

November 6, 2017

Joint Statement on Protecting the Environment, Protecting People

During 2017, the world witnessed another year of serious environmental damage inflicted by wars and armed conflicts. November 6th, the United Nations' International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict is an annual opportunity to reflect on the environmental costs and consequences of warfare.

From the oil wells of Qayyarah in Iraq, set alight by the Islamic State, to the widespread damage to cities, towns and industrial areas throughout Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. To the toxic risks of flooded coal mines and the shelling of industry and critical infrastructure in Ukraine, to the flows of hazardous waste polluting the shores of Gaza; the international community is failing to effectively address the environmental costs of warfare, in spite of the threats they pose to human health.

Environmental degradation linked to conflict, such as the loss of forests or the overexploitation of drylands or water resources, can also drive insecurity and hamper peacebuilding. Conversely, the sustainable and equitable use of these same resources is often the key to building peace. This equally applies to oil and mineral resources, the exploitation of which helps to motivate and finance conflicts around the world. Ultimately it is ecosystems and communities that bear the brunt of environmental damage and the misuse of natural resources; harm that is often exacerbated by the wholesale collapse of environmental governance during conflicts.

In an era marked by global environmental challenges, it is paramount that the international community also recognises that strengthening the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts is both vital, and long overdue. Protecting the environment before, during and after armed conflicts means protecting the lives and the futures of communities. The health and socio-economic consequences of wartime environmental degradation interfere with the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and with sustainable development. Particular sections of affected populations may be disproportionately vulnerable to harm or exclusion from processes to protect their rights, such as women, but also children, the elderly, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples.

While there are signs that the international community is beginning to take steps towards addressing the links between the environment, conflict and the protection of civilians and ecosystems, much remains to be done. The topic is increasingly on the agenda of the UN's Security Council and Environment Assembly. Its International Law Commission is reviewing the laws protecting the environment from conflict. Meanwhile new online platforms have been developed that focus on the environment in humanitarian response and in educating decision-makers on sustainable resource management.

On this #EnvConflictDay we make five calls to the international community

1. **Increase the protection of civilians** by ensuring that the environment is fully integrated into humanitarian response, and improve environmental data collection, analysis and sharing among and beyond humanitarian networks.
2. **Strengthen and properly resource the UN system** to enable it to identify, monitor and respond to conflict-linked environmental threats.
3. Governments, international organisations and civil society must work together to **progressively develop and encourage compliance with the legal framework** intended to

prevent environmental damage during conflicts and to remedy harm in their wake.

4. **Improve the documentation** of human rights violations and environmental crimes linked to wartime environmental harm and identify and develop effective remedies.
5. Ensure that the **sustainable and equitable management of natural resources** is fully integrated into post-conflict recovery planning and that long-term assistance is available to rebuild environmental governance in conflict-affected areas.

Signed by:

Organisations

- Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
- Atlantic States Legal Foundation
- Caribbean Youth Environment Network
- Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa
- Cooperación Comunitaria
- Disaster Waste Recovery
- Eco Ethics Kenya
- Environmental Law Institute
- Environmental Justice Foundation
- Environmentalists Against War
- European Environmental Bureau
- Greenpeace
- Groupe d'Action pour la Promotion et la Protection de la Flore et la Faune
- Groupe Urgence, Réhabilitation, Développement
- Human Rights Now
- Human Environmental Association for Development
- International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons
- Norwegian People's Aid
- OceanCare
- PAX
- Raising Gabdho Foundation
- Shanti Med Nepal
- Society of Doctors for Environment
- Sustainable Agriculture and Environment
- The Iraqi Environment & Health Society UK
- Toxic Remnants of War Project
- Urban Resilience Platform
- World Against War
- Zoi Environment Network

Individuals

- Piotr Barczak, Waste Policy Officer, (European Environmental Bureau)
- Dr Matthew Bolton (Disarmament Institute, Pace University)
- Dr. Robert Francies (King's College London, Reader in Ecology)
- Jasper Humphreys (Director of External Affairs, Marjan Centre, King's College London)
- Dr Dan McQuillan (Goldsmiths University, London)
- NdennehNying (National Environment Agency, The Gambia)
- Marie Thérèse MerhejSeif, Green Party of Lebanon, President HEAD.
- Prof. Richard Sullivan (King's College London, Director Conflict & Health Research Group)
- Steve Trent (Environmental Justice Foundation)
- Alexander Verbeek (Planetary Security Initiative)