

Workshop II: Managing Natural Resources for Peace and Sustainable Development (Conference Room 11)

Background

All countries depend on natural resources. Renewable resources like clean air, freshwater, healthy forests, fertile land and coastal waters are essential to meeting basic human needs. When well managed, natural resources have the potential to support sustainable development, contribute to sustaining peace, generate revenues for poverty alleviation and investing in the long-term well-being of the population.

Rising living standards, changing demand patterns, and population growth, combined in many instances with inefficient use, have placed increasing pressures on natural resource availability. These pressures are being intensified by the effects of climate change, for example on precipitation patterns, water availability, and the condition of marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

Conflicts over access to natural resources or over the distribution of the benefits derived from them can turn violent when systems to manage such conflict peacefully fail. In fact, between 1950 and 2010, 40 per cent of all intrastate conflicts had a link to natural resources².

Water crises are now recognized as a top global risk for business by the World Economic Forum, and about one-third of the world's population now resides in water-stressed areas.³ Over two and a half billion people depend directly on agriculture, but over half of the land used for agriculture worldwide is now moderately or severely affected by soil degradation.⁴ And scientists recently estimated that, with continued rise in greenhouse gas emissions, climate change could cost the global fishing industry \$10 billion per year in lost revenue by 2050.⁵ Poor people bear the brunt of these impacts.

Scarcities of water, fertile land and other resources have already reached critical levels in some places; increasing resource competition, migration pressures and, especially where poverty is high and governance institutions are weak, the risk of rising tensions within and between countries, including violent conflict. Particularly with climate change, natural resource scarcities and loss of biodiversity are projected to worsen across a widening geography in coming decades.

Effective and equitable natural resource management at local, national and regional levels are imperative in the face of worsening resource scarcities – imperative for both sustaining peace and achieving sustainable development as reflected in the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/262 recognizes the importance of “a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace”, particularly through the prevention of conflict by addressing its root causes, among them worsening natural resource scarcities.⁶

² UNEP, *From conflict to peacebuilding: the role of natural resources and the environment*, 2009:

³ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/01/why-world-water-crises-are-a-top-global-risk/>

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/events/desertificationday/background.shtml>

⁵ [Global-fisheries-will-lose-10b-a-year-to-climate-change-by-2050](#)

⁶ “Review of the United Nations peacekeeping architecture”, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 April 2016.

Localities, countries and regions differ markedly in their vulnerability to various natural resource stresses and to the impacts of climate change. Some are already facing serious natural resource challenges – acute water shortages, land degradation, desertification, loss of forest cover, degradation of coastal ecosystems, depletion of fisheries. Resilience and capacity to manage such stresses also varies widely across locations. The risks to peace and sustainable development are greatest where vulnerability is high, institutions weak and resilience low.

Evidence is growing that climate variability and change, through impacts, for example, on extreme temperature, water scarcity, drought and rural-to-urban migration, exacerbate poverty and increase risks of conflict in different parts of the world.⁷

With varying degrees of success, countries are adapting to natural resource scarcities and climate change. Some are improving the management of natural resources and sharing their benefits in an equitable and transparent manner. Some treat and reuse a high percentage of their wastewater. Some are expanding their use of conservation agriculture.⁸ Others invest in renewable energy and forest conservation. Restoration of degraded lands has made notable progress in a number of countries, alleviating poverty and bringing multiple ecosystem benefits. New efforts to reduce food loss and waste could dramatically reduce pressure on land, water, biodiversity and energy resources, and may bring food security within reach for the poor. Solutions are available, but we need greater political will and governance capacity to deploy them.

Objectives:

The workshop will provide an opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to discuss natural resource management challenges they are confronting and to share experiences, including successful approaches to equitably managing natural resources so as to prevent violent conflicts and relieve migration pressures. Participants may wish to consider the following questions:

- 1) **What are the long-term trends in the status of your country's natural resources that could constrain or facilitate the achievement of the SDGs and peace? How is climate change impacting natural resources in your country and what are the consequences for peace and sustainable development?**
- 2) **Are relations in your country strained by natural resource challenges? Is your region affected by transboundary water resource management issues with rivers and lakes?**
- 3) **Have natural resource scarcities been a contributor to fragility, internal displacement or migration pressures, and conflict? How have you sought to mitigate such pressures?**
- 4) **What measures have worked to strengthen participatory, inclusive, equitable and sustainable natural resource governance?**
- 5) **How can the United Nations system effectively support good practices in managing natural resources for peace and sustainable development in its Member States?**

⁷ C.P. Kelley, S. Mohtadi, M.A. Cane, R. Seager, and Y. Kusnir, Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 112, No. 11, 17 March 2015: <http://www.pnas.org/content/112/11/3241>; P.H. Gleick, Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria, *Weather, Climate, and Society*, Journal of the American Meteorological Society, July 2014. See also S.M. Hsiang, M. Burke, E. Miguel, Quantifying the Influence of Climate on Human Conflict, *Science*, Vol 341, 13 September 2013.

⁸ <https://factsreports.revues.org/1941#tocto1n3>