ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE IN THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA

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TOXIC REMNANTS OF WAR PROJECT
Research project exploring the humanitarian impact of environmental damage resulting from conflict and military activities.

Aims to engage CSOs from the environment, humanitarian disarmament, human rights and public health.

Seeks to contribute to the debate over strengthening the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts.

Established 2012.

Civil society network working to reduce the humanitarian and environmental impact of pollution generated by conflict and military activities.

The Network supports the development of a stronger standard of environmental and civilian protection before, during and after armed conflict.

Established 2015.
The state of Syria’s environment pre-2011

**Geography:** 30% agricultural, 55% desert, steppe and mountains.

**Population:** 21.5m.

**Economy:** lower middle income (agriculture, industry – oil, gas, mining, textiles, pharmaceuticals) retail and tourism.

**Protected areas:** 26 with limited restrictions on hunting, no formal national parks.

**Environmental issues:** overgrazing and desertification, agricultural intensification, water scarcity and pollution, industrial discharges, air pollution from vehicles and industry, poor waste management, inadequate governance and monitoring.
Conflict mediated environmental risks within Syria
TRWP – Toxic Remnants of War Project
Conflict mediated environmental risks in Syria’s neighbours
Conclusions

1. **Environmental damage in Syria is widespread and significant**
   Initial data suggest that, not only has the conflict directly affected the lives and security of Syria’s people, it will also have long-term consequences for sustainable development and the natural resources that civilians depend on – both within Syria and for neighbouring countries.

2. **Increased monitoring is crucial for minimising harm and improving response**
   Information is crucial both to raise awareness and to inform responses through local partners or government structures or, in the aftermath of the conflict, to speed-up assistance and remediation. Civil society can make a valuable contribution by monitoring and publicising environmental damage during conflicts.

3. **Stronger cooperation between humanitarian and environmental actors is needed**
   The Syrian crisis has generated an enormous response from humanitarian actors, operations that have already been confronted with environmental problems. Environmental tools and expertise are available to help identify potential impacts, improve response mechanisms and to encourage data sharing but implementation needs to be improved.
Conclusions

4. Fully integrate the environment into recovery plans
Recovery must take into account the location of environmental hotspots, access to and the sustainable use of natural resources. It should also integrate community-level risk awareness about environmental hazards and aim to build back greener.

5. Properly address the environmental dimensions of conflicts
The environment can be a driver of conflicts and the weakness of existing protection under international law guarantees that it is almost always a victim. The international community’s responses to wartime environmental degradation are ad hoc and piecemeal, even where it can help build and sustain peace. The SDGs will require that we finally address these gaps but doing so will require sustained commitment from States and civil society.