

Conflict risk escalates amid rising food and water scarcity and inflationary pressures

London, November 1, 2023: Today marks the annual launch of the Ecological Threat Report, produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP).

Key Findings:

- Ecological threats, such as rapid population growth, water risk and food insecurity will be compounded by climate change, causing mass displacement of people and conflict.
- A 25% rise in food insecurity increases the risk of conflict by 36%
- Similarly, a 25% increase in the number of people without access to clean drinking increases the likelihood of conflict by 18%
- 1 billion people are living in 42 countries that currently face severe food insecurity
- 1 in 4 people globally do not have regular access to safe drinking water
- By 2050, 2.8 billion people will reside in countries facing severe ecological threats, compared to 1.8 billion today
- More than 60% of the world's megacities are growing rapidly and are in countries with high levels of violence or conflict. These cities lack the financial resources to cater for their population growth.

The Ecological Threat Report (ETR) analyses ecological threats globally and assesses the countries and subnational areas most at risk from conflict, civil unrest and displacement caused by ecological degradation and climate-related events. The report covers 221 countries and independent territories broken down into 3,594 subnational areas.

The main finding from the ETR is that without concerted action, current levels of ecological degradation will worsen, intensifying existing conflicts, and becoming a catalyst for new conflicts, thereby resulting in increases in forced migration.

The number of countries suffering from severe ecological threats and low societal resilience has risen by 3 to 30 in the last year. These 'hotspot' countries are home to 1.1 billion people, an increase of 332 million¹. The recent pressures on global food prices have placed additional demands on countries already suffering from food insecurity.

Hotspot Countries

Three new countries have emerged as 'hotspots'. They are Niger, Ethiopia, and Myanmar, all of which have entered a detrimental cycle of increasing ecological threats, lower societal resilience and escalating conflict. Each has faced famine and violence in the last 12 months: Ethiopia's ongoing conflict, Niger's recent military coup, and Myanmar's violence following its coup in 2021.

Ecological degradation and conflict are cyclical, whereby the degradation of resources leads to conflict, while conflict leads to the degradation of resources. Ecological degradation has the biggest impact on conflict in regions like the Sahel, which face major deficiencies in governance, rule of law, high levels of poverty and short-term climatic variations.

Conflicts often spillover from one country into another, affecting the region and beyond². Currently there are over 108 million people that are displaced, up by 24% since 2020.

Estimates show that 30 per cent of all displacements move more than 500 kilometres beyond their home country, with a significant percentage of illegal entries in Europe originate from ecologically threatened and conflict-ridden countries⁶. A significant percentage of Europe's illegal entries, notably 29% from Syrian and 9% from Afghanistan, are from hotspot countries.

Based on current trends, and without substantial efforts to reverse them, IEP estimates show that by 2050, 2.8 billion people will reside in countries facing severe ecological threats compared to 1.8 billion in 2023.

Conflict, Food and Water Stress

Food insecurity is connected to water stress. The ETR estimates that a 25% rise in food insecurity increases conflict risk by 36%, similarly a 25% increase in water risk escalates the likelihood of conflict by 18%. Areas with a history of conflict and weak institutions are the most vulnerable.

Global food prices have increased by 33% since 2016, placing further stress on the most vulnerable. Currently, 42 countries face severe food insecurity, with almost four billion people living in areas with *high* or *severe* food insecurity. Most of these countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Two billion people currently live in countries without access to safe drinking water. By 2040, the MENA region will mirror sub-Saharan Africa's water stress. Eight of the 12 countries in Russia and Eurasia currently face significant water challenges, exacerbated by low rainfall and their topology.

These trends are expected to worsen. It is likely that global warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century, making it harder to stay below 2°C. This is likely to exacerbate ecological degradation and the underlying drivers of conflict³.

Natural Disasters, Population and Conflict

Climate change amplifies risks such as droughts, flooding, cyclones and storms. Death rates are seven times higher in countries with low rather than high levels of resilience and peace. As such, in 2022 the UN Central Emergency Response Fund allocated 35% of its budget to tackling natural disasters, up from 17% a decade ago.

Increasing demographic pressures intensify ecological risks, straining public resources and societal resilience, especially in already vulnerable regions. By 2050, sub-Saharan Africa's population is predicted to rise to 2.2 billion, an increase of over 60%, which will dramatically increase pressure on existing food and water supplies. By 2050, the number of youths under 15 in the region will account for more than the entire population of Europe, highlighting the dynamic changes in global population distribution.

Steve Killelea, Founder & Executive Chairman of IEP said:

“As we approach COP 28, the Ecological Threat Report provides a timely reminder of the need for leaders to act, invest and build resilience for the future. The number of countries with severe ecological threats that lack the necessary societal resilience to deal with these challenges keeps on increasing, and climate change will only exacerbate these threats.

Countries with high levels of Positive Peace⁴ have the societal resilience to solve these challenges. In a world facing increased ecological degradation, conflict and forced migration,

world leaders need to invest in programmes that build the capabilities that create positive resilience and drive economic advancement.”

Megacities: Rising Pollution and Population

The number of megacities⁵ are on the rise and projected to increase from 33 to 50 by 2050. Over 267 million people currently live in the world's least peaceful megacities. These cities will experience rapid growth over the next 30 years, but lack the financial resource to manage their expansion, resulting in increases in crime, poverty, traffic congestion, and pollution.

In Africa, both Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have multiple high growth cities, with low per capita incomes. Of the 50 projected megacities, 60% are in countries in the bottom half of the Global Peace Index.

Over 60% of refugees and 80% of internally displaced people move to cities. By 2050, 70% of the global population will live in cities, with most growth occurring in countries with low per capita income and high levels of violence. Examples include Kinshasa, Lagos, Dhaka, and Karachi.

Conflict & the Green Economy

Countries that rely heavily on fossil fuels will struggle without assistance during the forthcoming green transition. For example, DRC, Libya, Iraq, Angola, and Timor Leste derive over 25% of their GDP from fossil fuels. Confronted with major ecological challenges and low societal resilience, these countries may face a decline in GDP of up to 60% between 2030 and 2040.

For more information, visit economicsandpeace.org and visionofhumanity.org.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

¹The 2023 hotspot countries are:

<i>Burundi</i>	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Zimbabwe</i>
<i>Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>	<i>Central African Republic</i>	<i>Haiti</i>
<i>Guinea</i>	<i>Chad</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
<i>Niger</i>	<i>Equatorial Guinea</i>	<i>Libya</i>
<i>Republic of the Congo</i>	<i>Eritrea</i>	<i>Mali</i>
<i>Somalia</i>	<i>Ethiopia</i>	<i>Mauritania</i>
<i>South Sudan</i>	<i>Guinea-Bissau</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>
<i>Afghanistan</i>	<i>Sudan</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>
	<i>Uganda</i>	<i>North Korea</i>

³IPCC, 2023: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, p71

⁴Positive Peace is defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. [Source](#)

⁵Cities with a population of over 10 million

⁶Ecological Threat Report 2021

Global Media Contacts

Ryan Seller, Media Relations Manager, Hill+Knowlton Strategies

ryan.seller@hkstrategies.com

+44 7917 073423

About the Ecological Threat Report (ETR)

This is the fourth edition of the ETR which covers 228 independent states and territories. The ETR is unique in that it takes a multi-faceted, machine learning approach to combine measures of resilience with the most comprehensive ecological data available to shed light on the countries least likely to cope with extreme ecological shocks, now and into the future.

Methodology

The ETR includes the most recent and respected scientific research on population growth, water stress, food insecurity, droughts, floods, cyclones, and rising temperature. In addition, the report uses IEP's Positive Peace framework to identify areas where the resilience is unlikely to be strong enough to adapt or cope with these future shocks. The report draws on a wide variety of data sources, including World Bank, World Resources Institute, Food and Agriculture Organisation, the United Nations, the United Nations Human Rights Council, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, International Organisation for Migration, and IEP.

About the Institute for Economics & Peace

IEP is an international and independent think tank dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and tangible measure of human well-being and progress. It has offices in Sydney, Brussels, New York, The Hague, Mexico City and Harare.