

WATER AND ARMED CONFLICTS WEBINAR

Tuesday, 16 October 2018
from 13:00 to 14:00

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
7 bis Avenue de la Paix, 1211 Geneva 2nd floor, De Mello Auditorium

The Platform for International Water Law of the Geneva Water Hub (GWH) and DiploFoundation are pleased to invite you to the webinar on “Water and Armed Conflicts”. This webinar is organized in the framework of the Distance Learning Course on “International Water Law & The Law of Transboundary Aquifers” delivered through the Continuing Education and e-Learning Centre of the University of Geneva.

Armed conflicts affect water in several ways: destruction and damage to water facilities, attacks against power plants providing water supplies, and the collapse of water treatments and sewage systems are some of these aspects. Moreover, continued hostilities and protracted armed conflicts may undermine the efforts to repair, maintain and operate water pumping and treatment facilities.¹ The limitations on access to water in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the severe damage to water networks in Gaza during the conflict in 2008-2009, also illustrate the many dimensions of the consequences of the conduct of hostilities on water.² Meanwhile, armed conflicts may also affect the environment and ecosystem of water resources. For example, during the conflict in Kosovo in 1999, the attacks against industrial facilities situated along the Danube River caused the release of polluting substances in the river. Indeed, the bombing of the Pančevo and Novi Savi oil refineries spread the fear of widespread ecological damage to water resources.³

International Humanitarian Law (IHL), also called the law of armed conflicts, contains rules limiting the use of water as a method or means or of warfare. Examples are the rules applicable on ‘installations containing dangerous forces’ such as dykes and dams and on electrical facilities. The protection of these works in current conflicts raises challenges. In the last decades, belligerents have taken control of dams and dykes to strengthen their powers over occupied territories. Dams in the Tigris and

¹ For example, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, in 2016, reported that: ‘Continued hostilities have undermined efforts to repair, maintain and upgrade electricity production and water pumping and treatment facilities. This is particularly the case where water and electrical networks for a locality have fallen under the control of an opposing party.’ See: *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/31/68, 2016, p.12, para. 82, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A-HRC-31-68.pdf>.

² Amnesty International, *Troubled Waters: Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water: Israel-Occupied Palestinian Territories*, 2009, available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdf/mde150272009en.pdf>. United Nations Environment Programme, *Gaza: Environmental Assessment of the Gaza Strip following the Escalation of Hostilities in December 2008-January 2009*, p. 78, available at: http://www.unep.org/PDF/dmb/UNEP_Gaza_FA.pdf.

³ United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), *The Kosovo Conflict: Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlements*, 1999, pp. 59-62, available at: <http://www.grid.unep.ch/btf/final/finalreport.pdf>.

Euphrates Rivers controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria are examples in point. Moreover, power plants may also be a target of military operations. These facilities may have a dual function and be used for pumping water to civilian populations but also for supporting military activities. Although IHL contains rules to protect these facilities, these norms should be reinforced to ensure adequate protection of water and energy installations.

The Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace⁴ in its report “A Matter of Survival” recommended establishing a List of water-related infrastructures as well as the creation of an independent international body mandated to gather information about the destruction and cuts to water supplies as well as to foster technical assistance during protracted armed conflicts.⁵

The Geneva Water Hub, acting as the Secretariat of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, together with other partners including universities, international organisations and non-governmental organisations, is conducting a research to develop a List of principles related to the protection of water infrastructures in relation to armed conflicts. This List will identify principles and rules of IHL, human rights law and international water law that must be respected during and after armed conflicts to ensure an adequate protection of water infrastructures. The analysis of the interplay between different areas of international law is often neglected in current studies whereas international humanitarian law, human rights law and international water law can contribute together to ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation services in times of armed conflicts and in post-conflict situations.

Programme

Mr François Münger – Director of the Geneva Water Hub.

Overview on the implementation of the recommendations of the GHPWP.

Dr Mara Tignino - Reader and Coordinator of the Platform for International Water Law/Geneva Water Hub, Faculty of Law and Institute for Environmental Sciences, University of Geneva.

Strengthening the Protection of Water during Armed Conflicts: The List of Principles related to the protection of water-related infrastructures in relation to armed conflicts.

13:30-14:00 – Q & A

⁴ The GHPWP was established by 15 co-convening countries in November 2015 with the mandate to develop a set of recommendations aimed at preventing and resolving water-related countries and at making water an instrument of peace.

⁵ GHPWP, *A Matter of Survival*, 2017, p.26 and 31.