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Economic and Social Council Issue #2: The question of managing natural resources across shared national borders.

Natural resources include any “biological, mineral, or aesthetic asset afforded by nature” (“Natural Resource”). Natural gas, oil, and water have all been identified as three of the main natural resources that require managing across shared national borders.

Natural gas is used for heating, cooking, and electricity generation, and demand for it has increased over the past decades. However, as demand has increased, it has led to intensified conflict over transporting and sharing natural gas resources between nations. Some examples of shared natural gas across borders includes the Central Asia-China gas pipeline and the Yadana and Yetagun Gas Pipeline between Myanmar and Thailand (“Public-Private”). The Public – Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF) has identified that “cross-border oil and gas pipelines have a history of vulnerability to disruption and of generating conflict” (“Cross-Borders”). The United Nations also highlights that “political risks are heightened with several countries involved [in pipeline projects] and geopolitical considerations often interfere” (“Public-Private”). In addition to political tensions, the United Nations states that “environmental and social risks are considerable as pipelines usually cover a long distance and cross a range of land uses” (“Public-Private”). In response to this, organizations like the European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators have “decided on a limited number of cross-border issues, as well as provided opinions for cross-border matters and advised regulators” (“Cross Border”).

Oil is another resource that has been disputed across national borders, where “hydrocarbon deposit[s] may create complex legal issues if it underlies the territory of two different countries” (Weems). In response to these issues, “countries disputing such a boundary litigate the delimitation

of such boundary based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 (UNCLOS) in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (if such boundary is found offshore) and/or enter a joint development agreement...” (Weems). In Resolution 3129, the General Assembly declared that “it is necessary to ensure effective cooperation between states through the establishment of adequate international standards for the conservation and harmonious exploitation of natural resources common to two or more states...” (Weems).

In 2022, the United Nations reported that “more than 3 billion people depend on water that crosses national borders” (“Shared Management”). From rivers to lakes, water is essential to all life on earth, and it obeys no man-made laws. Some of the most famous issues surrounding the management of water across national borders includes the management of: the Nile Basin between Egypt and Ethiopia; the Euphrates-Tigris between Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq; the Helmand River between Afghanistan and Iran; and the use of the Tagus River between Portugal and Spain.

The United Nations estimates that a total of 153 countries currently share “transboundary rivers, lakes, and groundwater reserves that make up more than 60% of the world's freshwater flow” (“Shared Management”). In these countries with transboundary resources, political tensions have increased due to infrastructure expansion and usage of natural resources. The Nile Basin has particularly been a source of conflict, as Egypt’s main water resource, the Nile, could be depleted by the development of dams upstream in Ethiopia. In 1959, the Nile Water Agreement between Egypt and Sudan did not involve the input of Ethiopia, and subsequently increased Egypt's water allocation from “48 billion cubic meters to 55.5 billion cubic meters” (Kimenyi). However, in 2011, Ethiopia began construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which was estimated to generate 6000 megawatts of energy, leading to “devastating impacts downstream” (Polakovic). The circumstance of sharing the Nile is just one of many transboundary resources that

have led to conflict. In full acknowledgment of this, the United Nations urges nations to uphold the policies of the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The convention called for transboundary resources to be managed in a “collaborative and sustainable way, mitigating risks and preventing possible conflicts over a common resource” (“Shared Management”). As water scarcity and development of infrastructure continues, it is important that nations continue to work cooperatively with their neighbors to not only sustainably share water, but all natural resources.

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