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General Assembly First Committee Background Guide 2023

Written by Stephanie N. Shady and Tobias Willms



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2023 National Model United Nations Conference in Washington, DC (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the General Assembly First Committee. This year's staff is: Director Stephanie N. Shady and Assistant Director Tobias Willms. Dr. Stephanie N. Shady holds a PhD in political science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and currently teaches at Washington University in St. Louis. She studies migration, religion, and national identity. Tobias Willms completed the First Legal Examination in Germany and thereby obtained a Magister's degree from the University of Heidelberg. In August, he will begin his legal clerkship at the Higher Regional Court of Cologne, culminating in the Second Legal Examination.

The topics under discussion for the General Assembly First Committee are:

1. The Role of Information and Communication Technologies, and Cybersecurity in the Illicit Trade of Arms
2. Conflict and Natural Resources

As one of the plenary bodies of the United Nations, the General Assembly First Committee is the primary forum for all Member States to discuss matters of international peace and security. The First Committee holds thematic discussions and general debate towards building consensus on issues such as disarmament and global threats to peace. It is further mandated to coordinate across bodies that report to the General Assembly, such as the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Recently, the First Committee has renewed its emphasis on meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) (2015) as an essential component of promoting international peace and security.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a [position paper](#). Guidelines are available in the [NMUN Position Paper Guide](#).

The [NMUN website](#) has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretary-General Zack Parker at usgzack.dc@nmun.org or Secretary-General Ana Williamson at secgen.dc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,
Stephanie N. Shady, Director
Tobias Willms, Assistant Director



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Committee Overview

Introduction

The General Assembly is the main deliberative and policy-making body of the United Nations (UN) and one of the six principal organs established by the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945).¹ The work of the General Assembly is undertaken in subsidiary committees, each of which debates and adopts draft resolutions on their thematic areas and allocated agenda items.²

The General Assembly First Committee considers matters related to disarmament and international peace and security and it considers agenda items under seven thematic clusters, namely: nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, the disarmament aspects of outer space, conventional weapons, regional disarmament and security, other disarmament measures and international security, and the disarmament machinery.³

Mandate, Function and Powers

The General Assembly acts as a forum for dialogue and cooperation, providing general policy recommendations rather than carrying out operative tasks.⁴ Its policy recommendations are non-binding and their implementation is conducted by Member States, the UN Secretariat, and other UN bodies, each of which independently align their work with General Assembly resolutions.⁵ The *Charter of the United Nations* provided the General Assembly with a broad mandate to discuss and make recommendations on any topics within the scope of the UN.⁶

The General Assembly adopts resolutions, which are formal documents expressing the agreement and will of the international community.⁷ The majority of these resolutions are adopted by consensus, meaning no vote is taken and that no Member State has specific cause to object.⁸ In line with the *Charter of the United Nations*, the mandate of the General Assembly First Committee can be summarized as:

- The General Assembly **will generally**: make recommendations to Member States, the Security Council, other UN bodies and organs, UN specialized agencies, and other international actors; initiate studies and advance efforts to promote international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and health fields and in the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms; consider or request reports from other UN bodies and specialized agencies; establish UN observance days, create expert groups or commissions, formulate mechanisms for treaty negotiation, or refer an issue to the International Court of Justice.⁹
- The General Assembly **will not generally**: dictate the specific actions required for implementation of policies it recommends, allowing Member States and other bodies to determine operational details; create new bodies, except for in those rare instances where ubiquitous international demand requires the consolidation of existing bodies and/or a concept and mandate have been fully developed, typically through years of

¹ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

² Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 68.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

⁷ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 52.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 52.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36; United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945; UNFOLD ZERO. *UN Bodies*. n.d.

negotiations; make recommendations on situations under consideration by the Security Council.¹⁰

The First Committee adopts around 50-70 resolutions each year, around half of which are adopted by consensus, after which they are sent to the General Assembly Plenary.¹¹ The General Assembly Plenary has the ultimate decision-making authority on all resolutions, including those related to disarmament and international security.¹² It is possible that some minor differences may arise between what gets adopted in GA1 and what gets adopted in GA plenary, but these are usually minor and technical in nature.¹³

Governance, Funding, and Structure

The General Assembly meets annually and is comprised of all 193 UN Member States.¹⁴ Observer status can be granted to intergovernmental organizations and states without full UN membership.¹⁵ In the General Assembly, each Member State has one equal vote and most decisions require a simple majority.¹⁶ As a principal organ of the United Nations, the General Assembly is largely self-governing, determining its own agenda, procedures, officers, and subsidiary bodies.¹⁷ General Assembly meetings and events are funded through the United Nations regular budget.¹⁸

The First Committee's procedures are managed by its Secretariat and an elected bureau.¹⁹ The bureau of the committee assists with opening and closing each meeting, managing the discussions, pronouncing decisions, assisting with drafts and documents, and ensuring compliance with the rules of procedure.²⁰ The UN Secretariat assists the First Committee by delivering substantive and logistical support.²¹ The First Committee receives substantive and organizational support from three entities: the General Committee, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.²²

¹⁰ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.; United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library. *Are UN resolutions binding?* n.d.; United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Welcome to the Human Rights Council*. n.d.; United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. *UN Women: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*. n.d.

¹¹ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. pp. 68-70.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

¹⁵ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *About Permanent Observers*. n.d.

¹⁶ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

¹⁷ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. pp. 13, 15, 44.

¹⁸ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2022-23*. 2022. p. 412.

¹⁹ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017.

²⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.18*)*. 2016. pp. 30-31.

²¹ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017.

²² United Nations, General Assembly. *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*. n.d.

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Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook: A Practical Guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. Retrieved 27 February 2023 from:

https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/mission-new-york/en/documents/UN_GA_Final.pdf

This handbook was published by the Permanent Mission to the United Nations of Switzerland. It is a very good introduction to the General Assembly and its First Committee, including its processes, and structure. This source will support delegates in better understanding the General Assembly in its entirety as well as gaining more information on existing rules of procedure, the structure of resolutions, and the workflow of the General Assembly as they begin their research.

United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Retrieved 27 February 2023 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

The Charter of the United Nations is the document that created the organization and laid the framework for its main organs, including the General Assembly. It is a relatively short but dense document. Delegates may want to read the entire document to gain a general understanding of the foundational mechanics of the United Nations, but should certainly read the preamble, which established the justification for the organization's creation, and Chapter VI, which established the mandate of the General Assembly.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*. n.d. Retrieved 27 February 2023 from: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>

This website provides a concise and high-level overview of the General Assembly First Committee and what issues it is mandated to discuss. Albeit short, this website succinctly positions the Committee within the larger General Assembly environment and highlights recent trends within the Committee. Moreover, this website is a good introductory resource for accessing more detailed aspects about the Committee, which delegates will find useful in better understanding the activities, purpose, and history of the General Assembly First Committee.

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1. The Role of Information and Communication Technologies, and Cybersecurity in the Illicit Trade of Arms

“Arms control has always been motivated by the need to keep ahead of the challenges to peace and security raised by developments in science and technology. But in today’s environment with its ever-accelerating pace of change, diffusion of technology and parallel game-changing developments, there is a growing perception that our normative and regulatory frameworks cannot keep up. Or perhaps, more to the point, that the emerging challenges do not fit neatly into our existing frameworks.”²³

Introduction

According to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), trade in arms is a lucrative and steadily increasing business, with global military expenditure surpassing \$2.1 trillion in 2021.²⁴ UNODA differentiates between two main categories of arms: weapons of mass destruction, which include nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and conventional arms, which is the term used for all other weapons.²⁵ Of these, UNODA considers the latter to be the most widely used and typically known arms.²⁶ A subgroup of conventional weapons, small arms and light weapons (SALW), are portable lethal weapons intended to shoot projectiles.²⁷ In his 2021 report *Small arms and light weapons (S/2021/839)*, Secretary-General António Guterres stated that SALW account for 27% of civil deaths in armed conflicts and are, therefore, the leading cause of these deaths.²⁸ As the mandate of the General Assembly First Committee covers issues relating to disarmament and international security, it aims to limit the prevalence of weapons of all kinds.²⁹

Weapons are considered illicit when the way they were manufactured, assembled, transferred, or marked violates national or international laws.³⁰ When illicit trade occurs across the borders of several Member States, it includes the trafficking, or smuggling, of arms from one Member State to another.³¹ The *Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (Firearms Protocol) defines illicit trafficking as the movement of weapons, parts thereof, or ammunition between Member

²³ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Keynote address at UNIDIR 2019 Innovations Dialogue Digital Technologies and International Security – Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu – High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*. 2019. p. 2.

²⁴ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Arms Trade*. 2023; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. *World military expenditure passes \$2 trillion for first time*. 2022.

²⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Weapons of Mass Destruction*. 2023; United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Conventional Arms*. 2023.

²⁶ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Conventional Arms*. 2023.

²⁷ United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2005. p. 3.

²⁸ United Nations, Security Council. *Small arms and light weapons – Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/839)*. 2021. p. 2.

²⁹ *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 11(1); United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Global Issues: Disarmament*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly. *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*. 2023.

³⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (A/60/88)*. 2005. pp. 7-8.

³¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/255)*. 2001. p. 4; United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 7.

States without the consent of all Member States involved.³² According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), illicit trade can be even more profitable, as the illegality of the transaction can increase the price of products that cannot be obtained legally.³³

As new technologies develop, they have an increasing impact on the illicit trade in arms.³⁴ The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), in particular, has provided novel ways of connecting purchasers and sellers of illegal weapons.³⁵ The Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines ICTs as a “[d]iverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information.”³⁶ Communication platforms such as social networks and online forums have enabled a smaller and less organized type of smuggling called “ant-trade.”³⁷ According to UNODC, ICTs have consequently led to an overall decrease in the frequency and visibility of larger criminal organizations in favor of smaller groups, making investigating illicit arms trade more challenging.³⁸ In some Member States, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Colombia, and Jamaica, international criminal trade is now organized by several hundred gangs rather than one or two large organizations.³⁹

Although the illegal markets are changing, UNODC has found that their effect on national and international security remains the same.⁴⁰ According to UNODA, easy access to weapons, especially from illicit sources, endangers the security of Member States and the rights and safety of their populations by enabling crime and terror as well as state-sanctioned political oppression.⁴¹ For example, the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism found 193,172 people were killed in 85,148 terrorist attacks involving SALW in the last decade.⁴² Member States can use ICTs to combat these security issues by analyzing the records of criminal activity on the internet and conducting electronic surveillance of suspects.⁴³ Therefore, the First Committee promotes using new technologies to achieve international security and disarmament.⁴⁴

International and Regional Framework

One of the earliest actions taken by the United Nations (UN) system to combat the illicit trade in arms was the adoption of the *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime* by the General Assembly in 2000, which addresses organized crime in general and is supplemented with protocols on

³² United Nations, General Assembly. *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/255)*. 2001. p. 4.

³³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Institute for Statistics. *Information and communication technologies (ICT)*. 2023.

³⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 10.

³⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Consequences of illicit markets: producing, prolonging and exacerbating conflict and aggravating levels of crime and violence*. 2023.

³⁹ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Global Organized Crime Index. *Data explorer*. 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *A thematic paper supporting the OECD DAC INCAF project ‘Global Factors Influencing the Risk of Conflict and Fragility’: Transnational organised crime and fragile states*. 2012. p. 7.

⁴⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Consequences of illicit markets: producing, prolonging and exacerbating conflict and aggravating levels of crime and violence*. 2023.

⁴¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Arms Trade*. 2023.

⁴² International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. *Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW)*. 2023.

⁴³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. UNODC Teaching Module Series. *Physical and electronic surveillance*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. UNODC Teaching Module Series. *Surveillance and interception of communications*. 2023.

⁴⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *The role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament (A/RES/50/62)*. 1995. p. 2.

specific forms thereof per article 37.⁴⁵ The Firearms Protocol was adopted as General Assembly resolution 55/255 in 2001.⁴⁶ It addresses legal and illegal arms trade between Member States and non-state actors.⁴⁷ Parties to the protocol are required to criminalize the illicit manufacturing, trafficking, or marking of firearms in their national legislations as well as to confiscate, seize, and dispose of all such weapons discovered by them.⁴⁸ As of 2023, 122 Member States are parties to the protocol.⁴⁹ However, only half of the ten Member States exporting the most significant amount of weapons have ratified it.⁵⁰ Specifically, the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and Northern Ireland have signed but not ratified the protocol, whilst the Russian Federation, the State of Israel, and the United States of America have not become signatories.⁵¹

In 2001, the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects also adopted the *Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* (PoA SALW).⁵² This document addresses improving national laws on small arms, monitoring imports and exports, stockpile management, and the cooperation and assistance required to combat illicit trade in SALW.⁵³ Additionally, the PoA SALW encourages Member States to explore the use of technology in tracing and detecting illegal trade.⁵⁴ The goals of the PoA SALW were reinforced by the adoption of the *International Tracing Instrument* (ITI) in the General Assembly in 2005.⁵⁵ It supplements the PoA SALW with specific rules on the tracing of arms, which mandate that weapons are marked, and the relevant records are kept.⁵⁶

Together, these two instruments constitute an international framework on SALW that all Member States have adopted.⁵⁷ As part of their implementation, Member States meet biennially, under the purview of the General Assembly, to discuss efforts made, review progress, and address emerging issues.⁵⁸ At the latest meeting in 2021, Member States resolved to work with the private sector to implement improved

⁴⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament Treaties Database*. 2021; United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/25)*. 2000. pp. 4, 29-30, art. 1, 37.

⁴⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/255)*. 2001.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4, art. 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, art. 5-6.

⁴⁹ United Nations Office of Legal Affairs. United Nations Treaty Collection. *Chapter XVIII: Penal Matters – 12. c Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. 2023.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021*. 2022.

⁵¹ United Nations Office of Legal Affairs. United Nations Treaty Collection. *Chapter XVIII: Penal Matters – 12. c Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. 2023.

⁵² United Nations, Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (A/CONF.192/15 (2001))*. 2001.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2005; United Nations, General Assembly. *International instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons (A/DEC/60/519)*. 2005.

⁵⁶ United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2005. pp. 2, 4-6.

⁵⁷ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2023.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; United Nations, General Assembly, Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. *Report of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1)*. 2021. pp. 1-2.

methods for marking and tracing SALW, “such as data matrix codes, radio frequency identification, and biometrics.”⁵⁹ Member States are further encouraged to implement capacity-building programs concerning new technologies for their national authorities.⁶⁰

Additionally, the *Arms Trade Treaty* (ATT) was adopted in 2013, explicitly covering trade in conventional weapons.⁶¹ It calls for further regulation of this market in national law by requiring exporters to assess the risks the exported arms create in the Member State importing them.⁶² As of 2023, 113 Member States have ratified the ATT, with Member States opposing the Treaty, arguing that their right to self-defense would be unduly restricted if another Member State were entitled to deny the transfer of weapons.⁶³

Although these international instruments reference the possible uses of ICTs, no international legal instrument addresses new technologies directly.⁶⁴ However, according to the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, the existing frameworks may no longer be sufficient to safeguard against security issues caused by fast-paced technological advances.⁶⁵ In its resolution 74/247 (2019) entitled “Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes,” the General Assembly has therefore called for the establishment of a convention combatting the use of ICTs for criminal activities, the first draft of which is expected to be completed later this year.⁶⁶

According to UNODA, the illicit trade in SALW also hinders the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda).⁶⁷ Its consequences are in direct conflict with SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions), but they also affect or are addressed by SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).⁶⁸ According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, technological development is vital in achieving the SDGs because it can be used to obtain, share, and apply knowledge.⁶⁹ This reinforces the importance of commitments enshrined in the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda*, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2015 and stated that creating and transferring new technologies are essential to achieving economic growth, especially in least-developed countries.⁷⁰

⁵⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. *Report of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* (A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1). 2021. p. 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Arms Trade Treaty*. 2013.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6, art. 7-8.

⁶³ United Nations Office of Legal Affairs. United Nations Treaty Collection. *Chapter XXVI: Disarmament – 8. Arms Trade Treaty*. 2023. European Union, European Parliament. *Arms Trade Treaty (ATT): final negotiations*. 2012.

⁶⁴ United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. *A UN treaty on cybercrime en route*. 2022.

⁶⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Keynote address at UNIDIR 2019 Innovations Dialogue Digital Technologies and International Security – Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu – High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*. 2019. p. 2.

⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes* (A/RES/74/247). 2019. p. 3; Electronic Frontier Foundation. *UN Cybercrime Draft Treaty Timeline*. 2023.

⁶⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1). 2015; United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023.

⁶⁸ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023.

⁶⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Technology*. 2023; United Nations Industrial Development Organization. *Science, Technology and Innovation for Achieving the SDGs: Guidelines for Policy Formulation*. 2022. p. 11.

⁷⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development* (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) (A/RES/69/313). 2015. p. 31.

On a regional level, the European Union has established Europol, the European Union’s Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, which coordinates efforts to combat illicit arms trade and assists Member States in this area.⁷¹ For example, the Europol Analysis System is a system for processing information that can be used for analyzing and processing data and intelligence and facilitating operational meetings involving several Member States.⁷² The Organization of American States (OAS) had already adopted the *Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials* in 1997, which takes a similar approach to the Firearms Protocol.⁷³

Role of the International System

The General Assembly has adopted several resolutions addressing the illicit trade in arms and the impact of new technologies on international security.⁷⁴ In 2004, it called for the continued implementation of the PoA SALW and convened a conference and the second biennial meeting on this topic.⁷⁵ Through these meetings, the First Committee addresses emerging issues, such as the risks posed by new technologies.⁷⁶ In this context, UNODA assists the First Committee with norm-setting by collecting data on disarmament issues for Member States.⁷⁷

Regarding ICTs and international security, the General Assembly endorsed the decision of the Council of the International Telecommunication Union to convene a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2002.⁷⁸ The participating stakeholders agreed on a Plan of Action, which resulted in implementing an annual WSIS Forum to facilitate consultations on the action lines, the latest of which found that Member States need to strengthen national policies and develop public-private partnerships to combat cybersecurity threats.⁷⁹ Security Council resolution 2370 (2017) on “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts – Preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons” came to a similar conclusion, urging Member States to collaborate to prevent terrorist groups from gaining access to weapons using modern ICTs.⁸⁰ For example, the public-private partnership Tech Against Terrorism supports smaller businesses that offer legal internet platforms for social media, cloud computing, and

⁷¹ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. *Crime Areas – Illicit firearms trafficking*. 2023.

⁷² European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. *Europol Analysis Projects*. 2023.

⁷³ Organization of American States. *Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials*. 1997; United Nations, General Assembly. *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/255)*. 2001.

⁷⁴ *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 11(1), 22; United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security*. 2023; United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *SALW GA Resolutions*. 2023.

⁷⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (A/RES/58/241)*. 2004. pp. 2-3.

⁷⁶ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly, Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. *Report of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1)*. 2021.

⁷⁷ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *About Us – United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)*. 2023.

⁷⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *World Summit on the Information Society (A/RES/56/183)*. 2002.

⁷⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*. 2021; United Nations, General Assembly. *Letter dated 7 October 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/C.2/59/3)*. 2004. Annex, pp. 13-29; World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2023. *High-Level Track Outcomes and Executive Brief*. 2023. p. 11; World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2023. *World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2023*. 2023.

⁸⁰ United Nations, Security Council. *Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts – Preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons (S/RES/2370 (2017))*. 2017. p. 5.

financial services in implementing measures to recognize and prevent terrorist activity, as they typically lack the resources of larger companies.⁸¹

In recent years, the General Assembly First Committee established a Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (GGE) to assist in developing norms on the secure use and control of ICTs within international law.⁸² It then created an open-ended working group on security and use of ICTs 2021–2025 (OEWG) to build on its work and serve as a general forum for dialogue on cybersecurity with other stakeholders.⁸³ The reports of the GGE and OEWG found that terrorist groups can use ICTs to facilitate their operations with the same proficiency as Member States and that many state and non-state actors with malicious intents exacerbate the difficulty of addressing all potential risks.⁸⁴ These new technologies also provide easier access to weapons, which is essential for terrorists in perpetrating their attacks.⁸⁵ The reports, therefore, encourage Member States to develop systems for identifying, storing, and sharing evidence of criminal activities in cyberspace and to safeguard the integrity of ICT supply chains to prevent them from being exploited.⁸⁶

According to the General Assembly, achieving gender equality also plays an important role in combatting the illicit trade in arms, as women can be instrumental in preventing armed conflicts and implementing measures for disarmament.⁸⁷ However, in its resolution 77/150 on “Information and communications technologies for sustainable development” (2022), the General Assembly identified a persistent gender gap in digital literacy, with only 19% of women in least-developed countries being able to use the internet, as opposed to 31% of men.⁸⁸ To promote understanding of these issues in general, UNODC has implemented the Education for Justice (E4J) initiative, which encourages lawfulness among young people by providing educational materials on organized crime, firearms, and cybercrime for students up to the tertiary level.⁸⁹

At an international level, the impact of new and emerging technologies on the illicit trade in arms is also monitored by civil society organizations (CSOs).⁹⁰ For example, the Small Arms Survey provides research on global trends to actors on all levels to facilitate policy decisions.⁹¹ A similar approach is taken by

⁸¹ United Nations, Security Council, Counter-Terrorism Committee. *Information and communications technologies*. 2023.

⁸² United Nations, General Assembly. *Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security (A/RES/73/266)*. 2019. p. 3; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. p. 2.

⁸³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security (A/RES/75/240)*. 2021. pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. pp. 7-8; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 (A/77/275)*. 2022. p. 7.

⁸⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 13; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. UNODC Teaching Module Series. *Terrorism and trafficking in weapons*. 2023.

⁸⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. pp. 10-11; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 (A/77/275)*. 2022. p. 9.

⁸⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control (A/RES/77/55)*. 2022. p. 2.

⁸⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/RES/77/150)*. 2022. p. 10.

⁸⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Education for Justice*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Tertiary Education*. 2023.

⁹⁰ Small Arms Survey. *Small Arms Survey – 2019-23 Strategy for a World Without Illicit Arms and Armed Violence*. n.d. pp. 7, 12; Saferworld. *Briefing Paper – Preventing and mitigating the risk of arms diversion in Africa*. 2022. p. 14.

⁹¹ Small Arms Survey. *Vision and Mission*. 2023.

Saferworld, a CSO active in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, working with people affected by conflict in addition to gathering data to support policy-makers at local, national, regional, and international levels.⁹²

Identifying the Impacts of the Illicit Trade in Arms

According to the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, the international community historically discusses the topic in the context of promoting peace and security.⁹³ Following the Cold War, studies conducted by the UN have indicated that excessive military spending can negatively impact a Member State's ability to facilitate sustainable development, as these funds are unavailable to promote economic and social development.⁹⁴ The SDGs have reinforced this aspect of the topic, but the Agenda for Disarmament states that this relationship should be stressed even more in international debates.⁹⁵

In addition to the legal acquisition of arms for military purposes, new technologies have increased the overall availability of weapons.⁹⁶ For instance, the advent of the dark web, a part of the internet that can only be accessed with specific software and uses a series of connections to anonymize all data transfers, has enabled criminal organizations to engage in crime-as-a-service (CaaS) models.⁹⁷ CaaS models entail the provision of instructions and the development of advanced blueprints rather than the sale of pre-made arms.⁹⁸ This area has been particularly affected by the development of 3-D printing machines.⁹⁹ Although this technology is not yet suitable for mass production, it can be used to create or replace the parts of composite weapons, the components of which can be taken apart.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, inexperienced actors can easily access lethal weapons by downloading relevant blueprints or instructions for converting less dangerous firearms, such as signal pistols.¹⁰¹ Therefore, ICTs can circumvent the need to transport anything across the borders of Member States, which are protected in all international instruments on the reduction of illicit arms.¹⁰²

When weapons are readily available, the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality education), which can help to advance disarmament, is impeded due to the creation of unsafe learning environments.¹⁰³ To combat this

⁹² Saferworld. *Who we are*. 2023.

⁹³ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament*. 2018. p. 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7; United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023.

⁹⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament*. 2018. p. 7.

⁹⁶ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Obstacles to cybercrime investigations*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 13.

⁹⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Obstacles to cybercrime investigations*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 13.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. UNODC Teaching Module Series. *Firearms parts and components*. 2023.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 13.

¹⁰² United Nations, Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (A/CONF.192/15 (2001))*. 2001. pp. 7-17; United Nations, General Assembly. *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/255)*. 2001. pp. 5-7, art. 7-8, 10; United Nations, General Assembly. *Arms Trade Treaty*. 2013. pp. 5-7, art. 7-8, 12; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 13; United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2005. pp. 4-6.

¹⁰³ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023.

issue, ICTs can facilitate the implementation of educational programs such as the E4J initiative and the finding, monitoring, or tracking of firearms across several Member States.¹⁰⁴

Hampering economic growth through excessive military spending also increases the risk of child soldiers being used in armed conflicts.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, young men, in particular, may be more susceptible to engaging in armed violence when they have fewer opportunities to achieve a decent livelihood, which hinders the achievement of SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth).¹⁰⁶ In this context, the First Committee underlines that women and girls should not be reduced to victims of armed violence because they can play an essential role in preventing and reducing it.¹⁰⁷ According to the latest report on SALW from the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, Member State support is needed to implement the PoA SALW and ITI successfully.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the Agenda for Disarmament emphasizes the gendered impact of armed violence.¹⁰⁹ As the possession and use of weapons are associated with certain forms of masculinity, men are significantly more likely to be perpetrators of crimes using arms, while women are often subjected to gender-based violence.¹¹⁰

To reduce the availability of illicit weapons, Member States ratifying the Firearms Protocol agree only to authorize exports if the importing Member State has licensed the import and the transit Member States do not object to the transfer.¹¹¹ In this context, the Security Council has stressed that the illicit trade in arms has adverse socioeconomic consequences and negatively affects human rights in its resolution 2616 (2016) on “Maintenance of international peace and security.”¹¹² It further concluded that illegal firearms impede the rule of law by undermining arms embargos mandated by the committee, which has a negative impact on international peace and security and, therefore, on the achievement of SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions).¹¹³ The ITI cautions that using ICTs to advance sustainable development requires international cooperation and the transfer of knowledge and technology between Member States.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the report of the GGE urges Member States to use and develop new technologies responsibly rather than contributing to the advancement of malicious uses.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Institute for Educational Planning. *Information and communication technology (ICT) in education*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Education for Justice*. 2023.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Approving 15 Texts, First Committee Spotlights Impact of Illicit Weapons Trade on Women, Value of Gender Perspective in Reducing Armed Conflict*. 2022.

¹⁰⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects – Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/77)*. 2022. p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament*. 2018. p. 39.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/RES/55/255)*. 2001. pp. 2, 6, art. 10(2).

¹¹² United Nations, Security Council. *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2616 (2021))*. 2022. p. 1.

¹¹³ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023; United Nations, Security Council. *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2616 (2021))*. 2022.

¹¹⁴ United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2005. pp. 2, 6-9.

¹¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. pp. 8, 15.

Addressing the Risks Posed by Cyberspace and the Development of the ICTs

Historically, the First Committee has addressed the two aspects of this topic separately by either dealing with the illicit trade in arms or the impact of ICTs on international security in general.¹¹⁶ While the PoA SALW recommended using new technologies to improve existing efforts to mark and trace arms, it did not address potential risks associated with malicious exploits of the same advances.¹¹⁷ However, these aspects are now being discussed in the context of the PoA SALW through the biennial meetings on the implementation of this instrument; in the latest report, 3-D printing was explicitly mentioned as a new technology posing novel risks.¹¹⁸

The Security Council, in particular, has identified further ways technology can be exploited and cybersecurity compromised.¹¹⁹ Criminals can now base all activities that do not necessarily require a physical presence or the movement of illegal goods on digital platforms.¹²⁰ This includes the entire recruitment and planning processes and all communications concerning their activities.¹²¹ As the dark web can be used to make sure that these activities cannot be traced, and smaller gangs are more challenging to monitor in general, this significantly affects the ability of Member States to prevent and prosecute the illicit trade in arms.¹²² Moreover, criminals can send and receive payments without needing to resort to banks or cash, and the establishment of crowdfunding platforms has generated a new way of raising capital.¹²³ As the sale of blueprints and 3-D models could replace physical weapons in some instances, some gangs would be able to conduct their entire activities online.¹²⁴ According to the Executive Directorate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council, some of these areas have gained even more urgency in recent years as the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased internet usage overall.¹²⁵

To address these issues, the 2021 report of the GGE as well as the 2022 report of the OEWG, recommend that Member States incorporate standards for cybersecurity, which ensure that ICTs offer no undiscovered harmful features, as well as incident and crisis management into their national policies to be able to assess the scope of potential incidents.¹²⁶ In the context of the illicit trade in arms, such incidents

¹¹⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (A/RES/58/241)*. 2004; United Nations, General Assembly. *Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security (A/RES/73/266)*. 2019.

¹¹⁷ United Nations, Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (A/CONF.192/15 (2001))*. 2001. p. 15.

¹¹⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. *Report of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1)*. 2021. p. 12.

¹¹⁹ United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. *Counter-Terrorism in Cyberspace*. n.d. p. 1; United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. *Information and Communications Technologies*. n.d. p. 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. pp. 3, 13-14, 19.

¹²³ United Nations, Security Council. *Preventing and combating the financing of terrorism (S/RES/2462 (2019))*. 2019.

¹²⁴ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. pp. 3, 13-14.

¹²⁵ United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. *Counter-Terrorism in Cyberspace*. n.d. p. 1.

¹²⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. pp. 8-10; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 (A/77/275)*. 2022. p. 9.

could include terror attacks using illicit weapons.¹²⁷ Additionally, the GGE stresses that Member States should not permit ICTs to be abused from their territory if they become or are made aware of such activities, which would mitigate the risk of other Member States being surprised by criminals acting from abroad.¹²⁸ Other recommendations include ensuring that a state's ICT systems are secure by safeguarding the integrity of their supply chains, exchanging information on known vulnerabilities, and aiding affected Member States where possible.¹²⁹ Additionally, the Security Council and UNODA stress that Member States must monitor online and postal services to uncover criminal activities.¹³⁰

Conclusion

The prevalence of illicit trade in arms facilitates crime, terror, and oppression by providing easy access to weapons.¹³¹ New technologies have made it both harder for Member States to track and identify perpetrators of these acts and easier for criminal organizations to communicate and deliver their services.¹³² The General Assembly and its GGE stress that combatting this trend will require Member States to collaborate in developing responsible and sustainable technologies.¹³³ According to the Agenda for Disarmament, future efforts should emphasize the impacts on sustainable development.¹³⁴ Additionally, the General Assembly First Committee encourages Member States to adopt a gender-mainstreaming perspective into the measures taken to address illicit arms trade.¹³⁵

Further Research

Delegates should consider the following questions in their research: How can the First Committee combine its work on SALW with its efforts regarding the impact of ICTs on international security? Are the existing international instruments sufficient to address the risks and opportunities generated by the constant development of new technologies? If not, what measures can the committee recommend to close these gaps? How can the existing frameworks be used to better employ ICTs for the mitigation of the effects that the illicit trade in arms has on sustainable development?

Annotated Bibliography

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¹²⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. pp. 7-8.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

¹³⁰ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 14; United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. *Counter-Terrorism in Cyberspace*. n.d. p. 2.

¹³¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Arms Trade*. 2023.

¹³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Consequences of illicit markets: producing, prolonging and exacerbating conflict and aggravating levels of crime and violence*. 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. University Module Series. *Firearms – The Illicit Market in Firearms*. 2019. p. 13.

¹³³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security (A/76/135)*. 2021. pp. 8, 15; United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*. 2005. pp. 2, 6-9.

¹³⁴ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament*. 2018. p. 7.

¹³⁵ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Approving 15 Texts, First Committee Spotlights Impact of Illicit Weapons Trade on Women, Value of Gender Perspective in Reducing Armed Conflict*. 2022.

This document is the final report of the GGE, which was tasked with addressing the development of recommendations for norms, rules, and principles to build capacities with regard to ICTs and analyze how international law applies to them. The GGE was the first UN process dealing with responsible behavior in cyberspace. Although the report does not directly address their impact on the illicit trade in arms, delegates can refer to it for general recommendations on how Member States can benefit from new technologies while also addressing their inherent risks.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects – Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/77)*. 2022. Retrieved 28 May 2023 from: <http://undocs.org/en/A/77/77>

In his latest report on illicit traffic in SALW, the Secretary-General has outlined possible measures to assist Member States in combatting the issue. This encompasses an overview of ongoing and previous actions by UN bodies and procedures. Delegates can therefore use this document to get an overview of the international actors collaborating with the First Committee and to learn about possible gaps in the existing frameworks for preventing and reducing the illegal trade in weapons.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 (A/77/275)*. 2022. Retrieved 28 May 2023 from: <http://undocs.org/en/A/77/275>

The mandate of the Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies is similar to that of the GGE. However, it is also intended to determine and address existing and potential risks created by the development of ICTs. Additionally, it is a forum for an open-ended dialogue on cybersecurity within the UN and analyzes the concepts necessary to protect international IT systems. Delegates can refer to this report in combination with the report of the GGE for recommendations regarding the beneficial use of technological developments.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. *Disarmament and Sustainable Development*. 2023. Retrieved 28 May 2023 from: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/sustainable-development/>

This website provides an overview of the effect the illicit trade in arms has on sustainable development. It includes an overview of the affected SDGs and details how disarmament can help achieve the 2030 Agenda. Delegates can use this page as a starting point in their research into possible areas they can address at the conference.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *University Module Series*. 2023. Retrieved 28 May 2023 from: <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/tertiary/index.html>

UNODA has developed a series of educational materials on some of the most prominent threats of our time through its E4J initiative. These modules are intended to be used by academics in tertiary education. As such, they can help delegates get a deeper insight into crime prevention and organized crime. The Firearms, Organized Crime, and Cybercrime modules are particularly relevant to this topic and provide an introduction to how ICTs and cybersecurity are connected to the illicit trade in arms.

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2. Conflict and Natural Resources

“The effective governance of natural resources and the environment should be viewed as an investment in conflict prevention within the development process itself.”¹³⁶

Introduction

In 2022, the President of the 76th Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, Abdalla Shahid, delivered a speech on “Natural Resources, Peaceful Societies, and Sustainable Development,” in which he called for renewed attention to the links between conflict and natural resources.¹³⁷ As the plenary body tasked with addressing threats to international peace and security, the General Assembly First Committee leads thematic discussions and debate on this topic in addition to coordinating UN committees that report to the General Assembly.¹³⁸ The UN defines “natural resources” as “natural assets...occurring in nature that can be used for economic production or consumption.”¹³⁹ The First Committee has most recently discussed the relationship between conflict and natural resources in its 2009 resolution on “Climate change and its possible security implications,” which identifies two main relationships between conflict and natural resources.¹⁴⁰ First, conflict can occur over natural resources when those resources are inequitably distributed or not managed according to community needs, according to the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).¹⁴¹ Second, destruction of natural resources can be a byproduct of conflict.¹⁴² Recently, the First Committee has worked alongside the Security Council and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) to build global awareness campaigns and research about the multifaceted relationship between conflict and natural resources.¹⁴³ One key outcome of this work was UNDPA and UNEP’s *Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners* (2015), which offers recommendations for best practices rooted in case studies such as rainforest management in Canada and oil access in Sudan and South Sudan.¹⁴⁴ The First Committee’s work on the cyclical relationship between conflict and natural resources is an integral component of its larger contributions to sustainability.¹⁴⁵ In accordance with the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) (2030 Agenda), particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), the First Committee aims to simultaneously promote peace and resource preservation as intrinsically linked goals.¹⁴⁶

International and Regional Framework

The 1994 *Human Development Report* introduces the concept of human security as “protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards.”¹⁴⁷ Since then, the General Assembly has identified relationships between these threats to

¹³⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Natural Resources, Peaceful Societies and Sustainable Development: Lessons from the Kimberly Process*. n.d.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*. n.d.

¹³⁹ United Nations, Statistics Division. *Natural Resources*. 2023.

¹⁴⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Observance of the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in Times of War and Armed Conflict (A/RES/56/4)*. 2001. p. 1; United Nations, General Assembly. *Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications (A/RES/63/281)*. 2009. pp. 1-2.

¹⁴¹ United Nations, Department of Political Affairs, and United Nations Environment Programme. *Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners*. 2015. pp. 7-8.

¹⁴² United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change and Security Risks*. n.d.

¹⁴³ Ibid., United Nations, Security Council. *Maintenance of International Peace and Security*. 2019; United Nations, Security Council. *Letter dated 18 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*. 2020; United Nations Security Council. *Threats to International Peace and Security*. 2022.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations, Department of Political Affairs, and United Nations Environment Programme. *Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners*. 2015.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 25-26.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*. 1994. p. 23.

human security in its 2009 resolution on “Climate change and its possible security implications,” which invites relevant UN bodies to address climate change with security implications in mind, and it requests a report on the topic from the Secretary-General.¹⁴⁸ The resultant 2009 “Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/281)” outlines ways that climate change will affect peace and security over time: vulnerability, development, coping and security, statelessness, and international conflict.¹⁴⁹ It also recommends environmental management strategies to prevent conflict, especially where experts anticipate large-scale, rapid-onset, and/or irreversible impacts on the environment or populations.¹⁵⁰ The report concludes by recommending improved information sharing and cooperation across regional and international organizations, a task that fits the First Committee’s roles of overseeing the work of subsidiary bodies such as UNEA and coordinating plenary discussion on matters of international peace and security.¹⁵¹

The 2030 Agenda outlines 17 goals for Member States to meet by 2030 and asserts the importance of considering sustainability and peace as interdependent: “Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.”¹⁵² In addition to effective management of natural resources per SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action) calls for the incorporation of strategies for climate change adaptation, resilience, and early warning systems into states’ natural resource management plans.¹⁵³ SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), target 2 calls for “sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources,” and meeting this target will reduce risk of conflict over natural resources by promoting equitable access to resources within and across Member States.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the 2030 Agenda highlights institutions that promote peace as an integral aspect of sustainability in SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).¹⁵⁵ Targets 16.5 and 16.6 call for ending corruption and bribery and for transparency and accountability of institutions to the public, respectively.¹⁵⁶ The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund highlight corruption and transparency in their 2022 report, *Defueling Conflict; Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*, and meeting SDG 16 supports effective and equitable resource management towards the reduction of conflict over resources.¹⁵⁷

To address the climate crisis more directly, 196 Member States signed the *Paris Agreement* in 2015, in which parties agree to submit national plans to reduce carbon emissions towards the goal of limiting the increase in global average temperature.¹⁵⁸ The *Paris Agreement* recognizes the importance of these steps for addressing poverty and food security, two of the links between conflict and natural resources that the First Committee has discussed.¹⁵⁹ Although different natural resources pose unique management

¹⁴⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications (A/RES/63/281)*. 2009. pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. pp. 1-3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *The United Nations System*. 2021; United Nations, General Assembly. *Function and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 28.

¹⁵² United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 1-35.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 24; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 22.

¹⁵⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 23-26.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ Ahmadnia et al. The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund. *Defueling Conflict: Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*. 2022. pp. 15, 39, 104, 126.

¹⁵⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *The Paris Agreement. What is the Paris Agreement?* n.d.; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015. pp. 1-25.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. pp. 5-11.

challenges, the Kimberly Process, established by African states and supported by General Assembly resolution 55/56 (2001) on “The role of diamonds in fueling conflict: breaking the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict as a contribution to prevention and settlement of conflicts,” offers an example framework for international and regional cooperation on resource-related conflict.¹⁶⁰ Since 2003, 58 countries plus the European Union have coordinated diamond trade through the Kimberly Process to remove 99.8% of conflict diamonds, which are “rough diamonds used by rebel movements and their allies to finance armed conflicts aimed at undermining legitimate governments,” from global supply chains.¹⁶¹ The Kimberly Process includes shared standards on product origin and transparency, which each state integrates into national law, and participating states agree to trade diamonds only with fellow Kimberly Process members.¹⁶² Civil society and industry stakeholders work with states to maintain and update the Kimberly Process through twice-annual meetings and monthly teleconferences.¹⁶³ In 2022, the President of the 76th Session of the General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid, called upon Member States to draw upon the Kimberly Process as they pursue work towards the SDGs.¹⁶⁴ President Shahid called for the General Assembly to focus on institutional development for equitable stakeholder participation and transparent resource management in upcoming work on this issue.¹⁶⁵

Role of the International System

During the decolonization period in the 1950s and 1960s, the First Committee adopted several resolutions that affirmed Member States’ sovereignty over natural resources within their borders.¹⁶⁶ In the 21st century, the First Committee has shifted its focus to environmental protection in times of conflict, to which they directed attention in 2001 by establishing 6 November as International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict.¹⁶⁷

UNEA reports to the General Assembly and is responsible for assessing the role of natural resources in conflict.¹⁶⁸ With recommendations from the First Committee and subsequently UNEA, UNEP produces research and recommendations towards the prevention of environmental degradation in conflict.¹⁶⁹ UNEP led the technical contributions to the 2009 report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on “Climate change and its possible security implications” and the 2015 Group of 7 (G7) report on “A New Climate for Peace.”¹⁷⁰ The 2009 report of the Secretary-General discusses natural resources as “threat multipliers” or “threat minimizers” for conflict according to how Member States manage the resources, and it contains risk assessments for natural resource loss due to climate change over time.¹⁷¹ The report defines a “threat multiplier” as something that “exacerb[ates] threats caused by persistent poverty, weak institutions for resource management and conflict resolution, fault lines, and a history of mistrust between communities and nations, and inadequate access to information or resources.”¹⁷² It defines “threat minimizers” as “conditions or actions that are desirable in their own right but also help lower the risk of

¹⁶⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *The role of diamonds in fueling conflict: breaking the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict as a contribution to prevention and settlement of conflicts (A/RES/55/56)*. 2001; United Nations, General Assembly. *Natural Resources, Peaceful Societies and Sustainable Development: Lessons from the Kimberly Process*. n.d.

¹⁶¹ Kimberly Process. *FAQ*. 2023; Kimberly Process. *What is the Kimberly Process?*. 2023.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Natural Resources, Peaceful Societies and Sustainable Development: Lessons from the Kimberly Process*. n.d.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Permanent Sovereignty Over Natural Resources (A/RES/1803(XVII))*. 1962.

¹⁶⁷ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Conflict 6 November*. n.d.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change and Security Risks*. n.d.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Addressing Climate-Related Security Risks*. 2019; United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change and Security Risks*. n.d.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change and Security Risks*. n.d.

¹⁷¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

climate-related insecurity,” such as development and climate change adaptation measures.¹⁷³ The G7 report concludes with five areas of policy focus that it recommends for maintaining peace and security amid threats of resource loss due to climate change: climate-fragility risk assessment tools, food security, disaster risk reduction, water dispute resolution mechanisms, and use of overseas development assistance for local capacity building and climate resilience.¹⁷⁴ UNEP further coordinates with regional organizations and local stakeholders to build environmental resilience.¹⁷⁵ In 2016, UNEA adopted resolution UNEP/EA.2/Res.15, entitled “Protection of the Environment in Areas affected by Armed Conflict,” which underscores the necessity of sound resource management for conflict prevention.¹⁷⁶

The Security Council is the First Committee’s primary partner in matters of peace and security.¹⁷⁷ In its 2005 resolution, “Threats to international peace and security” (S/RES/1625), the Security Council expressed determination to take action against illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources when it contributes to conflict, but it has since taken no direct action on resources, climate, and security.¹⁷⁸ The Security Council first debated climate change in 2007 and has hosted three high-level debates on the links between conflict and the environment in 2019, 2021, and 2022.¹⁷⁹ In a letter to the Secretary-General following the 2022 debate, which focused on peace and security in Africa, the Security Council recognized that climate change can exacerbate conditions that contribute to conflict, including lags in economic development and competition over scarce resources.¹⁸⁰ Consequently, the Security Council has called for integrating a “climate lens” in peace and security work and additional data collection moving forward.¹⁸¹ The Security Council has expressed its intent to leverage its current in-country capacity, such as special political missions and peace operations, to collect such data.¹⁸² Towards the goals of international peace and security in light of conflict over resources, the First Committee, Security Council, and other stakeholders are building absorptive capacity (resilience to shocks), adaptive capacity (adjustments to mitigate future risks), and transformative capacity (structural shifts to reduce vulnerability of economic and political systems to climate change).¹⁸³ For example, the World Bank, in partnership with UNEP, has implemented its Risk and Resilience Assessment strategy (RRA) in areas affected by resource scarcity to tailor development initiatives to minimize conflict.¹⁸⁴

As the Secretary-General emphasizes in his 2009 report to the General Assembly, the First Committee and the wider UN are tackling the intersection of conflict and natural resources through the dual

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015. pp.117-123; United Nations Environment Programme. *Addressing Climate-Related Security Risks*. 2019.

¹⁷⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change and Security Risks*. n.d.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Conflict 6 November*. n.d.; United Nations, Environment Assembly. *Protection of the Environment in Areas affected by Armed Conflict (UNEP/EA.2/Res. 15)*. 2016; United Nations, General Assembly. *Observance of the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in Times of War and Armed Conflict (A/RES/56/4)*. 2001. p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations, Security Council. *Maintenance of International Peace and Security*. 2019; United Nations Security Council. *Letter dated 18 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*. 2020; United Nations Security Council. *Threats to International Peace and Security*. 2022.

¹⁷⁸ Security Council Report. *UN Documents for Energy, Climate and Natural Resources*. 2023; United Nations, Security Council. *Threats to international peace and security (S/RES/1625)*. 2005.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations, Security Council. *Maintenance of International Peace and Security*. 2019; United Nations Security Council. *Letter dated 18 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*. 2020; United Nations Security Council. *Threats to International Peace and Security*. 2022.

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Peacekeeping. *Conflict and Natural Resources*. n.d.; United Nations, Security Council. *Threats to International Peace and Security*. 2022. pp. 2-11.

¹⁸¹ United Nations, Security Council. *Threats to International Peace and Security*. 2022, p. 2.

¹⁸² United Nations, Security Council. *Letter dated 18 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*. 2020. p. 4.

¹⁸³ Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015. pp. 77-79.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

framework of conflict prevention (rather than reaction) and sustainable development.¹⁸⁵ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works with regional partners where conflicts occur over scarce resources, such as in the Lake Chad Basin.¹⁸⁶ The Lake Chad Basin covers 8% of African territory and offers fertile agricultural land and fishing for livelihoods of 42 million people in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.¹⁸⁷ Over the last 60 years, Lake Chad has shrunk by 90% due to factors such as dam construction and climate change, and conflicts have occurred over dwindling resources.¹⁸⁸ The UNDP, alongside the African Union, has supported the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin, which was established in 2018.¹⁸⁹ This collaboration aims to prevent armed groups like Boko Haram from controlling these resources with force.¹⁹⁰ In January 2023, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the UNDP convened the third High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region, and one outcome of the conference was raising awareness about the link between climate change and conflict over resources, especially after 2022 floods worsened food insecurity.¹⁹¹

Impact of Natural Resources and Climate Change on Conflict

UNEP has found that 40% of intra-state conflicts, conflicts that occur between groups within one state, in the past 60 years are partially caused by conflict over natural resources.¹⁹² As recognized in the 2009 report of the Secretary-General, scholars generally agree that natural resources do not *directly* cause conflict.¹⁹³ It is difficult to predict how climate change will shape this relationship in the future, so the First Committee and its partners use regularly-updated data to assess risks to peace and security due to climate change.¹⁹⁴ The 2009 report of the Secretary-General also highlights the roles of environmental destruction as a “threat multiplier” and sustainable development as a “threat minimizer.”¹⁹⁵ This framework emphasizes that decisions about resource management and respect for the environment in times of conflict can either damage or protect natural resources.¹⁹⁶ Though this report has not been updated recently, in 2022 the President of the 76th Session of the General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid, called for Member States to conduct additional work on this issue as they work towards the SDGs.¹⁹⁷

Resource scarcity is one of the primary links between conflict and natural resources, and in a joint report, the World Bank and SPF identify multiple ways that resource scarcity can contribute to conflict.¹⁹⁸ Resource scarcity can be “supply-induced,” which means that due to degradation of the environment or supply-chain infrastructure such as pipelines, natural resources on which a population depends cannot be

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 4.

¹⁸⁶ United Nations Development Programme. *Conflict Analysis in the Lake Chad Basin 2020-2021*. 2022. pp. 4-5.

¹⁸⁷ Kabukuru. *The Associated Press. Report: Climate change fueling conflict in Lake Chad Basin*. 2023.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; United Nations Development Programme. *Conflict Analysis in the Lake Chad Basin 2020-2021*. 2022. pp. 18-25.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁰ Kabukuru. *The Associated Press. Report: Climate change fueling conflict in Lake Chad Basin*. 2023; United Nations Development Programme. *Conflict Analysis in the Lake Chad Basin 2020-2021*. 2022. pp. 4-5.

¹⁹¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Outcome Document of the High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region*. 2023. pp. 5-6.

¹⁹² United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Conflict 6 November*. n.d.

¹⁹³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 4-5.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015, p. 18; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. P. 2.

¹⁹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Natural Resources, Peaceful Societies and Sustainable Development: Lessons from the Kimberly Process*. n.d.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmadnia et al., The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund. *Defueling Conflict: Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*. 2022. pp. 30-33.

accessed.¹⁹⁹ An example of “supply-induced” resource scarcity is loss of agricultural and livestock production due to changes in precipitation (droughts or flooding).²⁰⁰ This can foster conflict along ethnic or other group lines when basic needs cannot be met, according to case studies across world regions summarized in the World Bank and SPF report.²⁰¹ The World Food Programme has expressed concern about this issue in the Horn of Africa, where four years without the usual rainy season have contributed to food insecurity for 22 million people as well as conflict, and it has been establishing irrigation systems and early warning weather monitoring in response.²⁰² Scarcity can also be “demand-induced” due to population growth or other increases in resource consumption.²⁰³ For example, as the demand for oil, a non-renewable resource, increases with the growing driving population, the World Bank and SPF forecast that the rising price of this scarce resource will disproportionately affect poorer populations and contribute to conflict across groups at different income levels.²⁰⁴ This example relates to another form of resource scarcity, “structural scarcity,” the condition in which certain groups in society have unequal access to a resource due to systemic inequality.²⁰⁵ Although the World Bank, SPF, and UNEP do not consider conflict an inevitable result of supply-induced, demand-induced, or structural resource scarcity, they emphasize that resource scarcity can contribute to conflict absent good governance and resource management.²⁰⁶

Land is one key natural resource over which conflict can occur, especially in areas where there is a history of border contestation after decolonization.²⁰⁷ A “threat multiplier” of conflict over land is the presence of precious resources, such as in the conflict over oil and pipeline infrastructure in Sudan and South Sudan, where the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei has sought to maintain peace and protect humanitarian actors in the border region since civil war and the independence of South Sudan in 2011.²⁰⁸ Scholars have found evidence that oil dependence is related to intrastate conflict, but government management of resources can mitigate conflict.²⁰⁹ Additionally, non-renewable resources are a source of wealth that can afford legitimacy to authoritarian governments.²¹⁰ As these resources decrease, and as states shift to renewable energy sources to meet their commitments in the Paris Agreement, this potential source of legitimacy will weaken.²¹¹ Scholars have warned that when this legitimacy erodes, intrastate conflict over filling a power vacuum may arise.²¹²

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 30-33; United Nations Environment Programme. *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*. 2012. p. 9.

²⁰⁰ Ahmadnia et al., The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund. *Defueling Conflict: Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*. 2022. pp. 30-33.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 34-36.

²⁰² Thapa. United Nations, World Food Programme. *Horn of Africa: extreme drought deepens hunger in a region beset by conflict*. 2022.

²⁰³ Ahmadnia et al., The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund. *Defueling Conflict: Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*. 2022. pp. 30-33; United Nations Environment Programme. *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*. 2012, p. 9.

²⁰⁴ Ahmadnia et al., The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund. *Defueling Conflict: Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*. 2022. p. 39.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 30-33; United Nations Environment Programme. *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*. 2012. p. 9-10, 27.

²⁰⁶ Ahmadnia et al., The World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund. *Defueling Conflict: Environmental and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*. 2022. pp. 51-53; United Nations Environment Programme. *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*. 2012.

²⁰⁷ African Union, African Development Bank, and Economic Commission for Africa. *Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. Land Policy in Africa. A Framework to Strengthen Land Rights, Enhance Productivity and Secure Livelihoods*. 2010. pp. 6-7.

²⁰⁸ African Union, African Development Bank, and Economic Commission for Africa. *Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. A Framework to Strengthen Land Rights, Enhance Productivity and Secure Livelihoods* 2010. pp. 6-7; United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei. *Mandate*. 2023.

²⁰⁹ Bodea et al. World Development. *Oil and Civil Conflict: Can Public Spending Have a Mitigation Effect?*. 2016. pp. 1-10.

²¹⁰ Haber et al. American Political Science Review. *Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse*. 2011. pp. 1-26.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

Competition over water is another potential “threat multiplier.”²¹³ Although water is a renewable resource, it will become scarcer in some regions as climate change reduces glacier and snow cover mass and shifts precipitation patterns.²¹⁴ Changes in freshwater availability affect the habitability of regions because of basic needs fulfilled by clean drinking water, fisheries, and agriculture.²¹⁵ The Secretary-General has expressed concern for areas where weak governance increases human vulnerability.²¹⁶ Disruption of economies can lead to involuntary migration or conflict absent interventions to make the economy more resilient to shocks.²¹⁷ Scientists expect drought to reduce cereal production in highly-populated and low-income areas in Africa and South Asia, which simultaneously increases food insecurity and threatens livelihoods.²¹⁸ For example, the World Bank has been applying its RRA strategy to the Sahel region in West Africa since 2020.²¹⁹ UNEP contributes data analysis to the RRA, which has so far identified the reduction of arable land due to drought as a primary risk factor for further conflict escalation.²²⁰ According to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that collaborates with UNOCHA, conflict over resources in the Sahel region is challenging to address because the region spans multiple Member States and most directly affects rural poor and nomadic populations, who have historically been marginalized from political processes.²²¹ Furthermore, norms about water usage and dispute mechanisms vary by local community in the region.²²² Per the Secretary-General’s recommendations to the General Assembly, more effective and inclusive governance is an important part of promoting both peace and sustainable resource management.²²³

Impact of Conflict on Natural Resources and Climate Change

Conflict also threatens renewable and non-renewable resources essential for food and energy security, as the ongoing war in Ukraine, beginning with the Russian invasion in 2022, illustrates.²²⁴ According to a report from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the conflict has affected production and trade of natural resources.²²⁵ Conflict has destroyed livestock, crops, and farmlands, which rely on careful and regular planting to replenish the soil with nutrients.²²⁶ 25% of rural households that FAO interviewed said they had reduced or ceased agricultural production since the war began, and this rate is higher in areas with more protracted conflict in eastern Ukraine.²²⁷ In the short-term, this has resulted in 2.25 million USD in loss and damages in the first six months of the war alone, particularly in

²¹³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. pp. 10-12.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. pp. 5-6.

²¹⁸ Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015. pp. 41-50; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 11.

²¹⁹ Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015, pp. 41-50, 79-80; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Sahel security crisis ‘poses a global threat,’ Guterres warns*. 2022; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 11.

²²⁰ Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015, pp. 79-80.

²²¹ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. *Natural resource management in the Sahel: Uses and customs at the service of conflict resolution*. 2022. p. 9.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp. 20-45.

²²³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 6.

²²⁴ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. *Impact of the war on agriculture and rural livelihoods in Ukraine*. 2022. pp. v-viii; Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015. pp. 5-74.

²²⁵ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. *Impact of the war on agriculture and rural livelihoods in Ukraine*. 2022. pp. v-viii.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. *Impact of the war on agriculture and rural livelihoods in Ukraine*. 2022. p. vi.

lost production value of grains, oil seeds like sunflower and rapeseed, and vegetables.²²⁸ In January 2023, Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo warned in a speech to the Security Council that Ukrainian and global energy and food crises could worsen if the conflict becomes more protracted.²²⁹ DiCarlo noted the work of the UNDP to mitigate the impact of the conflict on natural resources critical to human security, but she urged a swift end to the conflict to prevent further “humanitarian and human rights catastrophe.”²³⁰

Additionally, local communities, especially subsistence farmers, and countries that are dependent on Ukrainian food exports, such as Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, have faced food shortages.²³¹ Since Ukraine is the world’s largest exporter of sunflower seeds and a major exporter of grains and vegetable oils, the loss of agricultural resources affects food security severely.²³² In the long-term, weapon debris and fire will change the soil composition and require new management strategies if the land is to bear crops safe for consumption again.²³³ The Ukrainian non-governmental organization EcoAction has documented 841 incidents of environmental destruction of the war as of February 2023.²³⁴ The Ukrainian government is requesting UNEP’s assistance in evaluating the impact, though so far UNEP scientists have stated that accessing and documenting the damage will be an arduous task.²³⁵

The same war has threatened the supply of non-renewable energy sources such as Russian natural gas and crude oil, on which European Union countries have relied upon importing.²³⁶ In September 2022, unconfirmed actors destroyed parts of Russia’s state-owned Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines that link Russia and Germany through the Black Sea.²³⁷ As winter approached, the German government had to find alternative sources of energy, since it previously imported 50% of its natural gas and over 30% of its oil from Russia.²³⁸ According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), energy dependence shapes decisions about addressing conflict, such as Germany’s hesitancy to sanction Russia for aggression that violates international law.²³⁹ Sanctions and unraveling of trade relationships in response to conflict further threaten energy security.²⁴⁰ To decouple the maintenance of peace within international legal boundaries and energy needs, the IEA recommends diversification of energy suppliers and shifts to more renewable sources of energy.²⁴¹ In this context, the IEA projects that renewable energy capacity in the European Union will double over the 2022-2027 period as the region learns from the impact of the war in Ukraine on its current natural resource needs.²⁴²

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²²⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Ukraine: ‘Humanitarian and human rights catastrophe’ continues, Security Council Hears*. 2023; United Nations, Security Council. *Under-Secretary-General Rosemary A. DiCarlo’s Remarks to the Security Council on Ukraine*. 2023.

²³⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Ukraine: ‘Humanitarian and human rights catastrophe’ continues, Security Council Hears*. 2023; United Nations, Security Council. *Under-Secretary-General Rosemary A. DiCarlo’s Remarks to the Security Council on Ukraine*. 2023.

²³¹ Organisation for Security and Economic Co-Operation. *The impacts and policy implications of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine on agricultural markets*. 2022; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. *Impact of the war on agriculture and rural livelihoods in Ukraine*. 2022. p. 22.

²³² Organisation for Security and Economic Co-Operation. *The impacts and policy implications of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine on agricultural markets*. 2022.

²³³ Turns. British Broadcasting Company. *The Toxic Legacy of the Ukraine War*. 2023.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ International Energy Agency. *Russia’s War on Ukraine: Analysing the Impacts of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on global energy markets and international energy security*. 2023.

²³⁷ Ahlander. Reuters. *State actor involvement in Nord Stream pipeline attacks is ‘main scenario,’ says Swedish investigator*. 2023.

²³⁸ International Energy Agency. *Russia’s War on Ukraine: Analysing the Impacts of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on global energy markets and international energy security*. 2023.

²³⁹ British Broadcasting Company. *Germany says it is no longer reliant on Russian energy*. 2023.

²⁴⁰ Gaffen. Reuters. *How the Russia-Ukraine war accelerated into a global energy crisis*. 2022.

²⁴¹ International Energy Agency. *Russia’s War on Ukraine: Analysing the Impacts of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on global energy markets and international energy security*. 2023.

²⁴² Ibid.

Conclusion

Natural resources such as water, land, and minerals are a factor in conflict and face risk of destruction during conflict.²⁴³ Both ends of this cycle affect the ability of communities to develop in sustainable and peaceful ways and maintain human security, and the Secretary-General, First Committee, UNEP, and other stakeholders have warned that climate change will intensify risks of conflict over natural resources.²⁴⁴ As climate change continues to disrupt ecosystems, economies, and societies, international cooperation is necessary to slow the pace of climate change, build resilience through sustainable socio-economic and political systems, and mitigate conflict escalation to prevent additional environmental destruction.²⁴⁵ The complexity of this issue requires a multidimensional approach, and the First Committee is working alongside states, regional and local organizations, and other UN bodies like UNEP and the Security Council towards solutions for conflict prevention, natural resource management, and climate resilience.²⁴⁶

Further Research

As delegates continue their research, they should consider the following: How can the First Committee organize future thematic debates on the links between conflict and natural resources based on recent data on climate change? How can the First Committee strengthen partnerships among other UN, Member State, and non-governmental stakeholders towards addressing issues related to conflict and natural resources? How can the First Committee further leverage the SDGs towards the promotion of both peace and environmental protection?

Annotated Bibliography

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This report from the World Bank and State and Peacebuilding Fund examines the relationship between conflict and natural resources from a development lens. It details ways that resources factor into conflict as well as how conflict affects natural resources. The report addresses unique challenges for a variety of natural resources and concludes with recommendations for risk and resource management. Delegates should reference this report as they consider how the First Committee can continue meeting its goal of working towards sustainable development and peace as interrelated aims.

²⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Observance of the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in Times of War and Armed Conflict (A/RES/56/4)*, 2001. p. 1; United Nations, General Assembly. *Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications (A/RES/63/281)*. 2009. pp. 1-2.

²⁴⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*. 2012; United Nations, General Assembly. *Natural Resources, Peaceful Societies and Sustainable Development: Lessons from the Kimberly Process*; United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. p. 2; Security Council Report. *UN Documents for Energy, Climate and Natural Resources*. 2023; United Nations, Security Council. *Threats to international peace and security (S/RES/1625)*. 2005.

²⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. pp. 23-29.

²⁴⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change and Security Risks*; United Nations, Security Council. *Maintenance of International Peace and Security*. 2019; United Nations, Security Council. *Letter dated 18 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*. 2020; United Nations Security Council. *Threats to International Peace and Security*. 2022.

Rüttinger et al. *A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*. 2015. Retrieved 7 February 2023 from: <https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/conflict/new-climate-peace#report-top>

This report from independent researchers commissioned by the Group of 7 analyzes risks to peace related to resource management and climate change, both in general and with specific case studies. In its conclusion, the researchers offer several recommendations for states to build resilience against current and anticipated effects of climate change. Delegates can use this report to deepen their understanding of specific climate-related security risks with illustrative examples in the regions of the countries they are representing.

United Nations Environment Programme. *Addressing Climate-Related Security Risks*. 2019. Retrieved 7 February 2023 from: https://www.unep.org/resources/toolkits-manuals-and-guides/addressing-climate-related-security-risks?_ga=2.96207065.472185903.1617836897-1429431024.1612346467

This training manual created by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) equips policymakers and other stakeholders to analyze the intersections between climate and security issues. In addition to a free online training course, UNEP explains and critically assesses past policy strategies to help new stakeholders consider best practices based on evidence. In addition to the resource serving as a direct training opportunity, delegates can use this UNEP resource as an example of the kinds of actions the General Assembly may request of its subsidiary bodies.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Report on climate change and its possible security implications (A/64/350)*. 2009. Retrieved 7 February 2023 from:

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/sg%20report%202009.pdf>

In response to the request of the General Assembly, this report of the Secretary-General highlights five intersections of natural resources and climate change, including development, human rights, and peace and security. It underscores the multifaceted nature of the relationship between conflict and natural resources, especially with the already-present threat of climate change. Delegates will understand the nuance of the relationship between conflict and natural resources after reading this report and should consider what the Secretary-General priorities are for the General Assembly on this topic.

United Nations, Security Council. *Letter dated 18 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*. 2020. Retrieved 7 February 2023 from:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_725.pdf

This letter addressed to the Secretary-General contains an annex about the most recent high-level debate on climate and security, sponsored by the Security Council. The annex maps a set of core concepts to frame the debate and highlights room for increased engagement across the UN. Delegates will find the "Objective and Scope" section of this letter particularly useful as they consider the complementary roles of UN bodies towards addressing climate and security issues as well as the roles of the countries they represent.

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