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**ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS:  
CONFLICTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

submitted by

the Governments of Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary and Italy,  
in collaboration with UNEP as competent partner  
of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)

through the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials



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**PARTNERSHIPS**

**PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

**ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS:  
CONFLICTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The text in this document is submitted as received from the authors.

“We are concerned that environmental degradation and the unsustainable use of natural resources may have significant social and economic consequences, such as increased poverty, cause health hazards, and aggravate insecurity and social tensions, possibly leading to political instability. We are also concerned that conflicts over shared natural resources and ecosystems could lead to tensions between states and have an adverse impact on other sub-regions, directly or indirectly. We recognize that the Environment for Europe process should contribute to strengthening wider peace, security and human safety, and should continue its close cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We note the serious environmental consequences of armed conflicts in the region and welcome contributions made by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in undertaking post conflict environmental assessments”

*(Paragraph 14 of the Ministerial Declaration, Kyiv 2003, decided by the Environmental Ministers for the UN-ECE region.)*

## I. PRESENT POLICY ATTENTION

1. The importance of conflicts and environment issues is currently discussed in various high-level international fora:
  - (a) The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) performs its 2007 Economic and Environmental Forum under Spanish Presidency as “Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area: Land degradation, soil contamination and water management”;
  - (b) On the 17<sup>th</sup> of April this year the United Nations Security Council discussed under the United Kingdom presidency, the security implications of climate change, including its impact on potential drivers of conflict (such as access to energy, water, food and other scarce resources, population movements and border disputes); and the upcoming Belgian presidency plans to prepare a further UN Security Council discussion on natural resources and conflict issues;
  - (c) The German EU Council Presidency has launched a European discussion on how to integrate environment, development and conflict prevention against the background of recent activities of the European Commission.
2. Other events have recently brought these issues to international attention:
  - (a) In December 2004, the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, established by the UN Secretary General, to devise a stronger role and performance of the UN in the field of collective security, stressed the need “to develop norms governing the management of natural resources for countries emerging from or at risk of conflict”;
  - (b) On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2004, in Oslo, an environmental activist, Mrs. Wangari Mathai, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize;
  - (c) The international well reputed World Watch Report published in January 2005 the highly regarded report “State of the World 2005 – Redefining Global Security” by underlying the emergent importance of environmental and natural resource issues in terms of security risks and conflict prevention.

3. Concerning the “Environment for Europe” Process:
  - (a) During the negotiations in preparation of the Environment for Europe Conference in Kyiv, May 2003, the proposal was made to name the Conference “Conference on Environment and Security”;
  - (b) At the fifth Ministerial Conference: Environment for Europe, Kyiv, Ukraine, 21 – 23 May 2003, the Environment Ministers of the UNECE region agreed on the paragraph 14 of the Ministerial Declaration (see above);
  - (c) An initiative about an “Environment, Water and Security Agenda” for Central Asia was decided.

## II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

4. **Human security** refers to a life in peace, without tension and conflict – political, social or economic – between people and nations. It encompasses freedom from a range of risks: disasters, hunger, diseases, civil strife or war, terrorism, eviction, persecution or discrimination, financial deprivation and poverty, and more.
5. **Protection of the environment is an important pillar of security.** Working together on solving environmental problems is often the simplest way to longer term, more systematic and fundamental cooperation. Where conflicts occur, environmental cooperation may pave the way to broader solutions. Proactive environmental management also helps reduce vulnerability to natural disasters, disease outbreaks, climate change and food shortages.
6. Conversely, **environmental degradation** and **uncontrolled resource depletion** can determine a variety of security risks. For example, damage to health or assets from pollution can lead to instability, while the competition over the use of an increasing number of scarce resources is almost growing by the day. As described in the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability climate change will have serious impacts on the living conditions, ecosystems and availability of natural resources. Problems related to, e.g. freshwater availability, food supply, agriculture and forestry, floods and droughts will increase the vulnerability of the societies, and may harm the social stability of the poor communities in particular. Usually, the environment is not a single or the major source of a problem, but can be important enough to worsen the situation. And conflicts will cause environmental problems as well; physical damage and pollution caused by explosives, clearance of vegetation, fires, disruption of waste management infrastructure and services, and resettlement of large populations fleeing the conflict areas are some of the common impacts of conflict.
7. An environment, which deteriorates can lead to conflicts. Human induced environmental disasters, such as spills from unsound mining practices or flooding due to uphill deforestation practices, can seriously disrupt the relationship between states, in particular if nothing is done to compensate the damage or prevent them from re-occurring. Unresolved local conflicts can spill over national borders and even create global threats, including terrorism. The examples where natural resources and conflict are seemingly linked are manifold.

8. Typically, when people are faced with a severely degraded environment, many choose, in fact are obliged to migrate. There are at least 25 million **environmental refugees** today, compared with 22 million refugees of the traditional kind. This number may well double by the year 2010, as increasing numbers of impoverished people press even harder on their already degraded environments. It is no secret to anyone that migration issues govern an ever-increasing part of the tensions between and within countries to date.

9. Another example relates to the **availability of water**. Nearly 47 per cent of the land area of the world excluding Antarctica falls within international water basins that are shared by two or more states. There are 44 countries with at least 80 per cent of their territory within international basins. The number of rivers and lake basins shared by two or more countries is now more than 300. In Africa alone, there are 54 drainage basins that cover approximately 50 per cent of the total land area of the continent.

10. Yet, **supplies of fresh water** are finite. The populations of water short countries today, estimated to be 550 million, are expected to increase to one billion by the year 2010. Water shortages will especially affect agricultural practices, including food production and – availability. As the demand grows and in the absence of a clear consensus on how best to use shared water resources for the benefit of all, the growing competition for water has the potential of erupting into disputes. More than 450 water-related conflict situations were registered in the past 50 years.

11. The rate at which **arable land** is being lost is increasing dramatically. Today, only about 1,5 billion hectares out of the original 3,5 billion is left. The loss of potential productivity due to soil erosion worldwide is estimated to be equivalent to some 20 million tons of grain per year or 1 per cent of global production.

12. The growing number of people affected by **desertification** – estimated to be 1 billion – is not simply waiting to be touched by the magic wand of development. They are literally “losing ground”, as their lands suffer more and more from the effects of this ailment. This has contributed considerably to the number of environmental refugees mentioned above as well as to the tensions over the property and use of arable land.

13. While acknowledging that the immediate drivers of conflict are likely to remain national and regional power struggles; ethnic, religious and national tensions; and severe economic, social or political inequality, it was understood that the cumulative impacts of **climate change** could exacerbate these drivers of conflict, and particularly increase the risks to those states already susceptible to conflict.

14. It is clear that environmental decline, whether sudden or a longer-term process, and conflicts are often linked in a chain of cause and effects. Environmental cooperation and remediation can help to mitigate both the causes and the consequences of conflicts, in particular in a transboundary or regional context on water issues, e.g. following a river basin approach, nature conservation, e.g. by founding so-called “peace parks”, disaster prevention or sustainable development in mountainous areas. This can as well contribute to peace and confidence building processes in regions of tension.

### **III. THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS**

15. The state and management of nature and natural resources also affect socio-economic conditions while, in turn, environmental degradation is often caused by it. In Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, the world community recognized that reducing, redressing and preventing environmental decline requires addressing the social and economic driving forces behind that decline. Ten years later, in Johannesburg, the world's leaders affirmed that "peace, security, stability and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential for achieving sustainable development". Both Rio and Johannesburg underlined that sustainable livelihoods depend on sound environmental management.

16. Environmental change is related to socio-economic development and hence to peace and stability. That is the political reality of today. There is an almost natural connection between conflict prevention, environmental care, and social and economic development, which all are crucial for achieving sustainable livelihoods. Overlooking, neglecting or ignoring socio-economic conditions and interstate relations in addressing trans-boundary environmental risks is an unsustainable way of mitigating such risks and will not help to improve and enhance the environment and in maintaining peace and stability in the longer term. Overlooking, neglecting or ignoring environmental imperatives in pursuing socio-economic development and bringing about peace and security, bears the risk to make such development and peace unsustainable in the long run. It therefore makes sense to draw on the collective wisdom and collaborative force of political leadership, management of interstate relationship, socio-economic developers and environmental lobby, and create partnerships to address environmental problems, which result from conflict or are conflict prone.

17. The need for joining capacities, harmonizing and streamlining approaches and working together in a participatory partnership approach to strengthen country capacities is fully in line with the resolve and commitments of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, adopted at the High level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, in February/March 2005.

### **IV. THE ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY INITIATIVE**

18. Providing a cost effective platform for lasting solutions to environment and security problems was and remains the rationale behind the Environment and Security Initiative, a consortium of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which, in the course of its existence extended to include the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an associated partner, as well as the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Regional Environment Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). Together, these organizations with their different constituencies and complementary mandates and expertise, provide responses to a growing number of requests for assistance in addressing and solving environmental problems with potentially escalating security risks.

19. Launched at the Environment for Europe Conference in Kyiv and the OSCE Economic Forum in Prague, in May 2003, the Initiative started to operate in Central Asia and South Eastern Europe. The first phase was relatively simple and the results were obvious. Civil society directly affected identified environmental problems with security risks, politicians expressed their

concerns and the Initiative assisted in making the risks visible, embedded in the social and economic realities of today. Water shortages and hazardous waste problems scored high in Central Asia; South Eastern Europe showed great concern over the adverse impacts of mining practices and the loss of biodiversity. Hot spots and their footprint were identified and captured in maps and a publication, and remedial work programs were developed and are under implementation.

20. Central Asia and South Eastern Europe were followed by the Caucasus region and Eastern Europe (Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine). In all the cases the approach remained the same, leading to overall assessment of hot spots; selected in depth assessments of the environmental problems and their political and socio economic context; and a portfolio of activities to promote cooperation and apply sustainable solutions to the problems identified. The program for the Caucasus region was launched during the Tbilisi Conference of Environment Ministers of the EECCA countries and their partners, on 22 October 2004; the program for Eastern Europe at the OSCE Economic Forum in Vienna, 22 January 2007.

21. The ENVSEC Initiative is governed by a Management Board composed of representatives from the partner organizations. An Advisory Board comprised of donors, recipient countries and other stakeholders provides scientific and policy advice. Activities are coordinated by a Secretariat consisting of staff from the partner organizations. On the national level, ENVSEC collaborates with national focal points from the ministries of environment and foreign affairs who facilitate the continued endorsement and involvement of national governments in the process. Throughout the process particular attention is paid to the role of civil society organizations as primary movers in securing a fundamental precondition for success: broad-based mobilization and grass roots demands for change, which pushes for concrete action and hold leaders accountable for their promises.

22. The strength of the Initiative is that it is a joint venture of organizations which complement each other, and which can benefit from the field presence of OSCE, UNDP and the REC. That makes both policy development and operations comprehensive and cost effective, permitting for minimal overhead requirements. In terms of clients and donors the Initiative can count on a broad base of interest and support, including from Ministries of Environment, Development and Foreign Affairs. Given the extensive network of alliances which each of the partners brings into the exercise, ENVSEC and its activities link to, build upon and integrate almost all the related work in the countries concerned. With that, the Initiative has become an important catalytic force for sustainable development in the region.

## **V. FROM PRE CONFLICT TO POST CONFLICT WORK**

23. Post conflict situations offer a special opportunity and incentive for addressing and solving environmental problems caused by these conflicts and as such presenting a challenge to lasting peace and stability. Although the emphasis in post conflict work is on repairing environmental damage after the conflict has been resolved, while environment and security work rather focuses on environmental interventions which may help prevent conflicts from happening, their way of mapping out and dealing with the environmental problems is based on the same basic methodology and approach: identifying and assessing the environmental risks of hotspots through desk studies followed by field missions, leading to in depth analyses and

proposals/portfolios for clean up work. Since conflict solving has already taken place, post conflict environmental work has a strong focus on the technical aspects of and requirements for clean up, whereas the environment and security portfolio by necessity includes equal attention for socio economic development and political dialogue as a means of conflict prevention.

24. Partners in addressing environmental problems caused by conflicts include first and foremost clean up oriented technicians whereas instruments to address environment and security risks range from environmental policy exchange to environmental institution building, legislation, technology transfer and public information and outreach. However, that does not take away the necessity to include a certain measure of conflict prevention in environmental clean up work, particularly if that clean up work increases the risk for future pollution and resource depletion.

25. Addressing conflict prone environmental problems serves the same purpose as post conflict environmental clean up work: both aim at solving environmental problems related to conflicts as a means towards securing international cooperation for development which is sustainable and environmentally sound in the long run.

## **VI. POST CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

26. As with conflict prevention and peace keeping, the post-conflict rehabilitation process represents a window of opportunity to lay the foundation for sound environmental management and sustainable use of natural resources. However, if environmental needs are not integrated at the outset, the chance is often lost as early decisions and policies establish a trajectory that cannot be changed. In this regard, post-conflict environmental assessments play a critical role to rapidly identify and advocate key environmental needs and influence the peace keeping agenda.

27. Building on its relationship with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNEP created a Post Conflict branch, which, assisted by international and local experts made an assessment of the environmental impact of the Kosovo<sup>2</sup> conflict in 1999 and recommended clean-up priorities. While it appeared that the conflict had not caused an environmental catastrophe, four “hot spots” were identified where chemical contamination of the environment threatened human health. Based on the assessments, clean-up works at the hotspots were initiated to reduce risks to health and protect the environment from further contamination.

28. In consequent years, UNEP conducted environmental assessments in 12 conflict affected countries. As the work has progressed, so has the applied assessment methodology, from assessing how the conflict caused environmental risks to health to also considering impacts on livelihoods and ecosystem services. The assessments furthermore make an effort to analyze how natural resources triggered or extended the conflict and contributed to the conflict economy. They also review the potential environmental pressures and impacts that could be generated during the relief of humanitarian needs or during the recovery and reconstruction process. The level of institutional capacity amongst key governmental, private sector and civil society actors to address the risks identified, is an important consideration of the process.

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<sup>2</sup> The UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244.

29. The post conflict assessments are conducted in a rapid and strategic way. They are designed for completion within a few months of the peace agreement in order to influence the policy agenda and help identify priorities. They seek to identify the key environmental issues that could undermine sustainable development and consequently threaten the newly established peace and stability if left un-addressed, and recommend actors and activities that should be undertaken on an urgent basis. The outcome of the assessment is used by the UN country team as well as national government counterparts and civil society organizations in designing sustainable recovery and reconstruction programs, building back better and ensuring that no new sources of environmental risk are created.

## VII. SOME ACHIEVEMENTS

30. Activities conducted under the ENVSEC Initiative show that environment can act as a bridge for cross-boundary cooperation. Joint assessments and information exchanges have identified common interests, improved mutual understanding, and built foundations for agreements on trans-boundary environmental management. The achievements include the following:

- (a) Through assessments and in-depth research of the transboundary impacts of industry and hazardous waste, the ENVSEC Initiative has provided practical and strategic recommendations on how to foresee and mitigate the impacts on specific sites (the “Mining for Closure” process in South-Eastern Europe). Eighteen industrial (including uranium mining) and hazardous waste sites have been investigated in the Balkans and in the Ferghana valley of Central Asia; such work is to be expanded to the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. By drawing attention to concrete problems and investigating solutions, ENVSEC is in many cases becoming a bridge to ensuring the remediation of ‘hot spots’. For example, it is playing a role in the containment and destruction of left-over rocket fuel in Armenia and Ukraine and obsolete pesticides in Moldova, Belarus and Tajikistan.
- (b) ENVSEC fosters information exchange, agreements and practical cooperation over shared waters. In specific cases this has helped to build understanding, cooperation and long-term development. Examples include environmental-agricultural cooperation in the Prespa lake; Dniester basin management agreement and improved information exchange; cooperative monitoring in the Prut, Kura Araks/ Aras basins and in Central Asia. In the Balkans, ENVSEC has been looking for arrangements and locations for cross-border ‘peace parks’, and in the ‘greater Caucasus’ it has helped re-open a discussion towards a region-wide environmental convention.
- (c) In the areas of ‘frozen conflicts’ in the Caucasus and Moldova, ENVSEC has promoted broad environmental cooperation, thus trying to add a ‘softer’ dimension to a difficult process of political settlement. In 2006 ENVSEC provided a core contribution to the OSCE-led Environmental Assessment Mission to fire-affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the Southern Caucasus. During the Mission, local and international wild land fire experts assessed the short- and long-term impact of the fires on the environment and recommended measures to counteract any detrimental impacts. Bringing together local environmental authorities in the turbulent Ferghana valley and preparing local

communities to anticipate natural disasters, such as floods or landslides, not only increases mutual understanding but mitigates major environmental risks to human security.

- (d) Finally, ENVSEC has contributed to strengthening environment and security institutions and policies in vulnerable areas. For example, in the Ferghana valley it helped to establish 'Aarhus centres' and helped local authorities to better inform the public about environmental situation. Elsewhere, it has systematically mainstreamed reporting on environment and security in the mass media of the Caucasus and Central Asia, promoted public participation in decision-making on related issues, and helped to implement existing policies (such as regional environmental conventions) or develop new ones (such as the new Environmental Security Strategy of Moldova).

31. Since 1999 UNEP's post-conflict operations have made a number of significant achievements. These include:

- (a) 12 major post-conflict environmental assessment operations in coordination with the UN humanitarian and development frameworks (Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Kosovo<sup>3</sup>, Lebanon, Liberia, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia/Montenegro and Sudan). The assessments have catalyzed environmental recovery activities and integrated environmental needs within post-conflict reconstruction and peace building programmes.
- (b) Implemented activities to clean-up environmental "hot spots" in two conflict affected countries (Iraq and Serbia).
- (c) Supporting regional cooperation and peace building through environmental diplomacy in three conflict affected areas (Afghanistan/Iran, Iran/Iraq, and North/South Sudan).

## VIII. SUGGESTED ACTION

32. In this age of globalization, the current UN reform processes and the establishment of the Peace Building Commission offer a welcome opportunity for mainstreaming care for the environment in development and peace building and vice versa. The environment and security agenda presents itself as a window of opportunities to strengthen and deliver on global and regional environmental policies in areas of climate change, sustainable use of natural resources or trans boundary water and landscape management. Protecting human health, providing sustainable livelihoods, and maintaining ecological services must be essential pillars of any conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction program, not only to meet the needs of the population, but also to secure lasting peace and stability.

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<sup>3</sup> The UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244.

33. Ministers gathered for the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in October 2007 in Belgrade, reiterating the linkages between environmental degradation, resource depletion and political instability, may wish to:

- (a) Stress that both short term damage inflicted on the environment and longer term environmental change, have an impact on peace and stability between and within nations and therefore require adequate attention in the fora and institutions dealing with these matters;
- (b) Recognise the need for governments to fully integrate environmental concerns in their foreign and security policies;
- (c) Welcome the growing interest in and attention for environmental management as an instrument of conflict prevention and resolution and an essential and basic element of post conflict repair;
- (d) Encourage the Environment and Security Initiative partners to continue to develop and implement collective responses to requests for assistance in the area of environment and security;
- (e) Encourage UNEP and OCHA to continue and provide post conflict environmental assistance where and when needed; and
- (f) Voice and confirm their intention to secure broad government support for and public involvement in the protection and restoration of the environment as part of conflict prevention or post conflict rehabilitation.

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