

Chair's Preface

We present this book to the world at a time when international relations are being convulsed by a war on terrorism. Issues of conflict and security are once again at the top of the policy agenda, if indeed they ever left. While the vast consequences of this latest conflict figure prominently in such discussions, the underlying forces of poverty, inequity and unmet expectations as causes are being widely acknowledged as well. These forces drive, and are at least in part driven by, environmental change and degradation in many parts of the world. Indeed, recent events underscore how important these relationships are to preventing instability and conflict.

In February of 2000, a group of prominent researchers and practitioners from the fields of natural resource management, insurance and policy-making were brought together by IUCN and IISD. The mission of this Task Force was to identify areas where conservationists could contribute to peace, and make a compelling argument to that community about how the links between environment, conflict and disaster are relevant to their efforts. Inevitably, tackling these problems extends much further than our modest effort, but we felt it important to build a bridge between the security community and that of natural resource management.

Through two meetings of the Task Force and presentations to the international community at the World Conservation Congress in Amman, Jordan, in 2000, we encountered remarkable receptiveness to our efforts. "Environmental security" was the unofficial motto at the Congress in Jordan, underscored by rising instability in the Middle East. Linking conservation to peoples' social and economic security—as Queen Noor of Jordan urged us to do in her opening statement to the Congress—will hopefully make conservation more relevant to the lives of a wider public.

We left Jordan convinced that these links do matter, that they are as relevant today as they were when we first sought to elaborate on them in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987.

Understanding the links between "environment" and "security" has proven to be a challenging and fruitful exercise for researchers and policy-makers over the past several decades. Although we learned from the debates in our Task Force of the difficulties in pinning down the exact nature of the relationship between these two seemingly elusive concepts, we know that in the midst of the ambiguity there is in fact a vital and powerful insight awaiting, not unlike the notion of sustainable development.

Marvin Sooros put it well in 1994, stating:

The usefulness of these abstract concepts is not in conveying a precise meaning, which would render them intellectually barren,

but in the discussions and indeed the controversies that they provoke, which lead to new insights and perspectives. Coining of the phrase “environmental security” has prompted a re-examination of the essence of security, thus enriching debate on social priorities and resource allocations (320).¹

This volume seeks to further the debate through a collection of case studies from a diverse group of experts who explore the links between natural resource management and social stability and peace, focusing on their implications for peoples’ livelihoods. By looking at a range of topics and events, such as forest fires in Indonesia; the turbot fishery dispute between Canada and Spain; violent conflict in Rwanda; and the impacts of Hurricane Mitch in Central America, the authors present a compelling case for using conservation as a tool for enhancing security and building lasting peace.

Rather than relegating environmental management activities to the periphery of political discussions, these activities should be recognized as viable measures for addressing some of the environmental sources of vulnerability and conflict. Not content with a review of the literature, our task force sought to initiate a process of translating the concepts from the environment and security field into recommendations for policy-makers and conservationists.

As the Chair of the IISD/IUCN Task Force on Environment and Security, and on behalf of its distinguished members, I am hopeful that through your own reading of our work here, you will find the basis for ground-level action to protect and enhance the environmental basis for security.

Mohammed Sahnoun

Chair, IISD/IUCN Task Force on Environment and Security

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1. M. Sooros, “Global change, environmental security and the prisoner’s dilemma,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 31 (3) (1994), p. 320.