



Environment, Disarmament and the United Nations

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Abstract:

The environment pollution has become a major cause of concern for the world. Many national and international organizations are concerned about this problem. The sustainable development goals also focus on the safety of environment and the well-being of humankind. The humankind is facing many problems due to environment problem and the advent and use of armaments have made the situation worst. The weapons of mass destruction are posing a great danger to the environment and the humanity. The United Nations and particularly the General Assembly have made many attempts in this regard. The United Nations Environment Programme through various measures and efforts have tried to save the humankind and the environment. Disarmament is the need of the time to protect the human beings and the environment.

Keywords: environment, disarmament, sustainable development, radiation, weapons of mass destruction, climate

In a broader sense environment means anything that surrounds us, including living or biotic life, e.g. plants, animals and non-living or abiotic components like air, water and soil and the environment pollution refers to degradation of air, water and the atmosphere by mixing of harmful and undesirable material and pollutants in them.¹

Today, pollution has become the biggest global problem because it has grown in magnitude and threatens to endanger all life on the living planet. As a matter of fact the gravity of the situation created by pollution worldwide has been voiced at many national and international levels by various dignitaries and organizations to emphasize the need to realize the problem in all its seriousness and take whatever measures necessary in all earnest.² In the millennium summit of the United Nations, it's then Secretary General Kofi Anan talked about 'freedom of future generation to sustain their life on this planet', he was referring to the unsustainable practices of the humans which have seriously threatened the very life on Earth.³

The 2030 agenda of the United Nations for sustainable development goals also stressed the need of quality education, good health and well-being, sustainable cities

¹ D.S. Paul and Najmusseher, "100 Essays", (Goodwill Publishing House, New Delhi), P.61

² Ibid., P.61

³ Ibid., P.61

and communities, responsible production, consumption, climate action and peace, justice and strong institutions.⁴ Although the 2030 agenda for sustainable development doesn't directly address the negative impact of inordinate military spending, but it is true that reallocating about 10 percent of military spending in the world could achieve major progress in achieving the sustainable development goals.⁵ The importance of reducing military budgets and expenditures⁶ for the fulfilment of the basic needs of the humans and for the protection of environment is much necessary.⁷

Trans-border pollution, resource depletion leading to ethnic or national conflict, and often migration, reductions in health and life expectancy, and economic dependence on polluting, inefficient extractive or manufacturing industries, are among the problems being faced by the societies around the world and the environment security is simultaneously a security and human rights issue.⁸

Important subsets of environmental security are the consequences of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) production, and military industries generally.⁹ Obvious examples are the radioactives and chemicals involved in WMD, but beyond these a vast range of precursor chemicals, as well as solvents, reactants and other by-products, solid millings and tailings, gaseous emissions and prosaic wastes such as used filters, gloves and photographic developing solutions and other military industries involved in production of conventional weapons produce an equally wide variety of wastes as do 'formerly defence sites' which may be only marginally less toxic and persistent than WMD production.¹⁰

Between 1940 and 1996, the United States spent more than five and a half trillion dollars on nuclear weapons production, deployment and waste management.¹¹ The scale of environmental problems in Israel, India, Pakistan and China is also very alarming and it has been increased as a result of weapons testing.¹² The chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq have caused major damage to the world peace and environment. The General Assembly resolution of 1995 invited the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to take every necessary measure to include in negotiations, treaties and agreements on disarmament and arms control the corresponding environmental norms, with a view to ensuring the environmental protection.¹³ The General Assembly

⁴ Melissa Gillis, "Disarmament: A Basic Guide", (United Nations, New York, 2017), P.19-20

⁵ Ibid., P.17

⁶ The General Assembly Resolution 48/62, December 16, 1993.

⁷ The General Assembly Resolution 66/31, December 2, 2011.

⁸ A.H. Joffe, "Environmental Security and Consequences of WMD Production: An Emerging International Issue", Disarmament Diplomacy, Issue No.54, February 2001, (www.acronym.org.uk/old/archive), Accessed on 15 February, 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ S.I. Schwartz, "Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of US Nuclear Weapons Since 1940", Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press, Ed.1998, Table 1.

¹² M. Datan, "Israel Debates Nuclear Weapons", Disarmament Diplomacy, Issue No.43, 2000, P.6.

¹³ The General Assembly Resolution 50/70, December 12, 1995.

in 2017 passed a resolution for the states to show harmony with nature and protect the environment for the sake of humankind.¹⁴ It also concerned itself about the potentially harmful effects on present and the future generations resulting from the levels of radiation to which humankind and the environment are exposed and emphasized the vital need for sufficient, assured and predictable funding, as well as efficient management of the work of The Secretariat of the Scientific Committee to arrange the annual sessions and coordinate the development of documents based on scientific reviews of the sources of ionizing radiation and its effects on human health and the environment.¹⁵ The General Assembly also welcomed the renewed interest and resolve of the world community, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross and international humanitarian organizations, to address the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons for mankind and environment.¹⁶

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) coordinates the UN environmental activities and assists the developing countries in making and implementing environment friendly policies regarding the atmosphere and terrestrial ecosystems. It also promotes attitudes and values that influence environmentally ethical behaviour of the world public that will help in achieving an ecologically sustainable and socially just society. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) has some successes to its credit like the 1987 Montreal Protocol to protect the Ozone layer and the Minamata Convention of 2012 limiting the use of toxic mercury. Many Global conferences have also been held during the past decades on one or another environmental issue such as the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio-De-Janeiro in 1992 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg in 2002 and it reviewed progress for the Implementation of the Agenda of this summit called Agenda 21.

These days many governmental, non-governmental and international bodies are working in this direction. The United Nations General Assembly also through a resolution called upon the states to adopt the unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures so as to contribute to ensuring the application of scientific and technological progress within the framework of international security, without detriment to the environment or to its effective contribution to attaining the sustainable development.¹⁷

The General Assembly welcomed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement adopted under the convention acknowledging that they are the primary international, intergovernmental forums for negotiating the global response to climate change, expressing determination to address decisively the threat posed by climate change and environmental degradation, recognising that the

¹⁴ The General Assembly Resolution 72/223, December 20, 2017

¹⁵ The General Assembly Resolution 72/76, December 7, 2017

¹⁶ The General Assembly Resolution 72/30, December 4, 2017

¹⁷ The General Assembly Resolution 71/60, December 5, 2016

global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible international cooperation aimed at the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁸

The General Assembly expressed concern over the findings of the World Meteorological Organization, in its Greenhouse Gas bulletin of 30 October, 2017, which showed that the global average of atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide reached 403.3 ppm (parts per million) in 2016, the highest such levels in 3 to 5 million years, and that the increase in the annual mean from 2015 to 2016 was 50 percent above the average growth rate for the past decade.¹⁹ It also reaffirmed that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and expressed profound alarm that emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise globally, remains deeply concerned that all countries, particularly developing countries, are vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and are already experiencing an increase in such impacts, including persistent draught and extreme weather events, land degradation, sea level rise, coastal erosion, ocean acidification and the retreat of mountain glaciers, further threatening food security and efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, recognized the substantial risks posed by climate change to health, and emphasized in this regard that mitigation of and adaption to climate change represent an immediate and urgent global priority.²⁰

The nuclear weapons are also posing a great danger to mankind and to the environment. The General Assembly emphasized that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments but each and every citizen of our interconnected world and have deep implications for human survival, for the environment, for socioeconomic development, for our economies and for health of future generations.²¹ In the above context two aspects of the picture need particular attention. One is the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons and the other is the rechanneling of military expenditures to economic and social areas because the military expenditures now siphon resources away from social programmes that are desperately needed in the countries around the world.²²

So the general and complete disarmament is the need of the time to achieve the sustainable development goals, to protect the environment of the Earth and to save the mankind.

¹⁸ The General Assembly Resolution 72/219, December 20, 2017

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The General Assembly Resolution 72/30, December 4, 2017

²² Bhasker Menon, "Disarmament: A Basic Guide", (United Nations, New York, 2001), P.4-5