

## **UN must rethink its approach to environmental problems**

The United Nations can tackle global environmental challenges far more effectively by incorporating two overlooked parts of its mandate—human rights and peace—into its efforts.

So says [Ken Conca](#), an American University international relations professor who has won the 2021 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order for the ideas set forth in his book “An Unfinished Foundation: The United Nations and Global Environmental Governance.”

The U.N. has addressed environmental issues using legal and sustainable development approaches but also needs to pursue strategies linked to its role as a protector of human rights and peace, Conca says.

The organization should declare a safe and healthy environment to be a basic human right, give its Security Council a well-defined role in safeguarding the environment, make sure its environmental initiatives are conflict-sensitive and seek environmental peacebuilding opportunities, he argues.

“His book is a crucial first step in a conversation about how the U.N. can better address global environmental threats,” said Charles Ziegler, world order director. “He identifies a critical failure of a vital institution grappling with one of the most important issues facing humanity and suggests ways to overcome it.”

Conca is a member of the U.N. Environment Programme’s Expert Advisory Group on Conflict and Peacebuilding and founded the Environmental Peacebuilding Working Group in Washington. He was a reviewer for the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and served on a scientific steering committee for the International Human Dimensions Program on Global Environmental Change.

He has twice won the International Studies Association’s award for best international environmental affairs book.

The U.N., formed in 1945 after the devastation of World War II, works to maintain international peace and security, prevent conflict, promote peace and create conditions in which peace can flourish.