22nd session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written statement by Murdoch University, Australia

Agenda item 10: Building strong institutions to link the environment and peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries.

The expert paper provides an excellent overview about strong institutions and environmental peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries. Based on this, the expert paper makes several sensible recommendations.

I suggest paragraph 4 should recognise the various ways through which environmental cooperation can contribute to peace. Apart from the spillover effect of cooperation, these include: (i) environmental cooperation can prevent resource conflicts, (ii) good environmental management can provide sustainable livelihoods as a foundation for long-term peace (e.g., by providing livelihoods for former combatants), and (iii) environmental cooperation can build trust and understanding between the participating parties. References: Ide (2019), Johnson et al. (2021).

As a cross-cutting issue, I suggest the expert report recognises the importance of local, traditional and informal institutions in managing natural resources and building environmental peace. This is particularly the case in contexts of armed conflict and weak statehood, but traditional institutions can also complement and support formal government institutions in well-functioning states. Existing research strongly suggests that state institutions acknowledging, supporting, and working with local, informal institutions can be highly beneficial for peacebuilding and environmental conservation. References: Bogale & Korf (2007), Castro (2018), Ide (2019).

While wars cause enormous ecological destruction, peace processes (including environmental peacebuilding) can have adverse environmental impacts as well. In some post-conflict settings, increased stability and access paved the way for cooperative natural resource exploitation, resulting for instance in accelerated deforestation. This is another cross-cutting issue I suggest the report acknowledges. References: Ide (2020), Murillo-Sandoval et al. (2021).Paragraph 13 correctly point out several key knowledge gaps on environmental peacebuilding as well as the difficulty of establishing causal links between environmental conditions and societal stability. I suggest also acknowledging the increasing empirical evidence on the issue, which demonstrates that environmental cooperation can result in low-level peace through improving the environmental situation, building sustainable livelihoods, and establishing local institutions. References: Ide (2019), Johnson et al. (2021), Dresse et al. (2021).

Environmental peacebuilding can certainly contribute to climate change adaptation as outlined in paragraph 18. It can also play a crucial role in adapting to climate change, for instance in the form of cooperation to manage shared groundwater resource (to cope with droughts) or preserve mangrove forests (that serve as buffers against storms and floods).

Climate change can also produce so-called "trapped populations". This term refers to groups that are willing to but unable to move, for instance because recent climate-related

disasters have reduced their savings. Such immobility can result in grievances and, in the worst case, manifest conflicts in the affected regions. Paragraph 24 could mention the conflict-implications of immobility. Reference: Boas et al. (2019).

Section IV on the impact of climate change on security would benefit from two additions. First, it focuses frequently on high-value resources that can be exploited and smuggled, such as oil or diamonds. These will be relatively unaffected by climate change. I recommend re-focussing the discussion on highly climate-sensitive resources such as water and (arable) land. Second, when discussing the pathways connecting climate change to conflict (paragraphs 23-26), I encourage to include the possibilities of armed groups increasingly recruiting desperate people deprived by climate change (which have lower opportunity costs to join armed groups). Furthermore, climate change could weaken states (e.g., by destroying infrastructure and facilitating economic crises), which undermine the ability of state institutions to mediate communal disputes and keep terrorist groups at bay. Relatively solid evidence exists for these two climate-conflict pathways (recruitment and weak states), hence justifying their inclusion in the report. References: Ide et al. (2020), von Uexkull and Buhaug (2021).

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