



## **UN General Assembly First Committee statement on the Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts**

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Delivered by Doug Weir, Research and Policy Director, Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS), on behalf of CEOBS, PAX and Zoï Environment Network.

Chair.

The global environment is facing climatic, biodiversity and pollution crises. Acting on these is a shared responsibility, as citizens, as states and as institutions, and the First Committee is no exception.

Armed conflicts not only cause lasting damage to the environment, they also create and sustain the conditions where environmental degradation goes unchecked. The environmental harm they cause, contributes to these global crises, undermining health, livelihoods and security.

Elsewhere in the UN system, attention to the environment, peace and security is steadily increasing, but it remains under-addressed in the First Committee. Yet the topics on this Committee's agenda have clear environmental dimensions. Delegations have a responsibility to articulate them.

Many of you will mention nuclear weapons. Some may mention their environmental impacts. But few will detail how their use would disrupt climate, water and food security, affecting millions. Or the ongoing violence suffered by predominantly indigenous peoples, whose lands and lives were scarred by nuclear testing.

As work continues towards a political declaration on explosive weapons, how many will advocate for it to address the acute and chronic environmental risks their use creates, through damage to industrial and civilian infrastructure, or the environmental costs of managing millions of tonnes of debris?

Will many here make the connection between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and declining biodiversity? The ready availability of weapons in conflict areas, and their dispersal from them, has been shown to decimate large mammal populations, and facilitate wildlife crime.

And will there be an appetite for progressive thinking among donors and affected states in managing explosive remnants of war? Thousands of square metres of land are cleared each year, and returned to local communities to safely manage and use, is it not time we supported them in implementing climate and biodiversity sensitive land management projects as part of mine action?

The ecological crises we face make preventing environmental harm during conflicts more critical than ever. So, will any delegations welcome the International Committee of the Red Cross's newly revised environmental guidelines for militaries? International humanitarian law's environmental provisions remain inadequate, but the guidelines do provide a normative floor for military conduct.

Finally, we urge you not just to articulate the environmental dimensions of these topics here, but also to ensure that you make the right connections elsewhere. For example, between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Arms Trade Treaty; or between the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Mine Ban Treaty. Disarmament policies have an impact on the environment, the only response to the crises we face is to make it a positive one.

Thank you Chair.