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Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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Natural Resource Management Critical to Peacebuilding

Over Forty Per cent of Intrastate Conflicts Linked to Natural Resources, Says UNEP Report

Nairobi, 20 February 2009 – Intrastate conflicts are likely to drag on and escalate without a greater focus on environment and natural resources in the peacebuilding process, according to a new report launched today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In addition, conflicts with a link to natural resources are twice as likely to relapse within the first five years, as shown by data collected by Uppsala University and the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo.

Even so, fewer than 25 per cent of peace agreements for resource-linked conflicts have addressed those linkages, leaving many post-conflict countries vulnerable to conflict relapse.

A stronger role for environment in post-conflict planning, along with greater capacity for early warning, are required to address environmental risks and capitalize on opportunities, the report says. This includes a more robust and comprehensive inclusion of environmental issues in UN peacebuilding activities, and a more careful harnessing of natural resources for economic recovery, essential services and sustainable livelihoods.

A timely input from UNEP as a fragile peace prevails in the Middle East and conflict rages on in Darfur and the Northern provinces of DR Congo, the paper analyses the links between environment, conflict and peacebuilding through fourteen case studies, including Afghanistan, Darfur, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The often devastating direct impacts of conflict on the environment have been established by UNEP through some 15 post-conflict environmental assessments, which have documented environmental damage from armed conflict around the world since 1999. But the indirect consequences of post-conflict coping mechanisms and the damage inflicted to the capacity of government institutions are also key problems.

Even after an initial cessation of violence, natural resources can contribute to conflict relapse in the post-conflict period, and help finance a continued insurgency. No less than 18 violent conflicts have been fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources since 1990.

As the global population continues to rise, and demand for resources continues to grow, there is significant potential for conflicts over natural resources to intensify in the coming decades. In addition, new conflicts could be generated by the possible consequences of climate change for water availability and food security, for example.

UNEP's new report, however, suggests that there are also considerable opportunities for environment to contribute to peace consolidation rather than conflict.

Naming sustainable livelihoods, dialogue and confidence-building as potential keys to peacebuilding, the report also emphasizes the important role that carefully managed resources can play to jump-start economic activity in post-conflict countries. By providing a platform for cooperation, common environmental needs and resource-related goals can be a significant impetus for peace.

The report, which inaugurates a new policy series by UNEP, was co-authored by the Expert Advisory Group on Environment, Conflict and Peacebuilding established by UNEP in 2008, which is composed of senior experts from academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and think tanks that have demonstrated leadership in environment and conflict issues.

With continued support from the Government of Finland, a collection of 60 case studies on best practices of natural resource management for peacebuilding will be published by UNEP as a follow up to this report in 2010. In addition, UNEP is joining forces with the European Commission, the UN Development Programme, the UN Department of Political Affairs, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and UN-Habitat to develop guidance and training to address resource-based conflicts at the field level.

The full report is available on:

http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/pcdmb_policy_01.pdf

Notes to Editors:

About this report

This report, which inaugurates a new policy series by UNEP on the environmental dimensions of disasters and conflicts, aims to summarize the latest knowledge and field experience on the linkages between environment, conflict and peacebuilding, and to demonstrate the need for those linkages to be addressed in a more coherent and systematic way by the UN, Member States and other stakeholders. As such, it is linked to a wider cooperation on conflict and natural resource management started between the European Commission and the United Nations system in 2008, which has resulted in a new project funded by the European Commission under the Instrument for Stability on “Strengthening Capacities for Consensual and Sustainable Management of Land and Natural Resources.”

A joint product of UNEP and the Expert Advisory Group, this paper was co-authored by Richard Matthew of the University of California, Irvine, Oli Brown of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and David Jensen of UNEP’s Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB). It was open for peer review to all UN agencies, programmes and funds working on conflict and peacebuilding, as well as to the Member States and observers of the Peacebuilding Commission. It was also released as a consultation draft at four international meetings during 2008, involving over 250 environment, security, peacebuilding and development practitioners.

About UNEP's Expert Advisory Group on Environment, Conflict and Peacebuilding

To broaden UNEP's expertise and analytical capacity, an Expert Advisory Group on Environment, Conflict and Peacebuilding was established in February 2008. Coordinated by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) the advisory group provides independent expertise, develops tools and policy inputs, and identifies best practices in using natural resources and the environment in ways that contribute to peacebuilding. The group is composed of senior experts from academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and think tanks that have demonstrated leadership in environment and conflict issues.

About UNEP's Disaster and Conflict Operations

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) conducts field-based environmental assessments and strengthens national environmental management capacity in countries affected by conflicts and disasters. Using state-of-the-art science and technology, UNEP deploys teams of environmental experts to assess environmental damage and determine risks for human health, livelihoods and security.

Since 1999, UNEP has operated in more than twenty-five countries and published eighteen environmental assessment reports. Based on this expertise, UNEP is providing technical assistance to the UN Peacebuilding Commission in assessing the role of natural resources and the environment in conflict and peacebuilding. The main objective of this cooperation is to prevent natural resources and environmental stress from undermining the peacebuilding process while at the same time using environment as a platform for dialogue, cooperation and confidence-building.

For more information on the UNEP Disasters and Conflicts programme, see:

<http://www.unep.org/conflictsanddisasters/>

Quotes on Environment, Conflict and Peacebuilding:

"Throughout human history, people and countries have fought over natural resources. From livestock, watering holes and fertile land, to trade routes, fish stocks and spices, sugar, oil, gold and other precious commodities, war has too often been the means to secure possession of scarce resources. Even today, the uninterrupted supply of fuel and minerals is a key element of geopolitical considerations. Things are easier at times of plenty, when all can share in the abundance, even if to different degrees. But when resources are scarce – whether energy, water or arable land – our fragile ecosystems become strained, as do the coping mechanisms of groups and individuals. This can lead to a breakdown of established codes of conduct, and even outright conflict."

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, 2007

"War-torn countries rich in natural resources face particular challenges in the stabilization and reconstruction of their societies, despite the apparent promise that natural resource wealth holds for peacebuilding and development. Where resource exploitation has driven war, or served to impede peace, improving governance capacity to control natural resources is a critical element of peacebuilding."

Carolyn McAskie, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, 2007

“We find ourselves in the early steep climb of exponential change: per capita consumption of materials and energy; the demand for shrinking natural resources, most critical of which is fresh water; climate change with an impact on virtually every aspect of human welfare; the cost of war; and the destruction of ecosystems and species, which have hitherto sustained us scot free. These trends are interlocked and mutually reinforcing. We must study and address them as a unity. Success would ensure a future for humanitarian civilization. Failure is unthinkable.”

Pulitzer Prize-winning Ecologist E.O. Wilson, Harvard University, 2008

For more information please contact:

Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel: +41 79 596 5737, or E-mail:

nick.nuttall@unep.org

Silja Halle, UNEP Communications Advisor, on Tel: +41 79 634 08 99, or E-mail:

silja.halle@unep.ch