

ISRMUN 2021



UNEP

**United Nations
Environment Programme**

Committee: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Topic: Addressing the environmental impact of armed conflict

Written by: Loretta Ceceña, Luna De La Vega and Martha Sofía Marroquín

I. Committee Background

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded in June 1972 as a result of the Stockholm Conference which addressed the human environment. The headquarters are located in Nairobi, Kenya, with 80 member states aiming to provide leadership and improve the quality of life for the next generations. This committee coordinates the United Nations (UN) environmental activities and has played to date a significant role in pointing out and taking action on global issues (Environment & Society Portal, 2004). Some major achievements from UNEP have been the launching of the “Principles for Sustainable Insurance”; helping develop the creation of the Energy Efficiency Toolkit; the shaping of a modern interpretation of fiduciary duty, etc. (Kell, Eco Business, 2017). In order to inspire the youth into taking action, the committee has also taken part in the creation of awards which include the Champions Of The Earth and Young Champions of the Earth awards (Global Environmental Movers, UNEP 2019). In this upcoming decade (2021-2030), UNEP will be collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations in order to implement the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (What is the link, UN, 2020).

II. Topic Information

A. History of the Topic

Armed conflict is defined as the war between two or more states against another state, regardless of the reasons and the intensity. As well as the term 'environment' can be addressed as the surroundings of where a living organism operates. Throughout history, the effects of armed conflict have been severe, affecting the well-being, health, survival and especially the environment. However, the deaths and humanitarian impacts afterwards have been the main issue for the citizens and not much has been done into saving the environment after these disastrous events. This is why the United Nations has been urged to create a 5th Geneva Convention to protect the environment, the people, and the generations to come (Honest Reporting Videos, 2018). Nevertheless, this has not been implemented yet, because of its failure when trying to be executed in the London conference of 1991. The main points that must be taken into consideration if efforts to release it again would be made, would be to break out the problem and tackle the main branches of it; not the whole complex problem as a whole. As the compound issue that it is, legal experts can not do the whole work; implementing tons of laws will not stop this problem. Also, "It's not enough to rely solely on UNEP post-conflict assessments.", so NGOs are encouraged as support, but not the main source (Toxic Remnants of War, 2020).

The existence of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) has helped reduce the issue by using its rules, which protect the natural environment. Having a specific order, these laws are divided into four main parts; the first part provides rules on specific protection to the environment, the second general rules protecting the environment,

third rules on the use of specific weapons, and the fourth the rules that protect the respect for implementation and dissemination of the rules (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020). Although even with these rules and global actions, armed conflicts continue to occur and their impact is proved to be either intentional or the contrary (unintentional). By using landmines and cluster bombs certain countries defend themselves, yet with unintentional purpose damage the environment. On the contrary, many historical wars like World War II and the Japanese War have intentionally manipulated the environment. In April 1986, the Chernobyl accident occurred, and even if it wasn't involved with armed conflict, we can observe what the use of nuclear elements can lead to. The effects of this accident are noticeable even to this day, manifesting themselves in about 4,000 deaths by cancer and the deaths of about 3,000 babies yearly thanks to radiation (Westing, EOLSS, 2000).

The toxic war aftermath of the military-industrial complex is about 153 million metrics of annual carbon pollution, making it one of the most polluting organizations on Earth (Kahn, Gizmodo, 2020). One of the main issues that affect the environment and people's health gravely is depleted uranium, which is chemically, radiologically, and particle toxic. The NATO bombing campaign from Montenegro and Serbia used depleted uranium shells in 1999, which had effects years later on the populations of those countries and on the ecological disaster it created. Depleted uranium contains billions of toxic chemicals, and at least 31% of its mass converts to nanoparticles on impact. However, it is impossible to remove these once they are in the air, and they last up to 4.5 billion years like that, creating devastating ecocide, which many campaigns do not direct their attention towards. The miniature size of these nanoparticles, allows them to travel through body organisms and straight into the nucleus of the cell, which

can harm people's DNA and RNA, leading to diseases like cancer (Spring, Burning Earth Radio, 2017).

Subsequently, to the surprise of many citizens, the environmental damage caused by armed conflicts begins long before the first attack, as well as during and after it. The building of military bases requires a massive amount of materials; all military vehicles are considered to be highly contaminating and require large amounts of energy, and the training causes chemical noise and disruption of landscapes. Another shocking fact is that military bases take 1-6% of the earth's surface. During the conflicts massive CO2 emissions affect the atmosphere, sensitive landscapes are often damaged, the agricultural areas are greatly harmed, great impacts on climate change are shown, there is air and marine pollution and high levels of deforestation and human displacement. "In just 1-2 months a forest fire can release as much carbon emissions as all the cars and trucks in an entire American state for a whole year." Finally, after these conflicts, there is environmental pressure, deforestation and fires (Conflict and Environment Observatory, 2020). We can observe that Afghanistan's forests have decreased by 50% due to war (Pomerantz, Honest Reporting Videos, 2018). Finally, to date, armed conflicts have mainly been occurring in Ukraine, Syria, South Sudan, Libya, India and Pakistan (Global Conflict Tracker, Council On Foreign Relations, 2020).

B. Current Issues

Afghanistan: As previously mentioned, in Afghanistan about 50% of the forests have decreased as a result of war (Pomerantz, Honest Reporting Videos, 2018). This deforestation has been a result of illegal logging, which has destroyed wildlife habitats. The UNEP project focuses on creating environmental resilience as well as sustainability

throughout the country. To achieve this, the programme trains and mentors government counterparts about environmental topics. Some of these topics include “coordination, law and policy, education and awareness, community-based natural resource management, climate change adaptation, protected areas, ecological disaster risk reduction and multilateral environmental agreements.” Furthermore, this programme is helping spread awareness about the increasing climate change situation and how it is affecting Afghan citizens (Afghanistan, UNEP, 2020).

Pakistan: For decades now, India and Pakistan have been fighting for the control of Kashmir. This issue started in 1947 when due to religious issues Pakistan and India separated, and that same year the First Kashmir War started. When the war ended, separate attacks were still committed and the fight for Kashmir continued. Fortunately, all the attacks decreased by 2003, nevertheless nowadays the United States still sees the probability of a nuclear war occurring between Pakistan and India. Commonly both countries accuse each other of ceasing fire and respond with more armed attacks, causing severe damage to the environment and deaths (Conflict Between, Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). On the other hand, the government is involved in diverse non-international conflicts. These armed conflicts are mainly against Taliban-affiliated groups that act throughout the country. In 2002 the government of Pakistan began sending military operations against nonnative fighters hiding inside their tribal areas. That same year the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan group (TTP) started fighting against neighbouring countries, including Afghanistan, and against local tribal groups (Pakistan, RULAC, 2017).

Syria: Currently, several armed conflicts are occurring in Syria, for example, the United States (US) has frequently targeted the positions of the Syrian government. Moreover, it

is fundamental to indicate the alliance created by the US, with Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Jordan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK), Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that stands to attack the Syrian group of the Islamic State. In August 2017, this alliance directed 235 strikes against this group (Syria, RULAC, 2019). Major armed conflicts that have affected the environment in Syria have come from the Civil War, which occurred due to protests against the dictator Bashar Al-Assad (Marks, History, 2021). Even though this Civil War might be coming to an end claiming Bashar Al-Assad victorious with Russia and Iran, the crisis will continue to exist, as the environment will take plenty of years to recover from the catastrophe. Some of the aftereffects were from chemical weapons that Bashar Al-Assad sent after his own citizens (World Politics Review, 2020).

C. UN Action

Above all the clear issues armed conflicts initiate, the United Nations Environmental Programme is highly aware of the environmental damage they create and therefore is looking for effective solutions. On November 5th, 2001, the United Nations announced November 6th of each year to be the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict, which strives to create awareness for all people about this grave but underestimated issue. Later, on May 27th, 2016, the United Nations Environmental Assembly embraced a resolution that recognized the role of healthy ecosystems and well-controlled resources in reducing the risk of armed conflicts. Moreover, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs is working as a part of the United Nations to prevent conflict and sustain peace. Some of the main causes of war in vulnerable areas are caused by the results of climate change, since it intensifies competition among natural resources,

increases food prices, as well as escalates geopolitical tensions (What is the link, UN, 2020). Undoubtedly, if the United Nations is aiming to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) it is urgent to reduce the threat that armed conflicts create to the environment. Finally, Ms. Anderson, the UNEP executive director stated that “On this International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict we have only one way forward: to up our ambition to protect our planet, even in the most complex and challenging scenarios” (UN News, 2019).

III. Essential Questions

1. Is your country currently involved in an armed conflict? If so, which one?
2. What impact do armed conflicts have on the environment?
3. What is the United Nations doing to address this issue?
4. Has your nation’s environment been affected by armed conflict? If so, in which way?
5. Which other organizations are working on helping countries resolve the environmental impact of armed conflicts? Is your country working with any of them? If so, which ones?
6. Are there any treaties or conventions that protect the environment during an armed conflict? If so, which ones? Is your country party to any of them?

IV. Resources

“Afghanistan.” United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). United Nations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/disasters-conflicts/where-we-work/afghanistan>>.

“Conflict Between India and Pakistan.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-between-india-and-pakistan>>.

“Environmental Costs.” Watson Institute. Brown University, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/social/environment#:~:text=The%20wars%20in%20Iraq%2C%20Afghanistan,natural%20environments%20of%20these%20countries.&text=Along%20with%20the%20degradation%20of,have%20also%20been%20adversely%20affected>>.

“Global Conflict Tracker.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/?category=us>>.

“Global Environmental Movers and Shakers Receive UNEP Champions of the Earth Awards.” United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). United Nations, 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/global-environmental-movers-and-shakers-receive-unep-champions-earth>>.

“Guidelines on Protection of Natural Environment in Armed Conflict.” International Committee of the Red Cross. International Committee of the Red Cross, 27 Nov. 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/guidelines-protection-natural-environment-armed-conflict-rules-and-recommendations-relating>>.

“How Does War Damage the Environment?” Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS). Conflict and Environment Observatory, 10 Nov. 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<http://ceobs.org/how-does-war-damage-the-environment/>> .

"International Armed Conflicts in Syria." Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (RULAC). Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<http://www.rulac.org/browse/conflicts/international-armed-conflict-in-syria>>.

"International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict." United Nations (UN). United Nations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.un.org/en/observances/environment-in-war-protection-day>>.

Kahn, Brian. "Groundbreaking Report Gives Us a Glimpse of the US Military's Gigantic Carbon Footprint." Gizmodo. Gizmodo 13 June 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://earth.gizmodo.com/groundbreaking-report-gives-us-a-glimpse-of-the-u-s-mi-1835458508>>.

Kell, Georg. "What the UNEP FI Has Achieved in 25 Years." Eco Business. Eco Business, 19 Oct. 2017. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/what-the-unep-fi-has-achieved-in-25-years/>>.

Marks, Julie. "Why Is There a Civil War in Syria?" History. A&E Television Networks, 14 Sept. 2018, Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<http://www.history.com/news/syria-civil-war-assad-rebels>>.

"Non-International Armed Conflicts in Pakistan." Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (RULAC). Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://>>

www.rulac.org/browse/conflicts/non-international-armed-conflicts-in-pakistan#collapse1accord>.

Pomerantz, Daniel "Environmental Impact of War." Honest Reporting Videos. Honest Reporting Videos, July 5. 2018. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI83U71HrPA>>.

Spring, Gerard "The Environmental Cost of War." Burning Earth Radio. Burning Earth Radio, May 18. 2017. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ0RbV5N1Os>>.

"Step up action to protect the planet during wartime: UN environment chief." UN News. United Nations, 2021. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1050761>>.

"The Syrian Civil War's Never-Ending Endgame." World Politics Review. World Politics Review, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/28041/the-syria-civil-war-might-be-ending-but-the-crisis-will-live-on>>.

"Syria." Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (RULAC). Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.rulac.org/browse/countries/syria#collapse1accord>>.

"United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Established." Environment & Society Portal. United Nations, 2004. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/tools/keywords/united-nations-environmental-programme-unep-established>>.

ISRMUN 2021

"What is the link between climate change and conflict?" United Nations. United Nations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tsz5Jgjd2x8&feature=emb_logo>.

Westing, Arthur. "ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF WAR." 2000. Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS). Westing Associates in Environment, 2000. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<http://www.eolss.net/Sample-Chapters/C14/E1-40-05-01.pdf>>.