



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations



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Protecting the Environment is Protecting Civilians

CONCEPT NOTE

PoC Week VIRTUAL Side Event to UNSC Open Debate on PoC

29 May 2020 | 1:00pm – 2:30pm EDT

Meeting to be held virtually via Zoom

Background:

Armed conflicts contribute to significant environmental devastation and conflict pollution. Attacks on industrial sites and other critical and environmental infrastructure can result in the exposure of civilians to toxic conflict pollutants and affect access to water infrastructure with resulting impacts on food and water security. In the long-term, the collapse of environmental governance can contribute to significant public health problems and result in the spread of communicable diseases. Furthermore, wider impacts on the natural environment due to illegal deforestation, waste dumping and desertification can seriously impact post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. These linkages have also been underscored by the UN Secretary-General in his 2019 and 2020 reports on the Protection of Civilians (PoC), and reaffirmed in the statements made by International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) during the 2019 UN Security Council open debate on PoC.

In recent years, there have been a number of important international legal and policy developments aimed at addressing these concerns. In 2019, the International Law Commission adopted (on the first reading) its 28 Draft Principles on Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts, while there have also been two UN Environmental Assembly resolutions in 2016 and 2017, and an increase of informal debates on the subject in two UN Security Council Arrria-formula meetings in 2018 and 2019. Furthermore, the ICRC is expected to release its updated *Guidelines for Military Manuals for Instruction on the Protection of the Environment in Times of Armed Conflict* in 2020, and there has been growing support for this work from civil society groups and academics.

PoC Week Virtual Side Event to UNSC Open Debate on PoC:

The protection of the environment in armed conflict (PERAC) is intrinsically linked with the protection of civilians, as the behaviour of military actors in armed conflicts – both state and non-state actors – can have detrimental impacts on the safety and security of civilians and communities. This link is further expanded upon in the in this year’s UNSG report on PoC. The UN, Member States, civil society and academics have repeatedly called for a comprehensive approach to monitoring and assessing risks and finding solutions to preventing environmental degradation and resulting threats to civilians in armed conflict.

In this aim, the Government of Switzerland, the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, the Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPax), and PAX will convene a virtual panel of global experts to explore these linkages and the need for coordinated multi-stakeholder solutions during “PoC Week” on the side-lines of the May 2020 UNSC Open Debate on PoC.



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Format:

The event will be held virtually via Zoom from 1:00pm – 2:30pm on 29 May 2020. Following welcoming remarks, the discussion will begin with introductions by the moderator and briefings from the featured expert discussants. Each briefer will be allotted an initial 10 minutes to speak. The briefings will be followed by an opportunity for interactive discussion during which the floor will be open to the audience for a Q&A session.

Moderator:

- **Mr. Carl Bruch**, *Environmental Peacebuilding Association*

Speakers:

Opening remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Jürg Lauber**, *Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations*

Panel discussion:

- **Ms. Vanessa Murphy**, *International Committee of the Red Cross*
- **Ms. Emilia Wahlstrom**, *Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit*
- **Mr. Wim Zwijnenburg**, *PAX*

Closing remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Dang Dinh Quy**, *Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations*

Objectives:

The panel and following interactive discussion present an important opportunity for:

- 1) A discussion and exchange among global experts and policy-makers on the linkages between PERAC and PoC, incorporating ongoing conflict monitoring and research conducted by civil society and academics to support a better understanding of the conflict-environment nexus, and promoting current political and operational work undertaken by Member States and the UN on this topic.
- 2) Participants to further explore and identify opportunities for all relevant stakeholders to improve coordination in order to better prevent, minimize and mitigate environmental damage and associated civilian harm, both in military conduct, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction.



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Questions for consideration:

- What steps can UN Member States take to address environmental dimensions of armed conflict in military planning and humanitarian response?
- What mechanisms exist/can be developed to identify, document and analyze environment impacts of armed conflict through data collection, sharing and response?
- What transformative strategies can be developed to address the environmental health risks of conflicts through the UN system that will ensure prevention, mitigation and minimalization of environmental impacts?
- How can the issue of environment, peace and security be better integrated in the UN system to improve capacities to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and be part of inclusive post-conflict reconstruction and environmental peacebuilding?
- How can the roles of civil society, States and UN agencies complement each other to improve prevention and mitigation efforts?

RSVP and further information:

Please RSVP via <https://bit.ly/PERACisPOC> by 5pm EDT Wednesday, 27 May 2020. Prior registration is required to attend. Joining instructions to follow via email.

For more information, please contact Ms. Brittany Roser at roser@paxforpeace.nl or +1 (646) 318 – 8698.