ENVIRONMENT OF PEACE
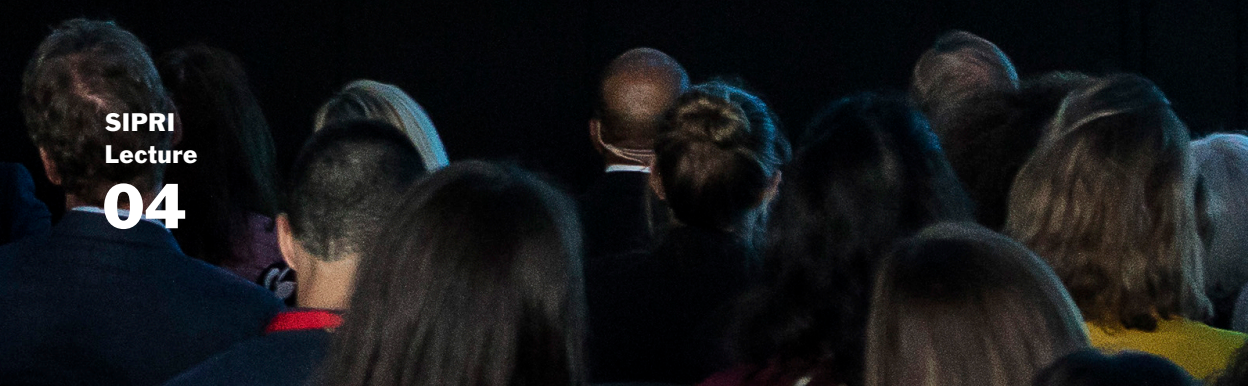
HELEN CLARK

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Environment of Peace

SIPRI Annual Lecture No. 4

HELEN CLARK

Preface

On 23 May 2022, SIPRI was privileged to have HE Helen Clark deliver the fourth annual SIPRI Lecture. Her lecture focused on the complex challenges that humanity faces as a global environmental crisis converges with increasing dangers of conflict and insecurity—and on how to respond constructively.

Helen Clark has been an inspiring voice for sustainable development, climate action, gender equality and global health issues on the world stage for two decades and more. As New Zealand's first female prime minister from 1999 to 2008, she successfully advocated for a pioneering national net-zero goal as part of a comprehensive sustainability programme. In 2009, she was invited to become administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Under her leadership, the UNDP was ranked the most transparent global development organization in the first Aid Transparency Index in 2012.

Clark's activities since leaving the UNDP in 2017 testify to her continued commitment to global development and human rights—including as chair of the Extractive Industries Initiative, chair of Women Political Leaders, and co-chair of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, which was set up to understand the Covid-19 pandemic and recommend improved ways of managing pandemic risk.

In 2020, Clark agreed to join the international expert panel guiding SIPRI's Environment of Peace initiative. Her advice and ideas were invaluable over the next two years, as we researched and drafted our policy report, *Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk*. That report was launched a few hours before the lecture, at SIPRI's Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development.

In her address, Clark eloquently and persuasively presents the findings of the report. She points out that the climate crisis looms ever larger, the world is off track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, and the war in Ukraine is not only having tragic consequences in Ukraine but also has potentially catastrophic repercussions far beyond that country's borders.

She argues that the 'grow now, clean up later' approach is bad for our health and well-being, for the ecosystems on which all life on earth depends, and for global peace and security. Transformative change is needed, which will require global cooperation; but the current geopolitical climate makes it far more difficult to address these interconnected risks.

Picking up on a phrase used in the welcome remarks by Ambassador Jan Eliasson, chair of the SIPRI Governing Board, she calls on all 'worried optimists' to rally behind strategies and initiatives that can turn the current dire situation around. She elaborates on the Environment of Peace report's principles for action and recommendations as a way of carving out a path to an environment of peace.

The audience, both those in the room and those joining online, were welcomed to the lecture by HE Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, as well as by Jan Eliasson.

After the lecture I moderated a discussion with Helen Clark; Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel; and two more of our Environment of Peace expert panellists: Ilwad Elman, Chief Operating Officer of the Elman Peace Centre in Somalia; and panel chair HE Margot Wallström, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden. In that discussion we reflected on the key messages coming out of Environment of Peace, and how progress could be made.

On behalf of SIPRI, I would like to extend my gratitude to Helen Clark for delivering such a compelling address. It was a powerful reminder of the risks the world is facing and the action that needs to be taken.

Dan Smith
Director, SIPRI
Stockholm, August 2022

Environment of Peace

My thanks go to SIPRI for giving me the honour of delivering this annual lecture.

I understand that the lecture was the initiative of my esteemed colleague Jan Eliasson, and that I am preceded in the series by three others whom I also greatly admire—Hans Blix, Michelle Bachelet and the late Madeleine Albright.

I have been privileged since 2020 to take part in the international panel supporting the preparation of SIPRI's new report on the environment of peace. It set out to look at the peace and security dimensions of environmental crises, and to show how taking a responsible approach to the environment helps build peace.

A responsible approach to the environment is a good thing in itself, but the spillover impacts for peace, and human and sustainable development make it an imperative. That is even more so in today's world. Even a cursory scan of the daily media headlines is more than enough to draw the conclusion that we are living in a dystopia crafted by human hands.

We human beings have created this mess. It's incumbent on us now to find ways out of it. That won't be easy, but having well-grounded reports scoping the scale of the challenge and identifying principles and priorities for action, as the *Environment of Peace* report does, helps chart a way forward.

An era of multiple crises

It's now commonplace to observe that we are living in an era of multiple crises, with many connections between them.

The climate crisis looms ever larger as the international community collectively fails to take the steps necessary to keep global warming below a 1.5-degree Celsius ceiling. The destruction of our wild habitats—from mountains and forests, and through lowlands and down rivers to the sea—exacerbates the climate crisis and threatens significant species extinction.

Our intrusion on nature is related to the reported increase in zoonotic diseases. We can't forecast when the next one with pandemic potential will emerge—one could be imminent. Yet, the world remains unprepared to stop another pandemic developing—having yet to agree to any significant long-term change to the way we prepare and respond, over two years into the current pandemic.

We are off track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals across all their dimensions. They were off track before the pandemic, and its impact on the poorest and most vulnerable has made them more off track now.

And the war in Ukraine over the past three months has been a further major setback to human and sustainable development in every sense—with tragic consequences for Ukrainians and spillover impacts around the world—from price spikes for energy and food, and from the likelihood of both more severe poverty

and hunger and considerable civic unrest as the geopolitical crisis over Ukraine becomes protracted.

This all adds up to a veritable syndemic of challenges. Overall, though, if we continue to career towards exceeding more planetary boundaries then, in a worst-case scenario modelled a decade ago for the *2011 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report on Sustainability and Equity*, improvements in human development overall would slow to a crawl, and there would likely be a regression in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

A worst-case scenario is not improbable unless we take sustainable development seriously. The 'grow now, clean up later' approach is bad for our health and well-being, for the ecosystems on which all life on earth depends, and for peace and security as the new SIPRI report demonstrates so well.

Toxic geopolitics diminish capacity

In an ideal world, with strong support for international institutions and law, we could have a degree of confidence about overcoming the crises we face. But the prospects are daunting now, with toxic geopolitics diminishing our capacity to address the challenges decisively—or even to discuss them at all.

I was struck by the recent interview with Finland's Foreign Minister in *Foreign Policy* where he said with respect to Russia that 'Environmental cooperation unfortunately has stopped. Cooperation on the Arctic is also frozen at the moment. So is cooperation on the Baltic Sea.' If such obvious areas of mutual interest between two neighbours are off the table for discussion, what hope then for the climate change Conference of the Parties in Egypt later this year, the need to strengthen the global architecture for pandemic preparation and response, and the success of the biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction treaty negotiations concerning our oceans?

Yet, the worst response to the syndemic would be to lose hope and sit by as the current trajectory continues.

More than once in my time at the UN in New York, I heard Jan Eliasson say: 'I'm an optimist, but I'm a worried optimist.' Now is the time for all worried optimists to rally behind strategies and initiatives which can turn the current dire situation around.

Environment of peace

The *Environment of Peace* report sets out principles for doing that. It exhorts us to:

Think fast, think ahead, and act now, to recognize the links between the concurrent crises, and to commit to urgent actions to arrest environmental degradation.

Cooperate to survive and thrive. Specifically, the report calls for 'a new mode of cooperation that reaches beyond like-minded alliances in the interests of addressing common threats'.

Let's dwell on that for a moment. As small democratic nations like Sweden and New Zealand know, we can't limit our dialogue on critical issues for humanity and our planet to those whose political systems currently resemble our own. Through diplomacy, we must find ways of addressing our shared interests as citizens of this planet.

Expect the unexpected—be prepared to adapt. In short, have foresight and assess your risks and how to begin mitigating around them.

Commit to a just and peaceful transition, and

Ensure that decision-making is inclusive of all.

Operationalize principles to create an environment of peace

The challenge now is to operationalize these principles in order to create an environment of peace. The SIPRI report makes a series of recommendations about how to do that.

Address the linked crises with joint solutions

First, it calls for addressing the linked crises with joined-up solutions.

The first step in that direction is to recognize the links. In that regard, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was forward leaning in both identifying key goals, declaring them to be indivisible and acknowledging that there could be no peace without sustainable development—and no sustainable development without peace.

But that agenda was agreed in 2015—which was a landmark year for international agreements, including on climate action. Thereafter, geopolitical tensions rose, making implementation of those agendas more difficult.

If we are to act on the understanding, for example, that the climate crisis is a threat to peace, then it is important that the UN Security Council acknowledges that. But, to the contrary, a resolution to that effect was vetoed by Russia last December, with India also voting against and China abstaining.

One of the arguments of those who did not support the resolution was that the issue belonged with deliberations pursuant to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Yet, complementary strategies are needed across decision-making bodies. If we try to deal with issues only in silos and refuse to acknowledge the links between them, then global and national decision-making will lack coherence, as sadly it often does. That is what the *Environment of Peace* report seeks to address.

Invest in preparedness and resilience

Second, the report urges countries to invest in resilience and preparedness to reduce vulnerability to environmental and conflict shocks.

That is important on a number of levels. At UNDP, we used to say that if development is not risk informed, it isn't sustainable development. How often do we see hard-won human development gains reversed by adverse events to which

societies could have been more resilient? Many of those events are climate-related, where human activity has paved the way for huge impacts—for example, the loss of forest cover in catchments resulting in devastating downstream flooding and/ or landslides, leading to loss of life and livelihoods.

There are issues there that states and communities can address individually, and there is an important support role for the development partners of lower-income countries. Globally, we have to see progress on arresting deforestation, and on making the transition to sustainable energy, transport, habitation and waste management. Unsustainability across these areas has serious implications for the poorest and most vulnerable around the world—whether they be living in flood zones or precarious hillside shanty towns, or on coastlines, low-lying atolls, or drylands threatened by ever more frequent and intense droughts.

The *Environment of Peace* report notes the significant overlap between countries facing the most significant environmental threats and those in a state of conflict or high insecurity. There is a nexus of vulnerability to adverse climate events and other shocks, high levels of poverty and poor governance which contributes to conflict risk.

Conflict may arise over access to scarce resources such as grazing land or water. Host communities may come under greater stress as they absorb peoples forced from their homes and lands by severe climate events. Armed groups may range more widely for sustenance when food is scarce and use the challenges communities face as recruiting tools for waging war against authorities. Corruption may block resources actually getting to communities for building resilience to adverse events and for restoring or rehabilitating ecosystems. All these risks need to be understood, and their root causes need to be addressed.

The *Environment of Peac*e report notes that 'The multiple ways in which risk factors interact make this a "wicked problem" with no simple solutions.' It also cautions against interventions that exacerbate rather than resolve problems. For example, the 'rush to biofuels' has had negative impacts, including from taking land out of food production and thereby driving up food prices, to exacerbating water shortages, degrading soils and driving land grabs—which in turn drive traditional owners off their lands. As well, the carbon savings from biofuel production may be negligible, if any, when all factors are taken into account. At least do no harm should be our bottom line!

Finance peace, not risk

Third, the report urges that globally and nationally we must finance peace, not risk.

It rightly identifies the wasteful use of public monies on subsidizing fossil fuels and deforestation that are so destructive to the climate ecosystem, and fishing subsidies which encourage overfishing and depletion of our wild fisheries. These subsidies must end.

As well, we need more investment in good practice across climate change adaptation and mitigation. High-income countries have yet to make good on their commitment to provide US$100 billion a year in climate finance. This funding is

greatly needed for low- and low-middle income countries seeking to adapt to the climate risks they already face and to adopt a more sustainable path.

Up until now, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea have all been financing coal power generation in developing countries. While as Group of Twenty (G20) members, they have undertaken to end that, they have not joined other major development partners in pledging to stop supporting all fossil fuel projects. Yet, the evidence is clear that the world must stop investing in these to have any chance of reaching net-zero global emissions by 2050.

Deliver a just and peaceful transition

Fourth, there must be a just and peaceful transition.

Without careful planning and provision, the ecological transition which must happen to secure our common future will create winners and losers, and further destabilize communities and states. Yet, there are examples from around the world of how transitions away from unsustainable practice have occurred with an emphasis on creating alternative livelihoods and sectors.

I can give two examples from New Zealand. The first involved the very first executive decision of my newly elected government in 1999 to stop logging native forest on all public land. That practice had persisted in one region of New Zealand, and its cessation had local economic implications. A sizeable regional development grant was made to enable diversification to other sectors.

More recently, in 2018, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government announced that there would be no more offshore oil and gas exploration permits granted in New Zealand. The burden of that fell on one region which serviced that sector. It too has been the beneficiary of funding for diversification. I understand that Spain took a similar approach when it ended coal extraction in recent years.

Make no mistake—many developing countries are very exposed to the energy transition that must happen for us to meet the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement. A number are late entrants to the oil and gas sectors and have had hopes for an economic boost from them.

Many of these countries are members of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), whose board I chair. In the course of meeting the EITI's requirements for validation against its standard, significant information is gathered on revenue flows and economic benefit from these sectors. At EITI, we are committed to supporting the use of that data to assist countries to plan for a future where there will be significantly less demand for their fossil fuels. That knowledge should also inform their investment decisions against sinking precious resources into sunset sectors.

Conversely, there are countries with deposits of strategic minerals that stand to benefit from the energy transition, if there is good governance in the sector. Implementing the EITI Standard helps put in place safeguards to mitigate the risks of extractive sector development to societies, the environment and peace.

Be deliberately inclusive

Fifth, in creating an environment of peace, decision-making should be inclusive and provide for meaningful engagement.

The report argues for recognition of indigenous knowledge with respect to conservation of the natural environment and of the rights of indigenous peoples. A study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean found that land in indigenous territories in the Amazon basin was far more likely to be protected than that under other control. Upholding indigenous peoples' right to title over their lands is vital for arresting deforestation. Yet, many in the region defending those rights and their lands have lost their lives under assault from the intrusion of unsustainable sectors.

Women also must be fully included in addressing environmental risks and their security implications. Where livelihood diversification is required, it must create opportunities for women too. The climate crisis magnifies existing inequalities through its differential impacts; addressing that crisis needs women's perspectives and full engagement.

The voices and perspectives of youth must also be heard. Where security risks arise, youth are at risk of being instrumentalized. Youth with opportunity and voice are a powerful force for good in all societies.

Research, educate, inform

Sixth, the *Environment of Peace* report closes with a clarion call for more education and information about the links between security and environmental crises. There needs to be a lot of listening to those on the frontlines of these crises to draw on their wisdom on what would help reduce risk. This knowledge may well be very local—in communities far from government headquarters and development partner offices. Understanding the local context will be critical to supporting initiatives which are beneficial to and desired by communities.

Conclusions

Would the world be a better place if the approach advocated by the *Environment of Peace* report was followed? The answer must be an unequivocal yes.

Certainly not all threats to peace and security and actual breakdowns into conflict have a relationship to environmental crises. But many do. Understanding why they do, and understanding what would both address the underlying environmental issues and deliver a peace dividend is at the heart of this new SIPRI report. I commend it to all who want to support a transition to a more sustainable and peaceful world—which surely should be a common goal for humanity.

Helen Clark

Helen Clark (New Zealand) was prime minister of New Zealand for three successive terms from 1999–2008. Throughout her tenure as prime minister and as a member of Parliament over 27 years, Clark engaged widely in policy development and advocacy across the international, economic, social, environmental and cultural spheres. In April 2009, Clark became administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Helen continues to be a strong voice for sustainable development, climate action, gender equality and women's leadership, peace and justice, and action on pressing global health issues. In July 2020, she was appointed by the director-general of the World Health Organization as a co-chair of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, called for by the World Health Assembly. She chairs the boards of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, and is a member and board member of many others.

The 2022 SIPRI Lecture by HE Helen Clark is available to watch on SIPRI's YouTube channel.