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International environmental policy and governance issues

Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/12 on environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. In resolution 6/12 on environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reaffirmed the critical importance of addressing the environmental dimensions of armed conflict and set out a clear mandate for UNEP to enhance its role in supporting countries affected by conflict in assessing, mitigating and recovering from environmental harm.

2. In paragraph 4 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director of UNEP, subject to the availability of resources, and with the oversight of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, to report on the provision by UNEP of environmental assistance and recovery support in areas affected by armed conflict and to identify and develop technical guidance on the collection of data on environmental damage associated with armed conflict.

3. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly encouraged the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, to strengthen UNEP collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders to provide, upon request by States Members of the United Nations or members of United Nations specialized agencies, environmental assistance and recovery support in areas affected by armed conflict.

4. In paragraph 6 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director, in consultation with States, to include environmental assistance and recovery support in areas affected by armed conflict in the development of the medium-term strategy of UNEP for the period 2026–2029.

5. The present report provides information on progress in the implementation of the resolution.

* UNEP/EA.7/1.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/12

A. Provision of environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict and collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders

6. In line with the mandate set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of resolution 6/12, and in response to requests from Member States and United Nations system entities, UNEP has continued to provide environmental assistance and recovery support in areas affected by armed conflict.

1. Gaza Strip, Occupied Palestinian Territory

In the Gaza Strip, UNEP conducted a rapid preliminary assessment of the environmental consequences of the conflict. Because of access restrictions, the preliminary assessment, published in June 2024, relied primarily on remote sensing and input from United Nations partners. Despite challenges related to limited ground data, the report raised international awareness and informed policy dialogue. The work was carried out in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations country team, the World Bank and the European Union. UNEP also led the United Nations system's contributions to the *Gaza and West Bank Interim Rapid Damage Needs Assessment*, published by the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations in February 2025. The conflict in the Gaza Strip has continued throughout the reporting period. Responding to a request received from the State of Palestine in June 2025, UNEP prepared a report entitled *Environmental Impact of the Escalation of Conflict in the Gaza Strip: Second Assessment of Environmental Damage and Recommendations for Recovery and Reconstruction Planning.*[1] The report, launched on 23 September 2025, incorporates updated information on environmental damage and sets out recommendations to guide recovery and reconstruction planning.

7. Under the United Nations humanitarian coordination structure, UNEP co-chairs, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Gaza Debris Management Working Group to coordinate a risk-informed, cost-effective response to debris clean-up. Outputs have included strategic frameworks, standard operating procedures, a debris information system and health and safety materials. UNEP also launched an emergency technical assistance programme supporting sustainable debris management. More than 21,000 metric tons of debris were cleared from access roads, enabling humanitarian operations and piloting recycling activities that benefited some 200,000 people and supported local employment and early recovery. The programme was implemented in cooperation with UNDP and local partners despite ongoing constraints.

2. Ukraine

8. In Ukraine, UNEP has played a central role in supporting environmental recovery efforts amid the ongoing war. Following the breach of the Kakhovka Dam, UNEP conducted rapid environmental assessments that revealed severe ecological damage across flooded and desiccated areas, including large-scale aquatic ecosystem collapse, sediment contamination and groundwater depletion. Those assessments were accompanied by capacity-building efforts for local authorities and the integration of data into geographic information systems to inform nature-based remediation strategies.

9. UNEP has addressed pollution risks in many areas – for example, through an asbestos management programme, which includes a national assessment, capacity-building programmes, policy dialogues and training for first responders. The programme conducted city-level wastewater assessments, mapped industrial and agricultural contamination (in Kyiv Oblast), and will support the development of environmental standards for demining in accordance with international standards and local conditions.

10. UNEP supported the protection of biodiversity and climate resilience in the Ukrainian Carpathians in the framework of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, and it worked to integrate biodiversity into transport planning. In addition, an infographic-based assessment raised awareness of the war's environmental impacts on the coastal environment of the Black Sea.

[1] Available at https://www.unep.org/resources/report/environmental-impact-escalation-conflict-gaza-strip.

11. In 2024, UNEP, the Economic Commission for Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development launched the Platform for Action on the Green Recovery of Ukraine. The Platform provides an umbrella for the work of UNEP in Ukraine and is aimed at institutionalizing green recovery planning by supporting policy reform, mobilizing technical expertise, collaboration and funding, and defining science-based recovery priorities. Key ongoing initiatives include a national green jobs assessment, exploring opportunities for veterans and vulnerable groups, and an energy efficiency and district heating programme in pilot cities, in which the UNEP district energy assessment methodology is being leveraged to support resilient, decentralized energy solutions.

12. All UNEP efforts in Ukraine are carried out in partnership with the Government of Ukraine, civil society and regional actors, reinforcing the commitment of UNEP to conflict-sensitive, forward-looking environmental recovery.

3. Lebanon

13. UNEP supported post-conflict recovery in Lebanon by helping to create a debris task force under the United Nations country team and by carrying out national debris quantification. In collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment of Lebanon, the United Nations Debris Task Force contributed to the publication entitled *Standard Operating Procedures for Post-Disaster Rubble Management 2025*. The work is aimed at integrating sustainability and circularity into recovery strategies in Lebanon. Progress was challenged by limited engagement during the conflict and restricted access owing to security and ordnance risks. The initiative was implemented in partnership with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Lebanon, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UNDP, the United Nations Office for Project Services and other United Nations entities.

4. Sudan

14. In the Sudan, UNEP continues to assess the environmental impacts of conflict. The findings of the unpublished Khartoum preliminary impact assessment of 2023 are being updated, including through ground truthing. Preliminary data indicate widespread destruction of hospitals, labs and chemical facilities, raising contamination concerns. Other risks include water pollution, debris accumulation, deforestation and major threats to agricultural productivity, all of which are contributing to the country's food crisis. UNEP is also planning a remote environmental assessment in Aj Jazirah State, focusing on damage to agricultural infrastructure, pollution and broader ecosystem impacts. Those efforts are being undertaken in collaboration with the Higher Council for Environment and Natural Resources of the Sudan and the National Committee for Rehabilitation and Recovery in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

5. Yemen

15. In Yemen, UNEP conducted scoping missions in Aden and Taiz to assess the feasibility of a sustainable debris management project. The process included field visits, stakeholder consultations and capacity assessments, leading to the development of a concept note for a $2.8 million recovery initiative. While the project attracted interest from donors and received national-level support, its implementation remains vulnerable to political volatility and insecurity. Continued engagement on the part of local institutions is considered vital for long-term success. Partners in the effort included the Aden City Cleaning and Improvement Fund, the Ministry of Public Works and Highways, the Ministry of Water and Environment, the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen.

16. Those interventions reflect the commitment of UNEP to providing targeted, evidence-based and partner-driven environmental support in conflict settings. Working with governments and other United Nations entities, UNEP promotes effective recovery, resilience and the integration of environmental concerns into peacebuilding.

6. Joint Environment Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: technical assistance to Yemen on marine pollution

17. Responding to a request from Yemen, the United Nations established a technical support team to assist the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in managing risks after the *MV Rubymar* sank in the Red Sea, reportedly following a missile attack. The team included 15 experts – two deployed by the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit through the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism – who worked closely with the Yemen crisis cell for two weeks. The team

presented its assessment methods and findings to national counterparts, including the Ministry of Water and Environment, the Maritime Affairs Authority, the Environmental Protection Authority, the Coast Guard and others.

18. The technical report found no acute toxicity risk from the cargo and a minimal environmental threat unless algal blooms were to occur. Most of the spilled oil had dissipated, and further leakage was unlikely, barring structural failure. Recommendations were focused on monitoring, shoreline preparedness and protecting the Hanish Islands. The report also included a review of relevant maritime conventions and outlined a plan to strengthen the emergency response capabilities of Yemen.

B. Technical guidance on environmental data collection in conflict-affected areas

19. In paragraph 4 of resolution 6/12, the Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director to develop technical guidance on the collection of data on environmental damage associated with armed conflict. In response to that mandate, UNEP engaged the NICOLE Foundation to design and develop the technical guidance, with support from the consultancy firm Environmental Resources Management and in collaboration with a range of global partners, including the Zoï Environment Network, PAX, the Conflict and Environment Observatory, NASA Lifelines, the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team, Oregon State University, the University of California–Berkeley Human Rights Center and UNEP. The preliminary technical guidance report is being prepared as proof of concept.

20. The guidance seeks to address a major gap: the lack of a standardized, accessible framework for collecting and managing environmental data in conflict-affected settings. The aim is not to examine the causes of conflict but to empower responders, authorities and civil society with practical tools to assess environmental harm and inform recovery efforts. It is designed to be accessible to a wide audience, from national Governments to civil society, humanitarian actors and environmental agencies.

1. Objectives and intended impact

21. The long-term ambition underlying the technical guidance is to promote a standardized, globally recognized approach to collecting reliable environmental data in conflict zones. Such an approach would facilitate better decision-making, help to prioritize remediation efforts and improve environmental recovery programming. The technical guidance will support multiple outcomes:

(a) Broader adoption of science-based environmental assessment methods in conflict settings;

(b) Global access to state-of-the-art methodologies for data collection, storage and analysis;

(c) Creation of national databases to inform policy and recovery strategies;

(d) Continued promotion of best practices by practitioners and donor agencies.

22. Ultimately, the technical guidance is aimed at informing structured, data-driven recovery interventions that are responsive to the needs of conflict-affected populations and ecosystems.

2. Initial implementation and proof of concept

23. Owing to resource and time constraints, the current version of the guidance presents the initial phase of implementation and should be viewed as a foundation for further development. This phase has focused on four components:

(a) Stakeholder engagement to guide the design and content of the guidance;

(b) Development of user profiles to tailor access and application;

(c) Demonstration of guidance selection and prioritization approaches;

(d) Drafting of initial guidance examples.

3. Stakeholder engagement

24. A global consultation process was initiated in order to inform the structure and content of the guidance. A curated database of experts – including from Member States, non-governmental organizations, funders, academic institutions and technology providers – was used to distribute a request for information. Eleven substantive responses were received, including from PAX for Peace,

the Conflict and Environment Observatory, the Zoï Environment Network, National Aeronautics and Space Administration Lifelines, the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team and others.

25. Targeted engagements focused on three themes:

(a) Challenges and gaps in environmental data collection in conflict and post-conflict contexts;

(b) Available technologies and tools for environmental monitoring;

(c) Platforms and processes for storing and sharing data.

26. Key challenges raised included limited data accessibility, gaps in domain-specific information and constraints in human and institutional capacity. Opportunities identified included the increased use of satellite data, mobile and drone-based sensing, open-source digital tools and applications of artificial intelligence and geospatial artificial intelligence.

27. Three case studies were used to illustrate best practices:

(a) *Colombia:* Water quality and deforestation monitoring using citizen science and low-cost tools;

(b) *Ukraine (remote sensing):* Satellite data collection for environmental impact documentation;

(c) *Ukraine (citizen science):* Community-based remote data collection in active conflict zones.

28. The input received informed the structure of the decision-making tool and the selection of sample guidance documents.

4. User profiles and access design

29. To ensure that the guidance is user-centred, three primary user profiles have been defined:

(a) *Administrators and decision makers*: UNEP staff, local authorities and donors who oversee environmental programming but are not subject matter experts. Their needs include understanding key risks, engaging technical experts and overseeing data-collection efforts;

(b) *Technical practitioners and subject matter experts:* Specialists from Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector responsible for developing and implementing solutions. These users require comprehensive, technically rigorous guidance that can be adapted to constrained, conflict-specific environments;

(c) *Awareness and informational users:* Individuals with limited technical expertise, such as community members, first responders or volunteers. These users need clear, basic guidance, including safety information and links to further resources.

30. The guidance materials will be organized in tiers to reflect the profiles set out above, ensuring that each group can access the appropriate level of detail and application.

5. Guidance selection and prioritization

31. The technical team developed a decision-support matrix to match data collection methods with specific conflict scenarios, environmental settings and user profiles. The tool incorporates factors such as the following:

(a) Conflict phase (e.g. active, early post-conflict, late post-conflict, peacetime);

(b) Environmental setting (e.g. industrial sites, agriculture, coastal areas and nature reserves);

(c) Accessibility of the site (e.g. physical access and security level);

(d) Environmental media affected (e.g. air, water, soil and biodiversity).

32. The data collection methods considered include:

(a) Remote sensing (satellites and drones);

(b) Community-based monitoring and citizen science;

(c) Open-source data scraping (e.g. social media and web content);

(d) In situ field assessments;

(e) Aggregation of existing environmental data sets;

(f) Artificial intelligence, machine learning and geospatial artificial intelligence.

33. The matrix guides users to the most appropriate tools and methods on the basis of their context and technical capabilities.

6. Demonstration of the technical guidance

34. Two sample guidance documents have been developed to demonstrate structure and usability:

(a) Groundwater and potential impacts from conflict, outlining methods to assess contamination and risks to water supply;

(b) Satellite remote sensing for conflict impact assessment, detailing data sources, imagery interpretation and limitations.

35. A digital tool is in development to guide users through a series of questions about the context of the conflict, the type of environment, data needs and access constraints, leading them to relevant guidance documents. The goal is to make the tool mobile- and web-accessible, multilingual and user-friendly, with interactive features and a clear visual design.

C. Inclusion of environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict in the development of the medium-term strategy for the period 2026–2029

36. In response to the request in paragraph 6 of resolution 6/12, UNEP has integrated environmental assistance and recovery in conflict-affected areas into its draft medium-term strategy for the period 2026–2029 and its draft programme of work and budget for the biennium 2026–2027. The topic cuts across strategic objectives and subprogrammes in the draft medium-term strategy. It is also central to outcome 3 of the draft programme of work, concerning the sustainable management and restoration of natural and productive ecosystems and enhanced pollution prevention and control, including in areas affected by disasters and conflict.

III. Lessons learned

A. Resource constraints limit the scale and depth of engagement

37. Across multiple conflict settings, limited financial and human resources have constrained the ability of UNEP to fully implement or validate activities, particularly for in-depth field assessments, stakeholder consultations and follow-up support. Such challenges were observed in the development of the global technical guidance, for which only a subset of potential users could be consulted owing to time and budget limitations.

B. Stakeholder engagement and validation are essential but incomplete

38. While strong multi-stakeholder partnerships enabled progress in contexts such as Ukraine and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, engagement was less effective in other contexts owing to political, institutional or logistical constraints. Work on the technical guidance likewise underscored the importance of early and broad stakeholder engagement to ensure that tools and content are fit for purpose, contextually relevant and widely endorsed.

C. Clear identification of target users and use cases strengthens impact

39. The success of both field operations and technical guidance efforts depends on the clear identification of end users and their specific needs. The initial development of guidance by UNEP confirmed the importance of refining target user groups and use scenarios in order to inform document structure and access pathways.

D. Remote tools provide value but must be paired with ground validation

40. Remote assessments are indispensable in settings characterized by limited access, but the limitations of those assessments are widely acknowledged. Whether one is assessing post-conflict

environments or developing global guidance tools, validation through ground-truthing, local input and practical field testing remains critical.

E. Cross-agency coordination and political sensitivity must be managed proactively

41. The effectiveness of UNEP efforts was enhanced when integrated into structured coordination mechanisms (e.g. the Gaza Debris Management Working Group and the Green Recovery Platform for Ukraine). However, politically sensitive contexts complicate dissemination and institutional uptake. Similarly, technical guidance efforts must anticipate and navigate political sensitivities in conflict-affected settings.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

42. The Environment Assembly may wish to:

(a) Take note of the report on the implementation of Environment Assembly resolution 6/12, which provides insights into the achievements and ongoing efforts to enhance environmental assessment, recovery and coordination in areas affected by armed conflict and complex emergencies;

(b) Provide strategic guidance on strengthening resource mobilization, broadening stakeholder engagement, institutionalizing coordination mechanisms, advancing environmental data systems and decision-support tools, expanding the scope of technical guidance and promoting the integration of environmental dimensions into peacebuilding and recovery processes;

(c) Encourage and invite Governments and relevant organizations to provide financial and in-kind support for the further development, field application and scaling up of technical tools, data platforms and recovery programming in conflict-affected settings, in line with the mandate set out in resolution 6/12.

A. Strengthening resource mobilization and deployment

43. The Environment Assembly may wish to invite Governments and other stakeholders in a position to do so to provide voluntary financial contributions to UNEP to support the scaling up of UNEP field programming in crisis-affected settings and the finalization of the global technical guidance framework, including field validation, local partnerships and capacity-building components.

44. UNEP will continue to pursue diversified and sustained resource mobilization strategies to secure financial support for the delivery of environmental recovery services and the expansion of guidance materials and tools tailored to conflict and post-conflict environments.

B. Expanding stakeholder engagement and institutionalizing coordination platforms

45. The Environment Assembly may wish to invite Governments and other stakeholders to broaden engagement with national authorities, local actors and operational agencies to ensure the relevance and uptake of environmental recovery planning and technical guidance.

46. UNEP will continue to facilitate inclusive and participatory processes for guidance development and recovery planning, while promoting multi-partner platforms that align environmental priorities with humanitarian and development agendas in conflict-affected areas.

C. Strengthening data systems and decision-support tools

47. The Environment Assembly may wish to encourage Governments and other stakeholders to support efforts to enhance the availability, usability and integration of environmental data systems and decision-support tools tailored to conflict-affected settings.

48. UNEP will continue to:

(a) Tailor data tools to distinct user groups, such as national Governments, humanitarian actors, civil society and environmental authorities, ensuring that use cases align with their operational mandates and capacities;

(b) Improve the accessibility of tools by ensuring interoperability with coordination portals, multilingual content, offline functionality and integration into humanitarian and development data ecosystems;

(c) Advance a user-centred design approach and enhance delivery infrastructure to ensure the widespread use and sustainability of environmental information platforms.

D. Broadening the technical guidance documents and their scope

49. The Environment Assembly may wish to request the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, to consider expanding the UNEP technical guidance documents to address a wider range of conflict-relevant environmental issues, including marine and coastal ecosystems, biodiversity loss, pollution and air quality impacts.

50. UNEP will continue to develop modular and thematic guidance products based on field experience and user feedback, ensuring that they can be adapted to a range of environmental challenges in crisis contexts.

E. Promoting the role of environmental data in peacebuilding and recovery

51. The Environment Assembly may wish to reiterate the importance of integrating environmental data into peacebuilding, reconstruction and recovery processes, and advocate for the use of such data as a means to support inclusive, resilient and sustainable post-crisis transitions.

52. UNEP will continue to:

(a) Advocate for the integration of environmental data into post-crisis planning instruments, such as post-disaster needs assessments, recovery compacts and resilience strategies;

(b) Position its technical guidance and tools as global public goods that are accessible to national and international actors engaged in crisis recovery;

(c) Work with peace and political entities, such as UNDP, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and regional organizations, to demonstrate the role of environmental data in conflict analysis, confidence-building and governance reform.

F. Embedding conflict sensitivity and political analysis in all phases of programme planning and implementation

53. The Environment Assembly may wish to reaffirm the need to integrate conflict sensitivity and political analysis into environmental programming in crisis settings.

54. UNEP will continue to conduct context-specific analyses that inform programme design, stakeholder engagement and risk mitigation, ensuring that environmental interventions do not exacerbate tensions, but instead contribute to stability and inclusive recovery.