

BACKGROUND GUIDE

**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAMME**

NMMUN 2021



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMM

INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to welcome you to the United Nations Environment Programme at the first ever virtual New Millennium Model United Nations! We are Anushree Kotwal and Chakradhara Chowdary, and we will be your chairpersons. We will be your mentors and help you introduce agenda and stir up discussions throughout the council proceedings.

We hope this document guides you to uncover solutions to the pressing issue at hand. Please note that as your research is not restricted to the guide, we highly recommend analyzing and examining your nation's policies and framework by using external sources.

As MUNs are formal sessions regarding vital issues, we expect you to abide by the Rules of Procedure and and hope you learn and enhance the art of diplomacy and public speaking.

Since the conference is being held virtually this time, only one topic will be debated upon. We understand the concerns and anxieties that some of you might have in light of the event being virtual, but we want to assure you that we will constantly be here to help you and to make sure that your experience is fruitful and enjoyable.

Regards,
Chakradhara Chowdary and Anushree Kotwal

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.

MANDATE

United Nations Environment Programme is an organization established in 1972 to guide and coordinate environmental activities within the United Nations (UN) system.

Features:

1. UNEP promotes international cooperation on environmental issues, provides guidance to UN organizations, and encourages the international scientific community to participate in formulating policies for many of the environmental projects.
2. The organization has encouraged participation by the private sector to promote the sustainable use of the world's natural resources.
3. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) seeks to minimize environmental threats to human well-being from the environmental causes and consequences of conflicts and disasters

Its duty revolves around resolving issues relating to seven broad thematic areas: climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, chemicals and waste, resource efficiency, and environment under review.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The United Nations Environmental Programme was founded in June 1972 as a result of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The

UNEP is the coordinating body for the United Nations' environmental activities. It has played a significant role in identifying and analyzing global environmental problems, developing regional and international environmental programs and conventions, and promoting environmental science and information. Among its most important tasks is assisting developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

Issue: Protection of the environment in armed conflicts

For almost as long as humanity has existed, so have conflicts. Conflicts between human beings are nothing new and neither are the effects that these conflicts tend to have on the environment. Then why is this issue so important in today's world?

Because the amount of damage caused to the environment has increased drastically and the number of conflicts has increased in recent years as well.

Degradation of the environment is an inevitable consequence of armed conflicts and/or wars. The toll of warfare today reaches far beyond human suffering, displacement and damage to homes and infrastructure. Modern conflicts also cause extensive destruction of the environment. In turn environmental damage, which often extends beyond the borders of conflict affected countries, can threaten the lives and livelihoods of people well after peace agreements are signed.

The effects of these wars often continue long after the war itself. Various wars throughout history like the Second World War, the Afghanistan War, Gulf War etc. have already shown this to be true. Despite all this, no proper steps have been taken to protect the environment during conflicts.

HISTORY OF THE AGENDA

War is a miserable thing. It kills and maims soldiers and civilians. It destroys infrastructure, cultures, and communities. It worsens poverty and development challenges. And it damages and cripples vital ecological and environmental resources.

The disdain for - and prohibition against - intentionally targeting civilian structures is rooted in custom, religious rules, and ethical codes of behaviour that go back thousands of years. In Yemen, for example, attacks on civilian water systems have led to a massive epidemic of cholera, with over 1 million cases reported and over 2,000 deaths.

After the Second World War, efforts were made to develop even stronger legal protections for civilians and infrastructure. The 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention's Article 53 prohibits deliberate or indiscriminate destruction of property belonging to individuals or "the State, or to other public authorities" and Article 147 bans "extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly." Even more explicit civilian and environmental protections were developed with the 1977 Protocols to the Geneva Convention, including Protocol I, which limits warfare that causes "superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering" or "widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment"), prohibits indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and protects civilian infrastructure critical to the survival of civilian populations.

But the question remains: Are these protections relevant—or sufficient—to address the threat of human-caused climate changes and related threats to resources?

The state of current international laws of war. All these efforts, legal statements, and principles fail to adequately protect civilians and the environment during armed conflicts. The 1991 civil war in Somalia destroyed the water system, which in turn contributed to outbreaks of cholera affecting 55 ,000 people. ISIS attacked major dams along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and used them as weapons to either deny downstream populations of water or to flood areas for military purposes.

In fact, in recent years the number of attacks on civilian infrastructure and the environment has been increasing rather than decreasing as seen by the Water Conflict Chronology database, which identifies water as a trigger, weapon, and casualty of armed conflict. The database has recorded a dramatic increase in the number of events in the last few years.

These trends suggest serious limitations to the protections offered by current humanitarian laws of war. Even when violations seem clear, enforcement and punishment of violators of these laws are rare. Parties to the Geneva Conventions have an obligation to enforce its provisions and to bring to trial persons who have allegedly violated its provisions. but nations have been unable or unwilling to enforce relevant provisions.

Consequently, a new Environmental Geneva Convention is needed, focused on protecting the environment, natural resources, and vital civilian infrastructure that supports basic needs like water, food, and energy.

CAUSES

During wars, environmental degradation is caused by various factors including but not necessarily limited to:

1. Production, testing and use of Nuclear Weapons
2. Aerial and Naval Bombing
3. Use of Landmines

4. Despoliation, Defoliation and Toxic Pollution
5. Attacks on civilian resources like dams
6. Internal conflicts within countries
7. Use of resources like water as weapons
8. Collateral Damage

IMPACT

Wars have a major impact on the environment and the life of people as well. The effects of wars often start before the conflicts themselves. During the wars, the impact increases dramatically, and these effects tend to continue long after the war is over.

The effects of the nuclear weapons used in Japan are still seen today, decades later. Radiation poisoning, birth anomalies, leukemia are just some of the many effects that have been plaguing the population of Nagasaki and Hiroshima over the last few decades.

Sometimes due to bombing, some industries are destroyed which may then cause harmful chemicals to leak into the environment which could affect the land, the people and the flora and fauna in the region. Along with causing toxic pollution, these bombings of civilian areas also cause immense destruction to infrastructure which is essential for human needs.

Landmines set in motion a series of events leading to environmental degradation in the forms of soil degradation, deforestation, pollution of water resources with heavy metals and possibly altering entire species' populations by degrading habitats and altering food chains. Additionally, landmines are usually placed near hospitals or sanitation facilities, impacting the ability to preserve human health. In certain cases, there is a repetitive geographical coincidence between mine-affected zones and biodiversity hotspots.

Sometimes, water sources and food sources are contaminated as acts of war. Once contaminated, the food and water obtained is no longer fit for human consumption and indirectly leads to the spread of diseases like Cholera. This was the case in the 1991 civil war of Somalia. The Civil War led to the destruction of dams, which in turn contributed to outbreaks of cholera affecting 55,000 people.

GLOSSARY

International Environment Law (IEL):

International environmental law is a body of international law concerned with protecting the environment, primarily through bilateral and multilateral international agreements. International environmental law developed as a subset of international law in the mid-twentieth century.

International environmental law is derived primarily from three sources: customary international law; international treaties; and judicial decisions of international courts. Customary international law refers to a set of unwritten laws that have arisen from widespread custom and usage among nations.

Armed Conflict:

An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility that concerns the government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.

Biosphere:

All life-forms on Earth and the interactions among those life-forms.

Conservation:

The act of using natural resources in a way that ensures that they will be available to future generations.

Ecosystem:

The community of individuals and the physical components of the environment in a certain area.

Fauna:

The animal life existing in a defined area.

Flora:

The plant life of an area.

Greenhouse Gas:

A gas whose accumulation in the atmosphere increases heat retention.

Non-Government Organization (NGO):

A voluntary organization that is not part of any government; often organized to address a specific issue or perform a humanitarian function.

Sustainable Development:

Development (i.e., increased or intensified economic activity; sometimes used as a synonym for industrialization) that meets the cultural and physical needs of the present generation of persons without damaging the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Global Warming

A gradual increase in the overall temperature of the earth's atmosphere generally attributed to the greenhouse effect caused by increased levels of carbon dioxide, CFCs, and other pollutants.

CASE STUDIES ON SOME WARS WITH SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

1. WORLD WAR 2:

World War II left deep marks on the natural environment of the war zones, home fronts and areas occupied by war industries. The global war left trash and ruins everywhere in its wake, consisting of abandoned front lines, half-sunken ships, empty bases and bombed cities in Europe and Asia.

Environmental Impact caused by Nuclear Weapons:

In August 1945, after fighting World War II for almost four years, the United States of America dropped an atomic bomb over the city of Hiroshima in Japan. Three days after the bombing of Hiroshima, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb on the industrial city of Nagasaki, instantly killing 35,000 people.

The nuclear weapons released catastrophic loads of energy. Once the bombs were blasted, the temperatures reached about 7200 °F. With temperatures that high, all the flora and fauna were destroyed along with the infrastructure and human lives in the impact zones. When the atomic bombs were dropped, they released enormous quantities of energy and radioactive particles. The radioactive particles which were released contaminated the land and water for miles around. The initial blasts increased the surface temperatures, along with the crushing winds which were caused by the initial blasts, the trees and buildings which were in their paths were all destroyed.

Impact on Forests in Europe

Due to fighting during the war, European forests experienced tragic impacts. Behind the combat zones, timber from cut down trees was removed in order to clear up the paths for fighting. The shattered forests in the battle zones faced exploitation and severe deforestation

Environmental Impact caused by Chemical Weapons:

The use of heavily hazardous chemicals was first initiated during World War II. The long-term effects of chemicals result from both their potential persistence and the poor disposal program of nations with stockpiled weapons. The development of chlorine gas and mustard gas led to many casualties, and lands were poisoned both on and near the battlefields.

Environmental Impact in the Oceans:

Later in World War II, chemists developed even more harmful chemical bombs, which were packaged in barrels and directly deposited in the oceans. The disposal of the chemicals in the ocean runs the risk of metal-based containers corroding and leaching the chemical contents of the vessel into the ocean. Through the chemical disposal in the ocean, the contaminants may be spread throughout the various components of the ecosystems damaging marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

Oil Contamination:

Marine ecosystems during World War II were damaged from chemical contaminants and wreckage from naval ships, which leaked oil into the water. Oil contamination in the Atlantic Ocean due to World War II shipwrecks is estimated at over 15 million tones. To this day, traces of oil can still be found in the Atlantic Ocean from the naval shipwrecks which happened during World War II.

CONCLUSION

The environmental impacts of World War II were very drastic, which allowed them to be seen in the Cold War and be seen today. The impacts of conflict, chemical contaminations, and aerial warfare all contribute to reduction in the population of global flora and fauna, as well as a reduction in species diversity. The nuclear weapons used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 continue to affect the environment and lives of citizens even decades later.

2. AFGHANISTAN WAR

The Afghanistan war was an international conflict in Afghanistan 9/11 attacks. It lasted for 13 years, from 2001 to 2014, during which it had a significant impact on the flora, fauna and quality of human life in Afghanistan. At present, Afghanistan has a total amount of 4% forest cover which is much lower than the international standard of 25%.

Environmental Impact in Afghanistan due to the War

To date, no specific environmental study has been carried out in Afghanistan. The lack of information on the quality of air, water, vegetation, land, and other environmental factors could be attributed to the non-existence of organizations or agencies devoted to this issue. The ecosystem in Afghanistan had never been damaged to the extent that it has been in the last three decades. This deterioration has been created by the unlimited use of nature and its energy.

Impact on forests due to the War

Many forested areas and farmlands were burned and degraded by the use of heavy war technology and chemicals. It is estimated that ten thousand villages and their surrounding environments were destroyed. This continuous process still takes its toll on the environment. According to World Bank, for sound economy a country must have at least 25% forested Area, while in Afghanistan the forest area is below 2%

Air Pollution caused by the War

Afghanistan itself doesn't have any industry to create air pollutants; smog is a common phenomenon in most of the urban areas. Trans-boundary air pollution is another concern. Due to this, Afghanistan receives enormous amounts of pollutants originating from the Aral sedimentary basin, Iran, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan's industrial parks.

Environmental Impact caused by Chemical Weapons:

Chemical weapons have been used during the Afghan war with the Soviets, and this caused severe short-term damage to the environment and ecosystem in Afghanistan. No data exists on their long-term effects.

CONCLUSION

The Afghanistan War has almost completely destroyed the flora and fauna of Afghanistan. From 2001 to 2014, Afghanistan's environment was continually devastated by multiple methods, including chemical agents, land mines, bombings and various other methods which have caused much damage to the environment there. Being a fairly recent war, the long-term effects of the Afghanistan War are not known yet.

SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED SO FAR

These are just some of the steps that have been taken to reduce environmental impact of wars:

1. Public concern over the targeting and use of the environment during the heat of battle first peaked during the Vietnam War, according to UNEP, where the deployment of the toxic herbicide Agent Orange led

to massive deforestation and contamination. The resulting international outcry sparked the creation of two new international legal instruments: The Environmental Modification Convention in 1976, and an amendment to the Geneva Conventions, which regulate the conduct of war, one year later.

2. In 1994, in response to a request by the United Nations General Assembly, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) issued the first *Guidelines for Military Manuals and Instructions on the Protection of the Environment in Times of Armed Conflict* to assist the instruction and training of the armed forces on IHL protecting the natural environment.
3. In its Resolution 47/37 of 9 February 1993, the UN General Assembly stated in the Preamble that “destruction of the environment, not justified by military necessity and carried out wantonly is clearly contrary to existing international law.”

Various other steps have been taken over the last few decades, but these have proven to be largely ineffective due to various reasons.

WHY HAVE THE IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS FAILED?

Despite protection afforded by several legal instruments, the environment continues to be “the silent victim of armed conflicts worldwide”, according to UNEP. Over the past 150 years, international law and principles related to war and armed conflict have evolved to try to limit some of the worst evils of violence by protecting civilians, medical and community infrastructure, and to some degree, the environment. But these protections are inadequate: Current international constraints are too weak, inadequately enforced, or both.

The problem. Over the long history of human conflicts, a set of ethical standards and legal constraints have evolved to try to limit or ban certain actions, behaviors, and weapons, and to protect certain populations and assets from destruction. In theory, these rules and codes of conduct, referred to as *jus in bello* (“the law in waging war”) or “international

humanitarian laws,” help to protect civilian populations, prisoners of war, medical personnel and facilities, and non-military property and infrastructure—including the environment.

In practice, however, these laws have largely failed to prevent attacks on basic civilian infrastructure and the natural environment, and they do not appear to impose accountability on governments in a way that limits military operations. Extensive evidence shows the growing effects of armed conflicts on civilians, built infrastructure, and the natural environment—especially water.

Similarly, threats such as climate change are worsening the risks of agricultural failure, coastal flooding, population displacement, economic disruption, and political failures contributing to violent altercations. Over the past few decades, persistent war and violence by nation-states and subnational groups has led to the “de-development” of entire countries, including Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and others. Infrastructure has been destroyed, incomes and quality of life has plummeted, fertility and life expectancies rates have fallen, infant mortality and unemployment has soared, large numbers of people have been physically displaced from their homes and lives, and even the most rudimentary aspects of survival have been challenged, including access to basic energy and safe water and sanitation.

Three core problems exist: The current international laws of war inadequately protect natural resources and the environment in the context of civil war or local conflicts. Militaries and armed groups inconsistently identify and differentiate among legitimate and illegitimate targets and ambiguous language in current laws and agreements creates loopholes for the military. And the enforcement of laws of war—and punishment of violators of these laws—are rare and subjective.

CURRENT SCENARIO

Despite concern raised by the public and various institutions alike, no real steps have been taken so far and steps that have been taken so far,

have proved to be largely ineffective. Thus, it is imperative that the international community takes steps to ensure that the protection of the environment is given foremost importance, even during times of war.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

These questions are mainly to help you understand what to research on and how you can decide what is important and what isn't.

1. Where does my country stand on environmental protection?
2. What steps have been taken by my country to reduce environmental impact.
3. Has my country ever been involved in major instances of environmental destruction caused by wars?
4. Has my country's environment been affected by wars?
5. Which wars throughout history have had significant effects on the environment?
6. What steps have been taken so far to reduce the impact of wars on the environment and how successful have these steps been?
7. What possible solutions can be suggested to improve the current scenario?

USEFUL LINKS AND WEBSITES

1. www.unenvironment.org
2. www.reuters.com
3. www.science.gov
4. Disasters & conflicts | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

SOME SUGGESTED MODERATED CAUCUS TOPICS

1. Attack on civilian infrastructure to cripple the economy of a country
2. Climate change, a "threat multiplier"?
3. Steps that should be taken to ensure that countries adhere to international laws to protect the environment during conflicts.
4. Post conflict environmental assistance becoming the standard, not ad-hoc

5. Attacks on objects which are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

These topics are just a few of the many topics you can debate upon. Don't limit yourself to these topics alone, be creative and come up with your own topics as well.

SOURCES

1. Environment and health: 5. Impact of war - NCBI - NIH
2. Step up action to protect the planet during wartime: UN
3. How does war damage the environment? | CEOBS
4. (PDF) Environmental Degradation due to War in Afghanistan
5. Protecting the environment in times of war - Down To Earth
6. Environment and warfare | International Committee of the Red ...
7. Protecting the environment during armed conflict: an inventory ...
8. Afghanistan War | History, Combatants, Facts, & Timeline ...

This guide is just a tool to help you with your research. Don't restrict yourself to the guide alone. Look outside the guide and look at other sources as well and come up with topics that can be debated during the session as well.

All the Best!!!

Best Regards,
Chakradhara Chowdary & Anushree Kotwal