



## **Joint NGO submission to the consultation on UNEA-6's Ministerial declaration**

June 2023

We, the undersigned group of civil society organisations (NGOs) working on the environment, climate and conflict nexus, welcome the focus of the Sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) on effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. We sincerely appreciate the recognition of the great urgency to take coordinated international action to tackle these three planetary crises, which constitute systemic threats to security and human development, as outlined in the zero draft Ministerial Declaration.

However, it would not be possible to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution without addressing their causes, including violent conflicts and military actions around the world, which significantly exacerbate the triple planetary crisis. Therefore, we note with disappointment that the zero draft Ministerial Declaration in its current version does not recognize the effects of conflict and military activities on global climate and environmental challenges. This is at a time when the devastating impact of the war in Ukraine is contributing to serious conflict-pollution hotspots and loss of valuable natural areas, the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen have continued to have destructive impacts on biodiversity from military activities and unsustainable coping mechanisms, while increased droughts, lack of rainfall and heatwaves are resulting in displacements in southern Iraq and in South Sudan, Syria, Chad, Burkina Faso, Benin and Nigeria, among others, fuelling social and political tensions, in particular between farmers and pastoralists.

We are convinced that recognizing the interlinkages between the triple planetary crisis, conflict and peace by UNEA-6 would not only contribute to better analysis of the nature of these global challenges, but will also provide for more effective and sustainable solutions to address them. The speed and devastation of environmental decline that current and future generations face demands a robust, comprehensive and cross-cutting approach that States must recognize and address seriously.

Therefore, we call on the world's ministers for the environment to include a peace and conflict lens into the language of the UNEA-6 ministerial declaration and to mainstream conflict sensitivity in policy discussions and deliverables of UNEA-6. Doing so would enable cooperation and synergies between various policy forums – including efforts in New York at the UN General Assembly, Peacebuilding Commission, and Security Council, as well as efforts in Geneva concerning environmental rights at the UN Human Rights Council - and strengthen international efforts in responding to protection issues emanating from the environment, climate and conflict nexus.

### **Interlinkage between conflict and the triple planetary crisis**

The relationship between conflict and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution is complex, yet evident. Violent conflicts cause environmental degradation and

fuel climate emergencies through direct destruction of nature, pollution, extensive military emissions, human displacement and unsustainable coping strategies. Fragility and conflict lead to the collapse of environmental governance, which can exacerbate underlying environmental challenges and weaken systems of protection and sustainable resource use. Ongoing hostilities hamper States' abilities for climate adaptation, leaving vulnerable communities poorer, less resilient, and ill-equipped to cope with the effects of climate change. These concerns also come with particular gender angles in conflict areas that often put women and girls at risk from societal instability and degraded environmental conditions. In turn, climate-change linked natural resource degradation could create tensions and conflicts over access to those resources. The cycle of conflict and environmental degradation can perpetuate instability and hinder sustainable development efforts.

Conversely, incorporation of environmental considerations into conflict responses could help alleviate the triple planetary crisis. The international community has a plethora of existing multilateral environmental agreements at its disposal that could be helpful to identify effective, inclusive and sustainable pathways for action to address conflict-linked environmental degradation and the cascading impact of climate-crisis on conflict-affected areas. These agreements must be widely implemented.

The timely identification and monitoring of conflict-linked environmental degradation is vital to support prevention and mitigation measures that protect people and ecosystems. Strengthening national policies that aim to protect biodiversity in armed conflicts in relevant multilateral forums would help prevent further biodiversity loss, while better management of hazardous substances and waste related to conflict-pollution in areas affected by wars would mitigate risks for the environment and human health. Meanwhile, peacebuilding interventions based on nature-based solutions, biodiversity protection and sustainable and equitable management of ecosystem services help communities recovering from conflict advance towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Therefore, the attainment of the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all would not be feasible unless the interlinkages between conflict and the triple planetary crisis are addressed.

### **Adding conflict sensitivity to the UNEA-6 agenda**

In the UN Environmental Assembly, resolutions on [protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts](#) and [conflict-pollution](#) have been instrumental in strengthening international responses. With the upcoming theme of inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions for tackling the triple planetary crisis, we see good opportunities for States' support and ambitions to address the challenges pertinent to the triple planetary crisis.

In this vein, the undersigned NGOs call on States' Ministers negotiating the UNEA-6 Ministerial declaration to:

- Recognise the inherent relationship between conflict and the triple planetary crisis, as well as the broader interlinkages between the environment, climate, peace and security nexus, and include strong references to the need for multilateral actions around this nexus in the UNEA-6 agenda.

- Highlight the need to include conflict sensitivity in relevant international environmental agreements for the sake of a more coherent and effective multilateral response to pressing challenges related to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution in the conflict settings.
- Encourage States to adopt the International Committee of the Red Cross' Updated [Military Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict](#) and International Law Commission's Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts ([PERAC principles](#)) on how the environment should be protected before, during and after armed conflicts as one of the ways to mitigate the triple planetary crisis.
- Enhance effective multilateral actions for environmental monitoring and assessment in conflict prevention programming and planning in order to identify natural resource degradation and environmental harm during conflicts and for post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding.
- Support UNEP in working on the environmental dimensions of armed conflict and providing a clear plan, mandate, and resourcing that cements the commitment to have conflict as part of UNEP's ongoing important work on environment, peace and security.
- Include conflict-sensitive language when referring to the ability of communities to adapt to climate change, and prioritize community engagement and capacity-building in the development, financing and implementation of prevention, mitigation, and response measures.
- Highlight the role of the environment as a crucial element for building and sustaining peace in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and Sustaining Peace agenda, and outline the importance of including environmental peacebuilding as a priority within the UN's forthcoming New Agenda for Peace.
- Encourage national government and (international) corporations operating in (post) conflict environments to implement strong national regulations on environmental protection, in particular the fossil fuel industry and wider natural resource extraction activities.
- Ensure gender-sensitive analysis and policies, to be included in (post) conflict-environmental and climate security assessments and to become part of implementation mechanisms of existing and future multilateral action to address the triple planetary crisis.

#### **UNEA-accredited NGOs:**

- Conflict and Environment Observatory (United Kingdom)
- European Environmental Bureau (Belgium)
- Interecocentre (Ukraine)
- PAX (Netherlands)
- Soroptimist International (United Kingdom)
- Zoï Environment Network (Switzerland)

*A broader list of NGOs have contributed to the contents of this submission. A full version of this input can be found [here](#).*

## Annex 1: Proposed Amendments to the Text of Zero Draft Ministerial Declaration

*Note: proposed additions are underlined in red, while the text in black is the original text of zero draft declaration.*

3. We acknowledge with great urgency the systemic threat to peace, security and human development posed by the three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and emphasize the importance of integrated, science-based approaches, including the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, that can strengthen resilience to present and future emerging risks with global solidarity, while advancing the attainment of the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all.

7. We note with great concern the main findings of the Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's sixth assessment report (AR6) approved in March 2023, and recognize that global greenhouse gas emissions will need to be halved by 2030 to limit global warming to 1.5°C. By the current trajectory, as estimated by assessing nationally determined contributions (NDCs) announced by October 2021, it is likely that warming will exceed the 1.5°C target during the 21st century, which calls for significant rapid and sustained reductions in all sectors, while ensuring that the level of support provided to developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change remains adequate. We also acknowledge that many fragile and conflict-affected States are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

8. We are strongly committed to urgently address our common and global environmental challenges through effective, inclusive, sustainable, transformative, intergenerational, gender sensitive, and science- and knowledge-based actions together with all Major Groups and other Stakeholders,

~~civil society, citizens, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, the private sector, and academia~~. We therefore decide to take the following actions, taking into account, the special needs and circumstances of the least greenhouse gas emitters and the most vulnerable, in particular, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), African States, conflict-affected States and developing middle-income countries:

- a. Deploy sustained global efforts to address climate change in line with the principles of the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, including by addressing the urgent need for scaled up action for adaptation and resilience as well as loss and damage. We will spare no effort to protect our communities against natural disasters induced or exacerbated by climate change and environmental damage, such as drought, famine, and flooding, recognizing the devastating impacts these phenomena have on societies, economies, and ecosystems.
- b. combat biodiversity loss, including in conflict situations, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, by urgently reversing ecosystem decline, promoting and strengthening ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, while mitigating and adapting to climate change and boosting resilience, supporting sustainable food production, promoting One Health and ensuring equitable benefits across economies and societies through robust safeguards and policies for environmental and social protection. We will

work in the direction of using biodiversity management and encourage cooperation of specialized institutions to search for joint solutions.

- e. Incorporate environmental considerations into disaster risk management to mitigate the adverse impacts of natural disasters and armed conflicts on human health and the environment and recommend using a combination of measures to strengthen the resilience to global risks, and accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including actions on the conservation and restoration of ecosystems, climate change mitigation and adaptation, (conflict) pollution reduction and management, as well as actions to transform economic and financial systems and to ensure sustainable production and consumption. Encourage States to adopt the International Law Commission's Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (PERAC) principles as one of the ways to mitigate the triple planetary crisis.
- [add point] f. Enhance effective multilateral actions for environmental monitoring and assessment in conflict prevention programming and planning in order to identify natural resource degradation and environmental harm during conflicts and for post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. We recognize that the environment is a crucial element for building and sustaining peace in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and Sustaining Peace agenda, and encourage Member States to include environmental peacebuilding as a priority within the UN's forthcoming New Agenda for Peace.
- f. Act towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by advancing existing international commitments and obligations, ensuring the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation, representation and leadership of women at all levels of relevant climate change, biodiversity and pollution decision-making, including gender-sensitive analysis and policies in (post) conflict-environmental and climate security assessments, promoting gender mainstreaming and integration across policies and actions to address the triple planetary crisis, and the safeguarding of marginalized groups and the most vulnerable, in our pursuit of inclusive solutions for climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution that leave no one behind.

9. We will work towards using the potential of digital transformation as a necessary tool for sustainable economic and social behaviour at the global level, bridging existing digital divides, make efficient use of remote sensing for better environmental analysis, improving equal access to environmental information and harnessing emerging technologies for environmental sustainability, peace and security.

12. We reiterate our recognition of UNEP's role in strategic foresight and horizon scanning ~~as well as in improving the capacities of Member States at all levels to stimulate and encourage long-term advance environmental decision-making~~ and in bringing the most pressing emerging environmental issues to the attention of Governments. UNEP should therefore ensure that it continues to anticipate trends and risks, engage in assessment of conflict-linked environmental damage and support conflict-affected States, bring these issues to the attention of the world, particularly with the aim of prioritising scientific research and promoting collective and multi-stakeholder responses to new challenges.