

## Initiatives within the UN system to increase environmental security in relation to armed conflicts



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**CEOBS works with international organisations, civil society, academia and communities to:**

- Monitor and publicise data on the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts and military activities;
- Develop tools to improve data collection and sharing;
- Monitor and contribute to developments in law and policy that could reduce humanitarian and environmental harm.

UK charity 1174115

Formerly the...



TOXIC REMNANTS  
OF WAR PROJECT



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## About us

- We have worked at a number of UN fora on depleted uranium weapons, toxic remnants of war, and the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts.
- Our advocacy is informed by the field of humanitarian disarmament, which in turn is based on promoting human security needs.
- In practice this means ensuring that the humanitarian and - environmental - consequences of military practices are the focus of the discourse.
- In this, humanitarian disarmament differs from historical state-centric arms control or disarmament activities.



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## About our work

- Key to our work has been the collection and presentation of data on environmental harm and its derived humanitarian consequences.
- This has been particularly important given the low prioritisation afforded to the environment in security debates, and the political constraints faced by UN agencies such as UNEP in what data they can present and when.
- As a very small organisation, we have drawn heavily on the technical and academic expertise of a wide range of individuals in framing and developing our advocacy interventions.
- Our activities have primarily focused on the UN General Assembly's First and Sixth committees, and the UN Environment Assembly.



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### Considerations for pursuing legal and political initiatives at the UN

- Who are your partners from academia, NGOs, think-tanks, international organisations and states? Are your objectives the same or do they just overlap?
- As there is no designated UN forum for debating and addressing environmental security topics, what are the limitations of the forum you have chosen?
- You need to fully understand the internal process of each forum and the roles of the different actors within it to identify opportunities to steer initiatives.
- Do you have the capacity to influence states on both the national level and at international fora?
- What exactly will your initiative achieve in terms of positive change on the ground, who will implement it and who will monitor its implementation?



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### Considerations for pursuing legal and political initiatives at the UN

- How does your initiative relate to or complement other ongoing environmental security initiatives?
- The lack of expert knowledge on our topics among diplomats has a range of implications, some positive, some negative.
- How quickly can your advocacy work respond to unexpected developments?
- While we may try to promote discrete environmental security topics, national interests and positions often make it hard to deal with particular themes in isolation.
- Many states hold, or are increasingly developing, divergent views on what constitutes environmental security, and its relevance as a topic within particular UN fora.



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State	Talked about	In their words
<b>China</b>	Vague strengthening of international cooperation and dialogue mechanisms, particularly on transboundary issues.	"China stands ready to work together with the rest of the international community to promote the sustainable development and utilization of water resources and to promote peace and security in a bid to realize peace, stability, development and the prosperity of humankind."
<b>France</b>	Clear call for an "equitable multilateral framework" for cooperation on water; Security Council has a key role to play in water resource management and it must ensure the protection of water infrastructure during and after conflicts.	"France is in favour of establishing a space for dialogue on water issues in their entirety..."
<b>Russia</b>	Called for technocratic solutions on the state level, with the solution being national development and ownership of issues; favours strengthening of existing UN water mechanisms.	"...we are concerned by the ongoing attempts to directly incorporate a security component into issues relating to water resources."
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Respecting IHL and the importance of protecting infrastructure; the solution is greater investment in information, institutions and infrastructure.	"...when combined with the right political interventions, including by the Security Council, together we can reduce the impact of water problems at the local, national and regional levels."
<b>United States</b>	Supporting the regional resolution of water disputes by building the capacity of states and stakeholders; the establishment of regional organisations, bilateral agreements and information-sharing platforms; sound data and impartial analysis as a foundation for decision-making.	"I would like to reiterate our support for developing creative, win-win solutions to transboundary water challenges."



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## Bridging the environmental security divide

- States bear the primary responsibility for responding to security challenges on their territories.
- The UN Charter assigned the UNGA and ECOSOC a mandate to consider socioeconomic and environmental issues. Vital to maintain the principle of division of labour between the UNGA, ECOSOC and the UNSC.
- The UNGA, with its universal membership, makes recommendations on such issues, considered in the relevant specialised committees and in individual forums such as the UNFCCC.
- Combining all these elements together and preparing balanced decisions on them demands a variety of expertise and time that the UNSC does not possess.
- It is inappropriate to transfer to the UNSC general issues that come under the remit of other principal organs within the UN system with a much broader representation States.

**Russia, UNSC debate on 'Addressing complex contemporary challenges to international peace and security', December 2017.**



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## Learning from climate security at the UNSC

*"This review suggests that the climate challenge fits poorly with the Council's modus operandi. In general, the Council is reactive, hierarchical, and often poorly informed, and has weak monitoring and follow-through." Conca, Thwaite and Lee: **Climate Change and global security (2017)***

Their proposals for UNSC climate security approaches: "climate" exchanged for "water".

- Improve the Secretary-General's reporting function on "contextual information" about water-conflict links.
- Encourage forward-looking initiatives that are supported by affected member states, e.g. integrated regional initiatives.
- Use experience to evaluate capabilities, e.g. an assessment of the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to security-related water issues.
- Challenge countries aspiring to a Council seat to explain how they view its role on water.
- Work for a symbolic gesture by the permanent Council members, e.g. a resolution.



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## Is the UNSC politically and conceptually equipped for addressing environmental security?

- Resolutions on natural resources and security during 2000s.
- Debates on climate change and security since 2007.
- Water and security since 2016.

But...

- If veto wielding UNSC members are reluctant to address environmental security resolutions, will environmental security issues need to be inserted into other topics, for example environmental degradation and climate change in the 2017 Lake Chad resolution? If so what are the implications of that?
- Or, given the linkages between all our environmental security issues, should we instead have approached the environment as a cross-cutting issue, like gender in UNSC resolution 1325? **Environment, Peace and Security.**



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## Are we advocating for duplication at the UN level?

### Recommendations for water in conflicts, A Matter of Survival (2017):

- An independent international body mandated to gather information about destruction and water supply cuts as well as to foster technical assistance during protracted armed conflicts;
- A mechanism to monitor compliance with International Humanitarian Law and reparations to victims of violations;
- Improved cooperation among the relevant international organizations and agencies to manage post-conflict environmental assessments and remedial measures.

But...

- These and other objectives in the report, are not just issues for water, they are equally relevant to many of the other environmental dimensions of armed conflicts.



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## Conclusions

1. Advocacy is most effective when it is data driven and undertaken in partnership with a diverse group of stakeholders, including states, international organisations and civil society.
2. The barriers to promoting environmental security topics at the UNSC are both institutional and geopolitical.
3. The breadth of the environmental security landscape and the diversity of current legal, political and policy initiatives risks duplication without more effective coordination.
4. That said, it is surprising what can be achieved with minimal resources and targeted advocacy.



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Thank you



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