

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PREVENTING THE EXPLOITATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN WAR AND ARMED CONFLICT 6 November 2016

This year, the world began implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With 17 universal and interdependent Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda is a transformational blueprint for peace, prosperity and dignity for all on a healthy planet. To achieve this vision, we must recognize that we have a duty of care towards the environment in peacetime and during war.

Poor governance of the environment and natural resources can contribute to the outbreak of conflict. It can fuel and finance existing conflicts and it can increase the risk of relapse. Conversely, there are many examples of natural resources serving as catalysts for peaceful cooperation, confidence-building and poverty reduction.

In the aftermath of violent conflict, natural resources, such as land, timber, minerals, oil and gas, are often the primary assets that governments need to support livelihoods and economic recovery. How governments manage these resources can fundamentally alter the course of post-conflict peacebuilding. That is why it is so important that we work together to combat environmental crime, end the illegal exploitation of natural resources, improve transparency, share benefits more equitably and encourage the participation of women, indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups in decision-making.

The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes that “sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.” That is why, earlier this year, all 193 Member States of the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted a resolution committing to protect the environment in areas affected by armed conflict. At the same time, the United Nations International Law Commission is currently reviewing the international legal framework for protecting the environment before, during and after armed conflict. It aims to establish guidelines that can better support environmental preservation, particularly in protected areas and environmentally sensitive sites, such as drinking water aquifers, which are of critical environmental and cultural importance and can be severely affected by warfare.

With the 2030 Agenda and the concurrent efforts of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the International Law Commission, we have a range of important tools at our disposal. On this International Day, I urge governments, businesses and citizens around the world to prioritize environmental care and the sustainable management of natural resources for preventing conflict, building peace and promoting lasting prosperity.