

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement by
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Belgium to the United Nations

**ARRIA FORMULA ON THE "PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT DURING
ARMED CONFLICT"**

New York, 9/12/2019

Mr President,
Your Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

I would like to begin by thanking Kuwait, Peru, Germany and Estonia for this initiative. In Belgium, we are still finding ammunition - conventional and chemical - from the First World War. A century later, our specialised services still collect 200 tons of unexploded material every year, including mines, and chemical weapons containing chlorine gas, mustard gas or phosphorus gas. We are therefore very aware of the effects of war on the environment.

Mr President, I would like to focus on three points: firstly, the importance of applying and strengthening international law. Secondly, the need to mainstream the theme of "Environment and Armed Conflict" into the work of the United Nations. Lastly, I would like to highlight the potential of sustainable natural resource management for peacebuilding.

1. The natural environment is protected by international humanitarian law (IHL) in two main ways: (1) the natural environment is civilian in nature: all the general rules of IHL that protect civilian property must therefore be applied to it. International humanitarian law (IHL) also contains rules that provide specific protection for the environment. As such, there are bans and restrictions on methods and means of warfare that can cause widespread long-term damage to

the natural environment. It is also prohibited to use the destruction of the natural environment as a weapon or reprisal. In 1977, States created the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques.

In recent years, the International Law Commission has addressed the issue of the environment in relation to armed conflict. Twenty-eight principles have been developed and submitted to Member States and partners for comment. We hope that this exercise will not only clarify the issue from a legal point of view, but also strengthen implementation.

2. Secondly, we believe that the theme of "Environment and Armed Conflict" must be better integrated into the work of the United Nations. This means that environmental protection must be integrated into prevention and early warning analyses. This also applies to climate-related security risks.

The United Nations should also set an example. Belgium welcomes the environmental strategies of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Operational Support. We believe it is necessary to continue to integrate this issue into mission mandates (and budgets) (for example, to clean up sites after missions have left). Belgium and other countries have also asked the United Nations system to provide a biannual report on climate-related security risks. In addition, we believe that work should be carried out to make greater use of renewable energies in peacekeeping operations (reference to Belgian event). We therefore welcome the United Nations climate action plan and the efforts of the United Nations and its staff to "green the blue".

3. Lastly, I would like to highlight the potential of sustainable environmental management for peacebuilding and socio-economic development. Poor management of natural resources is often a factor in conflict. Better management helps to prevent new conflicts and maintain peace.

An example to illustrate this is Virunga Park in the DRC. This magnificent nature reserve is a driving force for development and ecotourism in a conflict-ridden region. In the park, former rebels are being converted back into guards to protect the natural environment. This is not an easy undertaking because rebel groups are still active, but it offers better opportunities for many families and deserves our support.

Mr President,

To conclude:

It is increasingly recognised that there is a link between conflict, climate change and environmental degradation. We therefore believe that this subject has a place on the UNSC agenda.

Thank you, Mr President.