Protecting the environment is protecting civilians

Environmental and climate tools in peace operations

PoC Week Side Event
Thursday, 26 May 2022
10:00 – 11:30 EDT | 16:00 – 17:30 CEST
Virtual event to be held via Zoom. Register here.

Background:

There is growing recognition in the UN Security Council and other international and regional security bodies, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the African Union (AU), that environmental degradation, poor management of natural resources and the impacts of climate change are serious non-traditional security challenges to UN and non-UN multilateral peace operations.¹ These challenges have implications for the planning, execution, deployment, drawdown, effectiveness, and long-term legacy of peace operations, including capacities for protection. In addition, these risks pose compounding threats to the civilian lives and livelihoods in the countries in which these international missions operate.

Eight of the 15 most climate-vulnerable countries host a UN peacekeeping operation or special political mission. Rising temperatures, more severe and frequent extreme weather events, and erratic rainfall limiting water access have been linked to volatile food prices, insecure livelihoods, and large-scale displacement, challenging human security in the contexts that missions are operating in.² Further destruction of the environment in conflict, including through conflict pollution and contamination of air, water, and land, have had devastating and long-term humanitarian impacts. The UN, including through the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM), has aimed to address the need for a more systematic and cross-sectoral approach to climate-related security risks, including through supporting field missions with tools for risk assessments and response, enhancing knowledge management, and strengthening partnerships and advocacy across the UN and beyond.³ The UN’s Joint Environment Unit has also provided coordination of emergency relief efforts in response to environmental dimensions of crises.

Increasingly, mission mandates have included language focusing on environmental and climate concerns. For example: UNFICYP’s mandate includes calls to address issues related to climate change impacts and environmental degradation; MINUSCA and MONUSCO have been tasked to take into consideration the environmental impacts of its operations; and UNMISS, UNOCA, UNSOM, UNAMI, UNITAMS, and MINUSMA mandates call for risk assessment and management strategies for climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters impacting the host country.

Meanwhile, over the past decade, organizations such as NATO, the AU, and the OSCE have begun integrating environmental degradation and natural resource scarcity into their operational planning and

implementation. In August 2020, AMISOM (now ATMIS) appointed an Environmental Security Advisor and launched Environmental Protection and Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for their operations in Somalia. In their March 2021, “Protection of Civilians Allied Command Operations Handbook”, NATO included considerations of the impacts on the natural environment and climate change related to their operations as necessary to include in assessments of civilian harm and mitigation planning. However, more must be done to improve the breadth and scale of the environmental and climate capacities in peace operations in order to improve prevention, mitigation, and response to the risks posed to civilians.

**Objective:**

On **26 May 2022**, the Governments of **Costa Rica** and **Switzerland**, in partnership with **PAX** and the **Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI)**, will convene a panel discussion, entitled “Protecting the Environment is Protecting Civilians: Exploring environmental and climate impacts and tools in peace operations”. A diverse group of experts including representatives from international organizations such as the UN, Member States, civil society organizations, and environment and climate research institutions, will examine existing and proposed environmental and climate capacities of peace operations and international interventions in conflict and at-risk settings, including conflict-linked environmental degradation and climate concerns both for civilians and the effectiveness of peace operations. The panel will further explore how the inclusion and broader propagation of environmental and climate-related prevention, mitigation, and response tools in peace operations can contribute to immediate and longer-term protection capacities. This event will take place virtually as part of the “PoC Week” on the margins of the annual UN Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians.

**Guiding questions:**

- How can the inclusion of environmental and climate-related prevention, mitigation, and response tools in peace operations contribute to immediate and longer-term protection capacities?
- What environmental and climate tools currently exist within peace operations, and how can they be improved to better mitigate impacts and protect civilians in conflict and at-risk settings? What lessons can be learned, or best practices shared?
- What steps can be taken to improve coordination and cooperation across and within peace operations for better employment of environmental and climate risk mitigation tools aimed at addressing threats and responding to impacts on civilians and civilian infrastructure? What steps can national and local stakeholders take?

**Panel:**

Dr. Florian Krampe, *Senior Researcher and Director of Climate Change and Risk Programme, SIPRI*

Dr. Catherine-Lune Grayson, *Policy Advisor - Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division, ICRC*

Mr. Wim Zwijnenburg, *Conflict and Environment Project Leader, PAX*

Mr. Jimmy Okumu, *Civil Affairs Officer, United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)*

The panel will be followed by a moderated Q&A session open to the audience.

**RSVP and further information:**

*Please register via [http://bit.ly/PERACisPoC2022](http://bit.ly/PERACisPoC2022) by 5pm EDT on 25 May 2022. 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.*