

Foreword

Environmental harm in almost any form is inimical to the human experience when it rises above *de minimis* levels. To that extent, significant environmental degradation always has consequences for humanity, be they economic, social, cultural or political. What has become apparent is that there is also often a further dimension to such harm, namely that which is security-related. Environmental harm is thus increasingly recognised as both a consequence of military conflicts and, as significant, a trigger factor in the creation and/or exacerbation of civil strife, inter-State tensions and armed disputes. Resource scarcity, in particular, has shown itself to be a major cause of human insecurity. The birth of the world's newest country – South Sudan – continues to be mired, for instance, in bitter controversies over natural resources.

Environmental security is thus a pivotal matter for communities, States and the wider international community. However, as with all concepts, it is in danger of becoming a buzzword; critics would say full of 'political-ese' and rhetoric but with no real substance. Nevertheless, environmental security threats – both geographically discrete concerns as well as the more pervasive links between environmental harm / natural resource stresses and human conflict (both actual and putative) – are no less real simply because they can also be conceptualised and modelled. What Dr Das achieves in this monograph is to highlight the true extent of the problem without becoming overly-descriptive of particular issues; to reflect the broader context whilst concurrently relying on key instances to reveal the diverse nature of the threats.

She also underlines the role of international law and international organisations in mediating this complex problem. International law and international organisations are, however, no panacea; they cannot be 'activated' in some on/off fashion to resolve the world's ills. International law and international organisations are as imperfect, inchoate and fractured as the human causes of environmental insecurity – they can do no more, or no less, than political will allows. Nevertheless, within the substantive and procedural norms of international law and within the mission statements of international organisations, there is the potential

for something more, something better – an aspiration for more harmonious co-existence both between peoples, and between peoples and nature. Concepts such as environmental security and sustainable development, which must be considered as integrally related, may indeed be buzzwords but the principles they reflect are worth upholding and pursuing. Indeed, if worst case future scenarios are anywhere near correct, we have no choice but to continue to seek new and additional ways to implement still further the measures necessary to tackle the underlying causes of environmental harm.

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