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Environmental Change and Security Program

***From Conflict to Peacebuilding:
The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment (Report Launch)***

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Edited Transcript—Daniel Reifsnyder

I do appreciate the opportunity to be here tonight for the second time in about six months being on this stage with Achim Steiner and his staff and at the invitation of Geoff Dabelko to launch a UNEP study, the first one was, I think, last April where we launched the Africa Atlas, and this is the peace-building conflict and peace-building study, tonight.

We're very supportive, let me say, of what UNEP is doing in this area. I think it's an excellent -- it's excellent that is one of the six thematic areas that have been agreed now as part of UNEP's work. I think UNEP is uniquely positioned to play a real catalytic role within the U.N. system, bringing together various parts of the U.N. system to kind of focus on the importance of natural resources and the importance of the environment in peace-building initiatives. I know there were two that I really wanted to cite, one is something that had happened -- my staff had me given me some points today because USAID has been doing a lot work in this area and need to make a mention of them, particularly with regard to a project in the Sudan.

AID provided 1.8 million to UNEP for the Darfur timber and energy project to plant 3 million seedlings for reforestation in IDP camps in surrounding areas that provide 300,000 fuel-efficient stoves to reduce demand for fuel wood and collaborate on natural resource management assessments and associated technical studies.

This was a project that was started as a result of one of the resource assessments that conflict, post-conflict assessments that UNEP had done that grew out of that work that UNEP did. So we were working kind of hand-and-glove with UNEP in that effort.

But also one -- I had never been to the DR Congo until last year, and I made three different trips to the DR Congo last year -- so we did some very interesting work in the eastern Congo with Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda, trying to look at the situation of the mountain gorillas that you saw in some of the pictures here tonight and trying to figure out how we could try to



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work with those governments and those three countries to try to encourage the kind of activity that you saw on the Rwandan side of the border. You saw people paying 500 dollars a permit for -- to go view mountain gorillas. Rwanda and Uganda are making a fair amount of money off of this eco-tourism now.

And the same kinds of opportunities exist in the Congo, but for the problem that the militias at that time had taken over the Virunga National Park, a lot of the park areas and tourists will prevent it from going in there, and moreover, I think the guerillas were actually cutting down trees to fuel this 20 million dollar charcoal trade that Andrew mentioned. And we began to realize in the course of this work that if we were going to be concerned about the gorillas, we had to be concerned, first and foremost, about the energy needs of the people in that area, and trying to think about how to move them out of charcoal and into more modern sources of energy. And there are number of possibilities in that part of the world, including low-head hydro and the possibilities of -- there is enormous amount of methane at the bottom of Lake Kivu, for example, that people are now trying to recover. That could be bottled and used for cooking, and this kind of thing -- there are a number of different options.

And in this effort we have been working very closely with UNEP, with some of Andrew's staff, looking at the possibilities for how to supplement the efforts of the people in these areas who are working on this and try to figure out ways to overcome the conflicts that have plagued them for well over a decade, maybe for multiple decades at the loss of maybe five and a half million people. So this is quite important work. I think it was very exciting to be part of it, and I think as Achim said, people often don't understand. Sometimes the people that I work with, diplomats, don't understand how cooperating on a practical problem, a little thing like trying to safeguard mountain gorillas can -- sometimes war and peace is just too big to take on in one bite, you know? You kind of have to go at it in little bites, and you think let's have a practical problem, let's have an issue where maybe we could see eye-to-eye and find a way because if people are making this kind of money on eco-tourism in Rwanda and Uganda, then maybe we can do it here in the Congo and wouldn't that be swell? And, you know, we can move forward in these small ways.

So I think it's very important to try to come at this, to try to have the environment and natural resource protection and conservation as part of these efforts, and I think UNEP is extremely well-positioned to do it. I'm really glad to see that you have this wonderful publication; I hope everybody got a copy of it out there tonight. And we're very delighted to be here supporting this effort, so thank you.



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