



## Actions for Nature, People and Peace

*A civil society contribution to UNEA 5.1*

**Dear Excellencies and dear UNEA President, Vice-president and UNEA bureau members,**

UNEA-5's "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" theme is a unique opportunity to explore nature's role in relation to peace and security. Nature is key for providing a healthy and productive environment, providing the conditions for safe and stable societies. Disruption to nature can be particularly acute during armed conflicts, with both direct and long-term impacts on lives and livelihoods, and on the climate-resilience of affected states. Conflicts in biodiversity hotspots are commonplace and, by fracturing societies and weakening environmental governance, conflicts can create and sustain the conditions for environmental degradation that may extend for years beyond the cessation of hostilities.

Often, these consequences are overlooked and under prioritized in conflict analysis and reconstruction programming. Understanding the many competing priorities and complexities of humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery work, we believe there is opportunity to improve response efforts that facilitate rapid clean-up, remediation and restoration of nature, protect biodiversity and contribute to strengthening work on the Sustainable Development Goals.

There is a growing momentum to mainstream the environment, peace and security [agenda](#), both within and beyond the UN system. This is apparent in previous UNEA resolutions and declarations, in debates and decisions in the UN Security Council, and in the work of the UN [International Law Commission](#). It is also evident in the work of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) and the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature](#).

### **UNEA's contribution to the environment, peace and security agenda**

By addressing the relationship between nature and armed conflicts, and the opportunities that nature can provide to support sustainable peace and development efforts, UNEA-5 could make a valuable contribution to this mainstreaming effort.

UNEA's previous resolutions and decisions on the environmental dimensions of armed conflicts have been highly influential for the wider environment, peace and security agenda.

UNEA-5's theme provides the scope for spotlighting the importance of nature and natural solutions within this agenda. For example, Africa's [Great Green Wall](#) project, which among other benefits will enhance the environmental security and climate resilience of communities along its path. In northern Iraq, UNEP has already explored the potential of biological [remediation](#) for oil pollution caused by the Islamic State. In Bangladesh, UN agencies and NGOs have undertaken a huge [reforestation programme](#) to help protect displaced Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar from environmental risks such as landslides, as well as to help restore wildlife. This is just one example of how humanitarian organisations are [utilising](#) nature-based solutions in their response work, including in camp settings. While in [Colombia](#), the UNDP, Norwegian Refugee Council and other stakeholders are working with former combatants to help protect and restore nature. These examples demonstrate the potential for expanding nature-based solutions at all points of throughout the life cycle of conflicts in order to protect communities, restore ecosystems and support sustainable development.

Any decisions UNEA makes could also help provide a framework for UNEP's work on conflicts in its new Medium-term Strategy, which seeks to mainstream work on disasters and conflicts across its new thematic sub-programmes.

#### What Member States can do at UNEA-5.1:

- **Highlight the relationship between the environment, peace and security in statements at UNEA-5.1** As the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, it is incumbent on UNEA to continue to provide leadership on the environment, peace and security agenda. Using national statements to highlight the impact that armed conflicts and military activities have on biodiversity, on the potential role of nature in mitigating environmental security risks, or in supporting post-conflict recovery would help build a foundation for a substantive contribution at UNEA-5.2.

#### What Member States can do ahead of UNEA-5.2:

- **Incorporate language in relevant resolutions to help articulate the importance of nature in underpinning peace and security.** Environmental degradation can contribute to insecurity, and be exacerbated and accelerated by armed conflicts. The themes of many of the resolutions exploring nature that will be developed for UNEA-5.2 will intersect with security and conflict issues. For example, resolutions addressing the role of natural solutions in the protection of water, in combating deforestation, land degradation and pollution, and in the conservation and protection of biodiversity, are all of particular relevance for many fragile and conflict-affected states. Member States should highlight these connections to peace and security with appropriate language.

- **Develop a resolution dedicated to how nature can help reduce environmental security risks, and contribute to conflict recovery and transformation.** UNEA is well-placed to help frame how the international community conceptualises the relationship between nature and human security and, critically, to encourage UNEP and other stakeholders to plan and implement nature-based solutions in fragile and conflict-affected states. As the examples above demonstrate, this can and must be implemented throughout the life cycle of conflicts, from the mitigation of climate security risks, to humanitarian response, post-conflict remediation and to conflict transformation.

What Member States can do beyond UNEA-5:

- **Strengthen dialogue between different UN fora and international agreements to help further mainstream the environment, peace and security agenda.** Reducing harm to people and ecosystems from the environmental dimensions of insecurity and armed conflicts requires greater policy coherence across the UN system. A deliberate and holistic mainstreaming of the environment, peace and security agenda throughout the UN system, and in Multilateral Environmental Agreements, is vital to help identify and implement solutions and streamline responses to the environmental challenges many states face. We encourage governments to review how they currently approach environment, peace and security issues across different UN fora and processes in order to identify opportunities for improving policy responses and political action.

On behalf of PAX, ZOI Environment and the Conflict & Environment Observatory,

Wim Zwijnenburg  
Project Leader Humanitarian disarmament  
PAX

[Zwijnenburg@paxforpeace.nl](mailto:Zwijnenburg@paxforpeace.nl)