

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY
FOR PREVENTING THE EXPLOITATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
IN WAR AND ARMED CONFLICT
6 November 2008**

The natural environment enjoys protection under Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions. But this protection is often violated during war and armed conflict. Water wells are polluted, crops torched, forests cut down, soils poisoned, and animals killed, all in order to gain military advantage. The draining of the marshlands of the Euphrates-Tigris Delta during the 1990s deliberately targeted the ecosystem for political and military goals.

From the Balkans to Afghanistan, from Lebanon to Sudan, the United Nations is studying the environmental impacts of conflict across the world. We have seen how environmental damage and the collapse of institutions are threatening human health, livelihoods and security.

These risks can also jeopardize fragile peace and development in post-conflict societies. In Afghanistan, warfare and institutional disintegration have combined to take a major toll. In a clear case of environmentally induced displacement, tens of thousands of people have been forced from rural to urban areas in search of food and employment.

The environment and natural resources are crucial in consolidating peace within and between war-torn societies. Several countries in the Great Lakes Region of Africa established trans-boundary cooperation to manage their shared natural resources. Lasting peace in Darfur will depend in part on resolving the underlying competition for water and fertile land. And there can be no durable peace in Afghanistan if the natural resources that sustain livelihoods and ecosystems are destroyed.

The United Nations attaches great importance to ensuring that action on the environment is part of our approach to peace. Protecting the environment can help countries create employment opportunities, promote development and avoid a relapse into armed conflict. On this International Day, let us renew our commitment to preventing the exploitation of the environment in times of conflict, and to protecting the environment as a pillar of our work for peace.