
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the major priorities and policy responses discussed at the seminar on environmental security which was held on the 29th of February 1996 at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The concept of environmental security has acquired popularity over the last few years in the context of the post cold-war re-engineering of the international system. Issues such as environmental degradation have become high priorities and have promoted the flowering of international law, while at the same time, in the security field, un-conventional threats are now being studied seriously. The nature of foreign policy-making has been evolving rapidly and is increasingly geared towards influencing the way countries behave internally. In an attempt to reduce human suffering and financial costs, policy-makers have been investing a lot of efforts in the study of the roots of conflicts, and in the pursuit of preventive diplomacy. The research that is being done on the relationship between environmental stress and conflict, represents one example of this pro-active approach to foreign policy-making.

In terms of policy development, the novel concept of environmental security enriches the international debate on environmental issues only if it provides for a better understanding of what kind of instruments should Canada deploy to manage the environment as a factor in the security equation. The seminar has concluded to the effect that there is still a lack of consensus on what the concept should include. Some argue that human, rather than international, security should be the focal point, and that we need to push for a more global system of governance which would allow greater space for civic participation. Others, on the other hand, claim that foreign policy analysis should concentrate on the security of the international system, focussing on minimizing intra- and inter-state conflicts. This analysis would require a clear understanding of the links between environmental stress and conflict. If environment does play a role in the equation of security, is it a direct or indirect one? What crucial factors come into play? Because of the comprehensiveness of the concept of environmental security, it was suggested that a matrix be built, which would encompass all the elements, at every level of security, from local to global. It was also proposed that the gap between environmental and trade policies be bridged. This would ensure greater coherence and effectiveness in our foreign policy-making. Finally, because of the seemingly more altruistic motives behind environmental policies, it was argued that efforts to keep the public onside need to be increased.