

**Peacebuilding Commission - Working Group on Lessons Learned**  
**“Environment, Conflict and Peacebuilding”**  
*Held in cooperation with UNEP*  
**08 May 2008 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM**  
**ECOSOC Chamber**

**Concept Note**

**Objectives and Rationale**

Natural resources often lie at the heart of wars and civil strife. Since 1990, at least seventeen major conflicts – nine of which have occurred in Africa – have been driven by the exploitation of natural resources. Civil wars such as those in Liberia, Angola and DR Congo have centered on high-value resources such as timber, diamonds and oil. Other conflicts, including those in Darfur, Nepal, and in the Middle East, involve control of scarce resources such as land and water. As the global population continues to rise, and the demand for resources continues to grow, there is significant potential for conflicts over natural resources to multiply in the coming decades. Further, climate change is being looked at as a potential compounding factor. Against this background, there is a growing need to prevent resource-based conflicts and use the management of natural resources as an opportunity for peacebuilding, stability and security within and between nations. Environmental causes can mix with other factors to generate violence or prolong existing conflicts. Understanding possible environmental linkages to protracted violence is necessary to address the underlying causes of armed conflict. Alongside research from the past two decades, there are growing efforts in order to integrate environmental concerns into peacebuilding. There is a need to ensure that these efforts are not *ad hoc* and fragmented but are mainstreamed into peacebuilding policy and practice.

The environment can be linked to conflicts through the indirect use of natural resources (the “resource curse”) or its direct use connected to resource scarcity. The exploitation of extractive resources, such as oil or precious minerals, can fuel violent conflict or hinder transition to peace. Conflicts are also sometimes related to the direct use of natural resources, such as land, forests and water. Apart from resource scarcity, the *distribution* of or *access* to the resource, such as land (structural scarcity), can become a source of tension and armed conflict.

Beyond the provision of natural resources, ecosystems maintain conditions for life on earth by recycling nutrients. They also act as a natural buffer against extreme weather phenomena or the spread of disease. Environmental degradation thus increases vulnerability to human-driven events that destabilize societies and place people’s lives and well-being at risk. The result of scarcity or ecosystem failure can lead to internal displacement and external migration, possibly affecting population balances or creating additional competition over scarce resources.

Compounding factors such as population growth, poverty, increased global demand for resources and climate change are enhancing the risk of environmentally related conflicts. However, natural resources should also be viewed as a key asset in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. They can serve as a source of national wealth and job creation. Transparent and efficient management of natural resource can also build trust and confidence in war-torn countries.

Building local capacities, institutions, policies and clear rules to manage natural resources in post-conflict societies is therefore a key part of peacebuilding.

This meeting of the WGLL will explore the following key questions:

- What environmental issues are important for peacebuilding?
- How do environmental factors contribute to conflict?
- What has been done in practice to integrate environmental concerns into peacebuilding? Where are the major gaps?
- What role have land issues played in peacebuilding?
- How can the international community support governments in addressing the environment/conflict nexus?
- What role can the PBC play?

### **Format and Structure**

The Working Group on Lessons Learned meeting will be held from 10am to 1pm on 8 May 2008 in the ECOSOC Chamber.

*Chair*

**H.E. Ambassador Heraldo Muñoz**, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations.

*Panelists*

**Dr Richard Matthews**, Associate Professor, University of Irvine, California, *“Integrating the Environment into Peacebuilding: Rationale and Evidence”*

**Mr. David Jensen**, Policy and Planning Coordinator, UNEP Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, *“UNEP’s Post-Conflict Interventions – a Comparative View”*

**Dr Clarissa Augustinus**, Chief, Land, Tenure and Property Administration Section, Shelter Branch, Global Division, UN-HABITAT, *“Land Issues and Peacebuilding”*

*Discussant*

**Gay Rosenblum-Kumar**

Senior Public Administration Officer, Governance and Public Administration Branch, Division for Public Administration and Development Management, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

### **Output**

A Chair’s summary report will be available for circulation after the meeting.