



General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 February 2017

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-fourth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).



Environmental Crimes and Violation of Human Rights

War and the environment are two inseparable concepts. Today, no doubt remains that the destruction of the environment as the result of war, is a long-term threat to both the present and future generation. In addition to human casualties, including the death and injuries of soldiers and civilians, wars extensively destroy natural resources and the environment.

It is concerning that today, with the advancements and sophistication of military technologies and the use of unconventional weapons such as chemical weapons and cluster munitions, the destructive effects on environment have more extensive, in a way that the life and livelihood of people with low income have been affected. Destructions of the wildlife, destruction of biodiversity, poor air quality, contamination of earth and water, are some of the destructive effects of modern warfare, which today has the Middle East region and its people in a chokehold, and on countless occasions been pointed out in various reports. In the ongoing conflicts such as Ukraine, Yemen, Iraq and particularly the Syrian Arab Republic, military machinery and explosives have destroyed forests and habitats on an unprecedented scale, and caused serious damage to the natural ecosystem such as soil erosion, water pollution and production of low quality food products. Meanwhile, most dangerous of all are the auxiliary military equipment such as interference signals and waves which leave negative effects on people.

Following the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and the Vietnam War, there are two other examples of war crimes committed against the environment with noticeable human rights consequences in Yemen and Syria. The natural environment of the two countries until did not suffer from much problem before the war. But today they are getting wasted away under aerial bombardments. Furthermore the water crisis has engulfed both countries and right now the defenceless people of both countries are suffering from water shortage and water pollution that are the consequences of the destruction of the environment from armed conflict.

Experts have repeatedly warned about the water shortage crisis in Yemen. Dr. Jean Lapegue, French anti-hunger organization ACF water expert, in an interview with TV5 Monde expressed concern over the poor access of Yemenis to water resources. This is while according to published reports by international organizations, including UNICEF, Yemen faced water shortage even before the start of the conflict, and today, this problem has even become more highlighted with the ongoing internal conflict.

Since early 2011, Syria too has been heavily involved in internal conflict and its consequences. As well as the human pain and suffering and economic catastrophe, we are witness to an endless calamity to the environment. According to a published report and information received from human rights and environmental activists in Syria, vast areas of the environment in the country have been destroyed and toxic materials used in weapons and the rubbles left behind and also piles of garbage have penetrated deep into the soil and contaminated the underground water reserves of the country. The direct and indirect consequences of the war is visible from now, and it will take a long time, at least for the environment of the country, to repair itself to an extent.

Furthermore some of Syria's oilfields are under the control of terror groups. By setting oil wells on fire or unprincipled exploitation of the oil, these groups have caused a disaster to occur in the region. Since traditionally people have worked in agriculture in this region, the smoke and toxic emissions from oil, will subsequently destroy any chances of the soil in the region to be used for agriculture and will make it difficult for the locals to earn a living. This catastrophe is a clear example of environmental issues which smell of war crimes. Let us ask ourselves, who will be accountable for all of this?

The extent of the damage to the ancient city of Nimrod in Iraq and the proximity of Mosul is such that UNESCO called this destruction by ISIS, war crimes. This historic ancient city which is known as the jewel of Assyrian civilisation, was founded in the 13th Century BC on the banks of the Tigris. Nonetheless, according to Iraqi officials, by demolishing and destroying 3000 year old walls and statues, ISIS have destroyed this ancient city. This destruction of Mankind's heritage has caused deep concern of archaeologists, and they compare this crime with the crime of the 2001 destruction of the statue of Buddha in Bamian, Afghanistan by The Taliban, which caused international outrage.

According to published figures, in the 21st Climate Change Conference, the conflict in Ukraine has caused contamination of the soil and water in the country, to an extent where the Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko presented a report of this environmental catastrophe to the Conference, and called for the international community's help.

Recommendations

Considering that the right to a healthy environment is one of the certain rights of Mankind, and not only this right is stated in the third generation of human rights, but also is the necessity for enjoyment of other rights such as civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Also, according to the first article of the Stockholm Declaration, "Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth. In the long and tortuous evolution of the human race on this planet a stage has been reached when, through the rapid acceleration of science and technology, man has acquired the power to transform his environment in countless ways and on an unprecedented scale. Both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights the right to life itself."

The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence and the Chiko Environment Institute, on behalf of a number of environmental and human rights activists and experts, call upon the United Nations to utmost at its disposal to confront the current ongoing wars and conflicts, and not to allow the warmongering policies of warmongers and arms dealers to destroy the whole planet, for they have to be accountable to future generations. Because it can clearly be seen that it is not just the financial and human investments of a country that are destroyed in wars, but natural and unnatural resources are threatened even beyond borders for future generations.

Furthermore, we call upon the Human Rights Council to open a more serious case file for environmental issues, alongside human rights issues to show more sensitivity towards prevention of the destruction of the environment particularly during war.

We call upon the international community not to see the current ongoing wars as regional issues, because the effects of environmental damages reach beyond borders, and the human rights consequences will affect future generations. Right now some of these destructions are closely felt.

We also call upon the UN and Member States to consider important environmental issues, and to deem ecocide as important as genocide, because the environmental crimes in modern warfare cause such human rights crimes that the destructive effects cannot be calculated. In this regard it is good that we remember the nightmarish examples such as the Hiroshima atomic bomb and the Vietnam War, the effects of which are still being studied by scientists.

We, environmental protection and human rights activists regret that even though the dangerous role of the ecological destructions are at least clear for world leaders and international organizations, nevertheless the environmental principles and guidelines are not enforceable enough. This is a grave human rights concern and challenge, which has been overshadowed by other problems. Therefore it is necessary to unconditionally prosecute environmental crimes, and consider the right to have a healthy environment as an important right.
