



Preventing the Exploitation of Natural Resources in War and Armed Conflicts

Background Information

In 2001, the United Nations declared 6 November of each year as the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflicts. As the natural resources of a territory are fundamental for the economic growth and social development of local populations, these are also the cause of internal and external conflicts. The latter represent an imminent threat to humanity and to all forms of life on our planet.

Natural resources in conflict zones often become crucial in armed struggles, and as a consequence, the environment is affected directly and indirectly causing negative consequences for local populations in numerous ways. Some examples are: air pollution, deforestation, poor waste management, degradation of protected areas, loss of biodiversity, and the collapse of environmental governance structures.

It is crucial to spread awareness on the implications of climate change, especially in conflict-affected areas, in order to promote a fair management of natural resources, guarantee peace and security, mitigate ongoing disputes and ease the resettlement of societies.

How Wars Affect the Environment

Environmental damage harms people and the ecosystems they harbour; therefore, in order to protect civilians, it is first necessary to protect the environment that they depend upon.



By building and maintaining military infrastructures on the territory, countries are contributing to ruining the environment, as these infrastructures require a significant amount of resources such as metals, water or hydrocarbons. It is also important to consider the supplies needed in order to support the military, plus the physical space needed for training, which also place a significant weight onto the natural resources of a territory.

The intensity of the impact varies according to the type of conflict: there may be relatively brief disputes that result in major territorial damages, and others that are fought for decades but without such abrupt damages.

Examples of Local Controversies

The Security Council has recognised the possible implications caused by climate change also in local reality scenarios. For instance, during conflicts, relations between farmers and herders have often worsened due to disputes over natural resources. In the past, these types of relations were regulated by long standing agreements which guaranteed the coexistence of two realities during the season of transhumance. Unfortunately, due to the side effects of climate change, these arrangements are no longer suitable, and tensions arise for the scarcity of natural resources and the rapid socio-economic change.

Possible Solutions

In order to achieve durable peace and profitable economies, countries should reinforce the governance over natural resources, by monitoring those areas knowingly subjected to conflicts and avoiding the use of resources as pretext for new disputes. Furthermore, the correct management of natural resources is essential to ensure the wellbeing of the poorer part of the population that relies upon them. For example, in Somalia, profits generated from the illegal charcoal trading market are later used to finance terrorist groups active in the area, rather than in the local population and infrastructures.

Study Guide

Another crucial point posed by the United Nations in the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' agenda is the safe disposal of weapons. Moreover, new policies on the safe dismantlement of chemical weapons on territories are to be introduced under strict safeguards in order to prevent environmental contamination.

Sources & Useful Links

[International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflicts: A Political Ecology Perspective | Frontiers Research Topic](#)

[How does war damage the environment? - CEOBS](#)

[International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict | Article | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

[Conflict and natural resources | United Nations Peacekeeping](#)