



MUN Background Guide

Resource-driven War Prevention (SDG 12, 16)

Issue & Committee's Focus

How much should the UN help to stop fights over natural resources, especially when these fights get worse because of climate disasters and people having to leave their homes?

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Introduction

Competition over natural resources have been a direct cause of armed conflict throughout history, but today these conflicts are becoming more frequent, prolonged, and complex. Access to water, arable land, minerals, and energy resources is increasingly contested, particularly in regions where governance is weak and resources are unevenly distributed. When control over these resources is linked to political power, economic survival, or military advantage, disputes can escalate into full-scale violence and war.

Climate change has significantly intensified resource-driven conflicts. Droughts, floods, and desertification reduce the availability of already scarce resources, increasing competition between communities, armed groups, and states. In conflict zones, climate disasters can destroy livelihoods and infrastructure, making control over remaining resources even more strategically valuable. Armed actors may exploit scarcity to strengthen their influence, while governments may resort to force to secure critical resources for their populations.

Resource scarcity is also closely connected to forced displacement. As climate-related disasters and violence push people from their homes, the sudden movement of large populations can create new pressures on land, water, and food in host areas. These pressures can trigger further conflict, especially where resources are limited and political or ethnic tensions already exist. In some cases, displacement has directly contributed to the outbreak or renewal of armed conflict over territory and resource control.

The United Nations has a mandate to maintain international peace and security, yet its role in addressing resource-driven wars



remains debated. Questions persist over whether the UN should intervene more forcefully to prevent conflicts over natural resources, mediate disputes between states and non-state actors, or regulate access to resources during and after climate disasters. At the same time, concerns over sovereignty, enforcement capacity, and long-term effectiveness complicate UN involvement.

This topic challenges delegates to assess how far the United Nations should go in preventing and responding to wars driven by competition over natural resources, particularly when climate change and displacement act as conflict multipliers. Delegates must evaluate existing UN tools, consider the risks of inaction, and propose strategies that address both the immediate causes of violence and the underlying structural drivers of resource-based conflict.

Aspects for Consideration/Historical Context

1. Natural Resources as Drivers of Armed Conflict

Delegates should examine how competition over natural resources directly contributes to the outbreak and continuation of armed conflicts. Resources such as water, oil, gas, fertile land, and critical minerals often hold strategic military and economic value. In some cases, armed groups finance their operations through the control and exploitation of these resources, prolonging violence. Research may focus on how resource governance, ownership disputes, and unequal access increase the likelihood of war.

2. Climate Change as a Conflict Multiplier

While climate change is rarely the sole cause of war, it significantly worsens existing tensions by reducing resource availability and increasing unpredictability. Many states and international organizations recognize climate change as a “threat multiplier” that accelerates resource scarcity and destabilization. Delegates should explore how climate-related disasters intensify resource-



based conflicts and how global opinions differ on whether climate security should fall under the UN's peace and security mandate.

3. Sovereignty vs. International Responsibility

A central debate concerns the extent to which the United Nations should intervene in resource-driven conflicts within sovereign states. Some Member States advocate for stronger UN involvement in mediation, peacekeeping, and resource management to prevent war. Others emphasize national sovereignty and argue that resource governance should remain a domestic matter. Delegates should research how this divide shapes UN action and limits consensus.

4. Role of the UN in Conflict Prevention and Mediation

The UN currently engages in conflict prevention through early warning systems, diplomatic mediation, peacekeeping missions, and development programs. Delegates may assess whether these tools are sufficient to address wars driven by resource competition, or whether new mechanisms—such as climate-security risk assessments or resource-sharing frameworks—are needed. Opinions vary on expanding the UN's mandate versus improving coordination among existing agencies.

5. Displacement and Secondary Resource Conflicts

Forced displacement caused by resource scarcity and climate disasters often creates new conflicts in host regions. Competition over land, water, and employment can increase tensions between displaced populations and host communities. Delegates should consider how international actors view responsibility for preventing these secondary conflicts and whether the UN should take a more active role in managing resource pressures linked to displacement.

6. Equity Between Developed and Developing States

Developing countries, particularly those most vulnerable to climate change, often argue that they bear a disproportionate burden of resource-related conflict despite contributing least to global emissions. Many call for increased international support,



funding, and technology transfer. Conversely, some developed states prioritize national interests and voluntary cooperation. Delegates should explore how these differing perspectives influence global policy debates.

7. Risks of Inaction vs. Risks of Intervention

Global opinion is divided between those who warn that insufficient UN action could allow resource-driven wars to escalate and spread, and those who fear that deeper intervention could worsen conflicts or create dependency. Delegates should evaluate these competing concerns and research historical examples where international involvement either reduced or exacerbated resource-related violence.

Past UN Actions/Resolutions

1. UN General Assembly Resolution 1803 (1962): Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources

This resolution establishes the foundational principle that states and peoples have the sovereign right to control and exploit their own natural resources for national development. It remains central to debates on UN involvement in resource-related conflicts, as many states use it to argue against external intervention. Delegates should understand this resolution as the legal and political basis for resistance to UN interference in domestic resource governance.

Significance:

1. Core legal principle shaping global opinion
2. Frequently cited by developing and resource-rich states
3. Creates tension between sovereignty and international responsibility

2. UN Security Council Resolution 1457 (2003): Natural Resources and Armed Conflict (DRC)



This resolution explicitly recognizes that the illegal exploitation of natural resources can fuel and prolong armed conflict. In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Security Council condemned the plundering of resources and linked it directly to threats to international peace and security. This marked a turning point in acknowledging resource exploitation as a security issue, not merely an economic one.

Significance:

- Directly links natural resources to war
- Sets precedent for UNSC involvement
- Supports sanctions, investigations, and peacekeeping mandates

Key Terms

1. **Resource-Driven Conflict**

Armed conflict in which competition over natural resources—such as water, land, oil, or minerals—is a primary cause or sustaining factor.

2. **Resource Scarcity**

A situation where essential natural resources are insufficient to meet demand, often increasing competition and the risk of conflict.

3. **Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier**

The concept that climate change does not directly cause conflict but worsens existing political, economic, and resource tensions.

4. **Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources**

The principle that states have the right to control and manage their own natural resources without external interference, as recognized by the UN.

5. **Forced Displacement**

The movement of people compelled to leave their homes due to conflict, climate disasters, or resource shortages, often increasing pressure on host regions.



6. **Conflict Prevention**

Actions taken to reduce the risk of violence before it occurs, including mediation, early warning systems, and sustainable resource management.

7. **Peacekeeping Operations**

UN missions deployed to conflict-affected areas to maintain peace, protect civilians, and support post-conflict recovery, sometimes including resource-related mandates.

8. **Environmental Security**

A framework linking environmental conditions—such as access to water, land, and food—to national, regional, and international security.

References and Citations

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/general-assembly-resolution-1803-xvii-14-december-1962-permanent>
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/485249>