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## **NGO Letter to the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change**

October 11, 2004

H.E. Anand Panyarachun

Chairman  
UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change  
Chrysler Building, 5th floor  
405 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY 10174

Dear Chairman Panyarachun:

In the lead-up to the 3rd observance of the "International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict" on 6th November, we urge the Panel to focus in its upcoming report on this critical issue. Natural resources lie at the heart of many of the world's most deadly conflicts. We enclose a paper that includes a number of recommendations for action by the UN Security Council, the Secretariat and member states.

The UN Security Council has itself recognized the close connection between natural resource exploitation and violent conflicts. In recent years, the Council has appointed a number of Expert Panels that have investigated natural resource dimensions of specific conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The panels have issued revealing reports about

the links between lucrative and abusive natural resource exploitation and the emergence and continuation of these conflicts. The Council has also crafted a number of sanctions regimes to target resource exploitation and sales.

Natural resource exploitation also contributes to conflicts through promoting such destabilizing institutions as the illicit arms trade, clandestine transport systems, and money laundering, as well as criminal and terrorist networks. Foreign nations, rebel groups or governments who seek to gain control over resource-rich areas, often resort to arms and they embrace corruption and violent authoritarian rule, common precursors to civil strife.

Recent devastating conflicts have been triggered, funded and exacerbated by the exploitation of natural resources including timber, diamonds, oil, water, ivory, coltan, cobalt and gold. Growing scarcity of some resources may increase such conflicts in the future.

To successfully resolve existing conflicts and prevent future violence, the United Nations must address natural resource issues more thoroughly and systematically. Ad hoc action by the Security Council is not enough. We propose a number of general initiatives that the Council could take, including a definition of "conflict resources" under international law, broad enforcement, more effective action to end impunity, and serious steps towards crisis prevention.

We also suggest binding rules governing the natural resource extraction industry. Such rules can prevent business activities from contributing to conflicts, through bribery, arming of rebel groups, trade in illicitly-obtained resources and the like. Transparency and accountability of payments and contracts, including the "publish what you pay" initiative, could contribute significantly to conflict prevention.

To promote a permanent knowledge base within the organization, the UN should establish a Secretariat office or a permanent inter-agency task force on natural resources and conflict. Such a cross-cutting unit could advise the Security Council and maintain global records on natural resource issues. It would increase efficiency and institutional knowledge and enable the UN to respond more rapidly and effectively.

NGOs, scholars, the UN Secretariat, the World Bank and many others have recently produced important analytical work on natural resources and conflict. We urge the Panel to take full advantage of this work and to consider options for a stronger and more systematic UN role in this area.

We attach a [paper](#) with suggestions for the Panel to consider. We hope you find this useful in your important work.

Yours sincerely,

Alice Blondel  
Global Witness

James Paul  
Global Policy Forum

Matt Scott  
World Vision