve the environment and promote peace.

Greenpeace is known by several names, including Greenpeace, Grinpeace, and the Greenpeace group. It is an independent global organization concerned with environmental issues.[1]

Based on its characteristics and broad representation, Greenpeace is also defined as a global environmental organization that does not pursue profit and is represented in forty-four countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In order to safeguard the independence of its decision-making, the organization refuses financial contributions from governments, companies, and affiliated institutions, relying instead on individual contributions from its supporters and donations from charitable donor organizations.[2]

Greenpeace is considered one of the global environmental organizations that exerts significant efforts to defend various environmental issues at the international level. It participates in numerous scientific and educational programs that, taken together, aim to achieve a primary objective: protecting the environment from various risks and threats. It also works to raise awareness among different social groups through its programs and media campaigns to spread environmental culture and awareness, in addition to environmental education, while focusing on establishing and activating the values of environmental citizenship.

1.2 The Historical Background of the Emergence of Greenpeace

The origins of Greenpeace date back to 1971, when a group of environmental activists, namely Jim Bohlen, Irving Stowe, and Paul Cote, all environmental experts affiliated with the Sierra Club[3], set sail from Vancouver, Canada, to Amchitka Island in Alaska. The purpose of this journey was to protest the nuclear tests carried out by the United States of America on Amchitka Island, which is considered a site of ecological diversity that had become threatened with extinction as a result of these nuclear experiments. However, this campaign did not succeed in preventing the United States from detonating the nuclear bomb.

The efforts of the activists to protect the environment ultimately failed, as they were arrested by the United States Coast Guard. Following this incident, the United States carried out the nuclear detonation on 6 November 1971. The American authorities did not notice the presence of a number of journalists accompanying members of Greenpeace, who documented the explosion through photographs that were later published in daily newspapers. This contributed to the spread of the organization among the public as one of the bodies concerned with environmental protection and preservation.[4]

Media campaigns against the U.S. government continued, leaving it with no alternative but to change the location of the nuclear tests. Amchitka Island was subsequently declared a natural reserve for birds. In 1972, the organization's green emblem was created by Jim Bohlen. The organization's objectives were to combine peace with environmental protection and preservation. Its official headquarters was established in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and a number of national offices were set up worldwide, representing forty-one countries.[5]

2- Objectives and Principles of Greenpeace

Greenpeace seeks to achieve a set of noble objectives aimed at ensuring the necessary protection of the environment. It is also founded on respect for a number of fundamental principles, which may be summarized as follows.

2.1- Objectives of Greenpeace

Greenpeace aims to achieve a range of core objectives in the field of environmental protection, which can be summarized as follows:

- Working to support and disseminate the organization's fundamental principles and values, represented by independence and non-violence.

- Encouraging sustainable trade and environmental development.
- Making everything that negatively affects the environment in the present and the future a central focus of its action, relying on the fieldwork of its members and on conveying facts through various media outlets.
- Supporting and promoting the organization's core principles and values, namely independence, non-violence, confidentiality, and international presence.
- Working to eliminate environmental problems by developing a roadmap to save seas through the establishment of marine protected areas.
- Protecting and safeguarding communities from pollution and reducing its causes.
- Developing research and encouraging concrete steps toward a green future.
- Contributing to the preparation of expert reports in order to propose alternative solutions, relying in this regard on individuals from outside the organization, including legal experts, as well as independent research institutes specialized in environmental matters.[6]
- Working to protect oceans and forests from global warming, promoting the use of renewable energy, and abandoning fossil fuels.
- Urging states to use environmentally friendly materials.
- Rejecting the use of nuclear weapons due to their long-term destructive impact on the environment, and preventing the use of genetically modified materials.
- Opposing forms of fishing that target endangered species.[7]

2.2- The Specific Principles of Greenpeace

The principle of political and financial independence:Greenpeace is an independent organization and is not aligned with any political system, political movements, or governments. Its sole concern is the environment. In application of this independence, the organization does not accept aid or privileges offered by states, political parties, or companies. It also refuses any assistance or donations that may affect or conflict with its objectives, principles, and independence. Instead, it relies on contributions from individuals and charitable entities for the purpose of protecting and preserving the environment.[8]

The principle of bearing witness:Greenpeace was founded on the principle of bearing witness. This principle holds that when one witnesses an act of injustice, one has a moral duty to choose either to confront it or to remain silent.

The principle of universality:On the basis that pollution knows no borders, Greenpeace is a global organization and seeks, through its objectives, to achieve global solutions to environmental issues.

The principle of defining the objective:The specific and fundamental objective of Greenpeace is the protection of the environment from the various harms that may affect it.

The principle of non-violence:In pursuing its objectives, Greenpeace relies on peaceful means and completely avoids the use of violence or armed action. It resorts to peaceful methods such as protests at sites of environmentally harmful activities, the use of audiovisual media, and gaining the support and sympathy of public opinion.

3- Stages of Greenpeace's Intervention

Greenpeace intervenes in both emergency situations, where measures are adopted in line with the nature of the urgent situation, and in ordinary situations. These will be addressed as follows:

3.1- Emergency situations

This situation requires the adoption of specific steps characterized by speed and immediate action. Among the steps followed in emergency situations are the following:

1. **Drawing attention**: Greenpeace plays an important role in drawing attention to and warning of environmental risks in a particular region of the world. It works to alert international

institutions in order to prompt rapid intervention and the adoption of the necessary measures to address environmental danger.[9]

2. **Media**:The media is considered one of the important principles in the field of environmental protection and is also regarded as a key method for dealing with emergency situations. Through it, the public is informed and alerted to the threats facing the environment as a result of actions or omissions. Media outreach is carried out through various means of communication, as the organization publishes periodic reports on its official website, which are then circulated through other media outlets.
3. **Early warning:**Greenpeace works to anticipate environmental harm and therefore follows a policy of early warning and environmental assessment. In doing so, it adopts a preventive and precautionary approach by examining human actions and behavior that harm the environment, without invoking the absence of scientific certainty regarding the occurrence of damage. This is done in order to prevent environmental harm from occurring.

3.2- Ordinary Situations

Ordinary situations are the opposite of emergency situations, as the organization works to protect the environment with greater flexibility, on the basis that the circumstances are not urgent. In such cases, the organization has several options for preventing harm, including the following:

1. Investigation:Greenpeace conducts inquiries into environmental damage by examining the occurrence or the potential occurrence of environmental harm. It employs all investigative methods in this regard, including field visits, case studies, and their analysis. All of this is undertaken in anticipation of preventing and avoiding environmental damage.
2. Research:Research is carried out through the collection of data and information related to the environmental problem. This includes identifying the groups affected by the problem and the damage suffered by each group, selecting possible means to resolve the issue, and determining the entities that have the capacity to bring about change and contribute to its solution.[10]
3. Consultation:This involves conducting the necessary consultations and communications with the responsible parties in order to convince them of the harm that may result from their actions, and to urge and persuade them to take the necessary precautions to resolve the problem.
4. Pressure:When the parties responsible for environmental harm fail to respond, Greenpeace resorts to exerting pressure by informing the public of their actions, gaining public sympathy, and organizing protests and demonstrations condemning practices that are harmful to the environment.[11]
5. Monitoring and evaluation:The organization oversees the monitoring of the implementation of environmental programs and plans, as well as the recommendations of conferences, and evaluates what has been achieved in order to complete any remaining required efforts and to determine the extent to which objectives have been met. This serves as a starting point for renewed efforts, and the success of this process depends on the degree of priority given to this stage.

4- Practical Achievements of Greenpeace and Its Challenges

Greenpeace has succeeded in achieving numerous accomplishments aimed at protecting the environment, which have been historically recorded. It has exerted considerable efforts to prevent the occurrence of environmental disasters. However, its work faces many obstacles that constitute challenges confronting Greenpeace.

4.1- The Practical Achievements of Greenpeace

-Greenpeace is considered one of the most well-known organizations whose efforts have been realized on the ground. Its interventions are characterized by effectiveness and firmness in achieving its environmental protection goals. These practical efforts are represented as follows:

-The successful establishment of Greenpeace and its opposition to nuclear tests conducted by the United States of America in 1971 on Amchitka Island, which was subsequently transformed into a natural reserve for migratory birds.

-In 1985, France conducted a number of nuclear tests in areas of the South Pacific Ocean. Members of Greenpeace confronted these tests by boarding a Greenpeace vessel bearing the Rainbow Warrior emblem to protest against them. However, French intelligence services detonated the vessel on which the Greenpeace members were aboard, resulting in the death of one photographer on board and the sinking of the ship. This led to confirmation of the French government's involvement and its assumption of responsibility, as well as the resignation of the French Minister of Defense. Based on these events, the French state ended its nuclear tests on Moruroa Island and pledged to terminate nuclear testing. Greenpeace also exerted strenuous efforts to prevent whaling and to establish a special sanctuary for whales in the Southern Ocean, based on a proposal by Greenpeace and with the approval of France, in 1994.[12]

-In 1995, Greenpeace contributed to halting French nuclear tests. Following the media campaign conducted by the organization along with environmental activists worldwide, France, the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, China, and the United States committed to signing the treaty to ban nuclear tests in 1996.[13]

-In 1997, three members of Greenpeace announced the establishment of a new state on Rockall Island in the Atlantic Ocean, naming it the "New Wave Land." They rejected the United Kingdom's claims of sovereignty over the island.

-The Turkish government abandoned its plans in 2000 to construct ten nuclear power plants for electricity generation in the city of Akkuyu. This reversal came after eight years of pressure and protests from Greenpeace and other environmental protection organizations.[14]

-Greenpeace has conducted studies, reports, and research to protect the environment and expose pollution. These studies highlighted the contamination of dairy products and numerous crops in Ukraine resulting from the Chernobyl reactor explosion. They also assessed the scale of the disaster in Japan following radiation leakage from the Fukushima plant, detailing the amount of radiation and environmental contamination, which local authorities and technical agencies failed to contain. Greenpeace called for abandoning nuclear energy to protect the environment.

-Greenpeace also pressured Philips Electronics in 2009, leading the company to adopt a new policy for collecting and recycling electronic waste to convert it into environmentally friendly materials.

-In 2012, Greenpeace launched a large-scale campaign, gaining support from various segments of society and numerous environmental activists worldwide, to oppose South Korea's government efforts to conduct whaling for commercial purposes. As a result, 100,000 messages from citizens across different countries were sent to the South Korean Prime Minister, calling for the cessation of whaling activities and the protection of whales.

4.2- Challenges Facing Greenpeace

-Among the most prominent challenges affecting international non-governmental organizations, including Greenpeace, are the following:

-Like other non-governmental organizations, Greenpeace suffers from a lack of specific agreements recognizing its status. It is not granted international recognition, nor is it allowed to negotiate with states or resort to international courts.

-The international community lacks a global law regulating the registration and unification of non-governmental organizations.

-Proposals submitted by NGOs concerned with international environmental protection are often not taken seriously, despite existing cooperation with the United Nations. Such relations are largely honorary and advisory at most.-NGOs are not entitled to vote in meetings of international organizations and have only limited participation in discussions during sessions and conferences of these organizations.[15]

-Raising awareness among societies within countries about environmental problems and climate change caused by unplanned policies for environmental protection remains difficult.
-NGOs face limited and weak financial resources, which are typically derived only from selling some publications and printed materials at prices that do not cover the organization's expenses.[16].

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be observed that Greenpeace plays a prominent role in the preparation, negotiation, and proposal of environmental solutions. It has also been instrumental in preparing several important international environmental agreements, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol for climate protection. From this, it is clear that non-governmental organizations have a significant positive role. Beyond their foundational role in contributing to the drafting, formulation, and development of public international law, they collaborate with states and intergovernmental organizations to protect human rights and implement international environmental law. NGOs also demonstrate the ability to adapt to various situations and find appropriate solutions to the challenges they face due to the experience they have gained and the sense of responsibility shown by their activists.

It is further suggested that NGOs, especially those concerned with environmental issues, should not deviate from their objectives and must remain committed to their declared principles, which focus on humanity, alleviating suffering, and protecting rights. This is particularly important when their activities extend beyond their national borders to weaker countries. They must not become political tools that worsen local problems.

Additionally, global NGOs should be granted international legal personality so that they can perform functions still largely reserved for states. They should also have enhanced consultative status within the United Nations, including at least the right to vote. At the local level, they should have the right to litigate before domestic courts and be able to adapt their status and legal standing according to the nature of environmental law, beyond the traditional limitations of interest or official recognition.

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