

2024 GHRP Annual Conference

CONCEPT NOTE WORKSHOP 3

Human Rights in Preventing Environmental Triggers to Conflict

Tuesday 5 November 2024, 11:00 – 12:30,

Maison de la Paix (Pétale 5), *Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E, Geneva*

A project of the:

**GENEVA
ACADEMY**

Académie de droit international
humanitaire et de droits humains
Academy of International
Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

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TOPIC

The interconnection between human rights, environmental degradation, and violent conflict is becoming an increasingly pressing issue for global governance. When fundamental environmental-related human rights, such as food and water, are compromised, the consequences can lead to social tensions and even armed conflict. For instance, failure to uphold the right to food during droughts can exacerbate food insecurity in communities, intensify competition for limited resources, and potentially trigger violent conflicts. This pattern has been observed in regions of Africa and the Middle East, where resource scarcity has fueled tensions and clashes.

Key questions arise in this context: what does the community expect from human rights in preventing environmental triggers of conflicts? How could these expectations shape the design of conflict prevention strategies?

The [2022 White Paper on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding](#), a collaborative initiative led by five organizations, including the **Geneva Peacebuilding Platform**, focuses on the model of environmental peacebuilding – a people-centered approach that integrates human rights, sustainable development, and peacebuilding efforts. It underlines that human rights violations are often closely linked to mismanagement of natural resources, including minerals, oil, and timber, as well as biological resources like land, forests, and fishing grounds. This mishandling also contributes to a heightened risk of conflicts.

However, the complex, non-linear, and unpredictable relationship between environmental human rights and conflicts makes it difficult to operationalize early warning systems. A [research brief](#) from the **Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights** underscores this point, noting that the Human Rights Council's current data collection efforts often prioritize thematic reports and country-specific investigations. However, such a mechanism is not designed for providing the granular data necessary for accurate conflict prediction. The fragmentation of the current human rights framework highlights the necessity to systematically track and analyze various environmental human rights violations. By doing so, it would be possible to assess their potential conflict risks and provide relevant information to key stakeholders, such as peacebuilding agencies.

The **former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, Michelle Bachelet, has identified climate change as a “non-traditional threat” to peace and security, highlighting how environmental degradation can fuel conflicts over resources like land and water. In this regard, the recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment by the UN Human Rights Council in [resolution 48/13](#) on 8 October 2021, followed by its [acknowledgment by the UN General Assembly](#), marks a significant advancement. This right, arguably a promising tool for conflict prevention, underscores the importance of safeguarding environmental human rights as a strategy for reducing tensions before they escalate into violence. It follows that, by focusing on the protection and promotion of environmental rights, relevant stakeholders can contribute to mitigating conflict risks.

This workshop will explore pressing questions about community's expectations on the role of human rights in preventing environmental triggers from escalating into conflict. By examining the lessons learned from Geneva's role in peacebuilding, where the [Second International Conference on Environmental Peacebuilding](#) took place in 2022, and considering the potential of human rights, especially those related to the environment, as a tool for conflict prevention, this workshop aims to foster an in-depth discussion on how human rights can contribute to a more peaceful future.

WORKSHOP MODALITY AND KICK-OFF SPEAKERS

The workshop will begin with kick-off speakers, each presenting for 3-5 minutes, offering key insights on the topic. Following these brief presentations, the floor will be open for all participants to contribute their perspectives, fostering a dynamic and inclusive discussion. Potential kick-off speakers/participants

- **Balsiger Jörg**, Associate Professor at the Department of Geography and Environment (Geneva School of Social Sciences) and the Institute for Environmental Sciences
- **Romina Edith Pezzot**, PhD Candidate in International Law, Geneva Graduate Institute
- **Diana D. Rizzolio**, Coordinator, Geneva Environment Network, UNEP
- **Annyssa Bellal**, Senior Researcher, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, Geneva Graduate Institute
- **Nickolai Denisov**, Deputy Director - Zoï Environment Network

MODERATOR

- **Yves Lador**, Representative of Earthjustice to the United Nations in Geneva

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