

On international day, Ban underscores bond between peace and the environment



Collecting groundwater samples in Kosovo to test for depleted uranium. Photo: UNEP (2001)

6 November 2012 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon warned today about the precarious links between peace, conflict and the environment, urging the international community to recognize peace and security as “a critical fourth dimension” of sustainable development.

“War and armed conflict shred the fabric of sustainable development,” Mr. Ban said in his [message](#) marking this year's *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict*.

“There can be no peace if the resource base that people depend on for sustenance and income is damaged or destroyed – or if illegal exploitation finances or causes conflict,” he added.

Established by the General Assembly in 2001, the [International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict](#) was created to spotlight the tenuous link between global and regional conflicts and the environment.

According to the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), at least 40 percent of all internal conflicts of the past 60 years have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources such as timber, diamonds, gold and oil, or scarce resources such as fertile land and water. Moreover, conflicts involving natural resources have also been found to be twice as likely to relapse into violence.

In his message, the Secretary-General remarked that since 1990, at least 18 violent conflicts had been fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources, while in other areas of the world the discoveries of mineral wealth were quickly transforming already beleaguered nations into potential hotspots.

In Afghanistan, said Mr. Ban, recently discovered mineral deposits worth an estimated trillion US dollars were sparking fears that the newfound natural wealth could perpetuate civil strife. Meanwhile, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the UN chief noted that rich reserves of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold were being funnelled to armed groups which used that wealth to prolong violence across the country.

The Secretary-General pointed out that six UN peacekeeping missions had been mandated to support the host country's ability to re-establish control over its resource base and stop illicit extraction by armed groups, but added that more needed to be done in terms of the role of natural resource management in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

“Let us reaffirm our commitment to sustainably managing and safeguarding vital natural resources in times of peace and war,” Mr. Ban said in his message. “Let us do more to prevent conflicts over natural resources and maximize their benefits for maintaining and building peace.”

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