



Protecting the environment is protecting civilians:

The humanitarian dimensions of the environment, peace and security agenda

Concept Note

PoC Week Side Event to UNSC Open Debate on PoC

26 May 2021 | 1:00pm – 2:30pm EDT

Meeting to be held virtually via Zoom

Background:

In 2021, civilians living in conflict-zones have continued to see the detrimental impacts of conflict-related environmental damage and an increased vulnerability to climate and environmental health risks as violence wreaks havoc on governance and mitigation infrastructure. Direct and indirect impacts of military activities on critical environmental infrastructure have had deadly and potentially long-term effects on civilian lives and livelihoods, including contributing to food and water insecurity; exposure to toxic hazards from damaged industrial sites and/or remnants of war; and the destruction of necessary public health infrastructure; among others. Resulting breakdowns in civilian access to safe water supply, waste disposal, and pollution control services have further limited capacities to protect human health and stem the spread of communicable diseases like COVID-19 in conflict-affected communities. Furthermore, as fighting has increasingly taken place in urban areas in recent years, the risk and magnitude of civilian exposure to environmental harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has also increased.

Growing empirical evidence linking armed conflict, environmental degradation, and climate concerns has driven the discourse forward within the UN system in recent years. For example, in his last three reports to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres underscored the direct environmental impacts of conflict on human health and suffering, and Member States have continued to drive the conversation forward in the UN Security Council,¹ General Assembly,² Environment Assembly, and beyond. Building on this momentum, there are unique opportunities to improve recognition, monitoring, and assessment of these risks in order to find solutions to improve responses that prevent environmental degradation and resulting threats to civilians in armed conflict.

On 26 May, the Governments of **Belgium, Costa Rica, Niger, Switzerland** and **Viet Nam**, in partnership with the **Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPax)**, and **PAX**, will convene a virtual side-event to the annual UNSC debate on the Protection of Civilians examining the detrimental impacts of conflict-related environmental damage on civilians, and exploring the linkages between protecting the environment and protecting civilians in armed conflict.

¹ High-level UNSC debates on climate and security in [July 2020](#) and [February 2021](#) and the humanitarian effects of environmental degradation and peace and security in [September 2020](#), as well as Arria formula meetings on the protection of the environment during armed conflict in [November 2018](#) and [December 2019](#).

² UNGA75 high-level side event on the humanitarian impact of combined conflict, climate and environmental risks in [September 2020](#).



Objectives:

By bringing together experts from a range of environmental, humanitarian, and protection fields, the event will seek to identify and promote coordinated recommendations for the prevention, mitigation, and remediation of conflict-related environmental damage as a means of improving civilian protection. Projected speakers will cover environmental dimensions of humanitarian response in armed conflicts, explore policies to prevent and limit environmental damage from military operations, and illustrate various cases from ongoing conflicts.

Program:

1:00 pm – 1:15 pm Opening remarks:

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

1:15 pm – 1:55 pm Moderated panel discussion, featuring:

- **Ms. Johana Bretou-Klein**, *Researcher at the London School of Economics and Political Science*
- **Mr. Chris Harland**, *Deputy Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross Delegation in New York*
- **Mr. Dominick de Waal**, *Senior Economist at the World Bank*
- **Mr. Wim Zwijnenburg**, *Conflict and Environment Project Leader at PAX*

1:55 pm – 2:25 pm Q&A Session moderated by:

- **Dr. Erika Weinthal**, *Vice President of the Environmental Peacebuilding Association, Professor of Environmental and Public Policy at Duke University*

2:25 pm – 2:30 pm Closing remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Philippe Kridelka**, *Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations*

RSVP and further information:

Please register via <http://bit.ly/PERACisPoC2021> by 5pm EDT on 25 May 2021. Prior registration is required to attend. Joining instructions to follow via email. For more information, please contact Ms. Brittany Roser at rosier@paxforpeace.nl or +1.646.318.8698.