

A New Security Agenda

Clean Energy, Nature Restoration, and Economic Security



ClientEarth[⊕]

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Introduction

This year's UN General Assembly comes at a time of increasingly sharp convergence between multilateral strain, climate and nature crises, and geopolitical insecurity, conflicts, and wars. The final year of António Guterres' ten-year tenure as UN Secretary-General coincides with a funding crisis at the UN, a gridlocked Security Council, and a persistent gap between the scale of climate and nature-related risks and the urgency and willingness of governments to act collectively at scale to solve them together. As the clock runs down on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across people, planet, and prosperity, collective action is more important than ever. Governments must move beyond political ambition and adopt, implement, and enforce legislative and regulatory frameworks that reduce fossil fuel dependence, protect and restore ecosystems, and direct public finance to long-term resilience. Legal clarity and certainty are security assets, and it is the power of the law that will support governments to deliver their new security agendas.

We have already breached seven of nine planetary boundaries, and the consequences of this breakdown are now becoming ever harder to ignore. Wildfires, extreme heat, droughts and flooding have moved from the fringes of political debate to its centre, with economic costs running into billions, and a human cost measured in thousands of lives lost. Fossil fuel dependence has exposed governments to volatile markets, supply shocks, and the whims of geopolitics. Ecosystem breakdown and the breaching of ecological tipping points are now being assessed by governments as a risk to food security, public health, economic resilience and social stability. This breakdown is contributing to multiple sources of security risks.

Energy security, nature security, climate security and economic security can no longer be treated as separate policy areas. A country that cannot protect the ecosystems, climate, and energy systems on which its people depend cannot guarantee affordable food, reliable power, stable public finances or resilience against external geopolitical shocks.

Governments must now integrate action on climate and nature into conditions of national security. Those states most exposed to fossil fuel imports, food and synthetic fertiliser imports, water stress, deteriorating ecosystems, fragile supply chains and the costs of disasters such as wildfires expose themselves to the consequences of delayed action.

Stable, enforceable legal frameworks provide the certainty needed for investment, resilience, and long-term security. Law provides a critical foundation in securing climate, energy and nature security, including at the international level. Through 2024 and 2025, multiple international and human rights courts confirmed the binding legal obligations on states to protect the climate and limit the impacts of climate change. **In May 2026, the UN General Assembly voted by 141 to 8 to operationalise the findings of the International Court of Justice and asked the UN Secretary General to report on how compliance can be advanced.** Our lack of preparedness and vulnerability to the changing climate and biodiversity loss is already being treated as a security risk by some intelligence agencies, banks, as well as defence and foreign ministries. As heads of state and governments from around the world will gather at the UN General Assembly, and for them to respond to these crises by acting on energy and nature security, we are calling them to consider the following priority policy asks:

3 Priority Policy Asks



Deliver a managed fossil fuel phase-out:

Governments should adopt binding legislative and regulatory measures on fossil fuel phase-out, subsidy reform, and no new extraction at COP31, building on the UAE Consensus from COP28, the Santa Marta process, and the UN General Assembly's resolution on the ICJ Advisory Opinion;



Treat ecosystem protection and restoration as security infrastructure:

Governments should enact and enforce the **conservation and the restoration** of biodiversity across all sectors and legal frameworks. They must adopt legally-binding and enforceable national restoration plans that **strengthen** ecosystems as critical infrastructure across food, water, public health, flood protection, climate stability, economic resilience and territorial security;



Align budgets and public finance with climate and nature security imperatives:

Governments should establish legal requirements for Treasuries to publish and act on comprehensive assessments on a fossil fuel dependency exit plan that identifies the true cost of fossil fuel dependence, and the cost of inaction, redirects public finance and subsidies with a fossil fuel phase-out, as well as establishing the legal, financing, and social protections needed to deliver a just transition for citizens, households, businesses, and communities. They should likewise publish and act on plans to eliminate all environmentally harmful subsidies, such as those that support overfishing or prevent the transition to agro-ecological farming.

Nature and Energy as a Security Imperative

The language of security and sovereignty now dominates political debate. This reality underscores, rather than displaces, the importance of taking action across climate and nature. Security is not ideological: it depends on the systems that sustain our societies, including affordable energy, reliable food, clean water, resilient ecosystems, functioning supply chains and public trust in the capacity of governments to protect citizens from foreseeable harms.

Energy security means ensuring sufficient, affordable, and reliable energy, whilst reducing exposure to the volatility of fossil fuel markets, geopolitical pressures, corporate coercion and conflict-prone supply chains. Nature security means safeguarding the ecosystems that provide essential stability: freshwater, fertile soils, pollination, fisheries, flood and storm protection, climate stability and healthy living conditions. If these systems breach tipping points and fail, security fails too. Delivering these requires regulatory action. Governments must align energy market rules, planning regimes, subsidy policies and nature protection and restoration with long-term security priorities.

Energy security is the ability of a country to meet its energy needs without being at the behest of volatile fossil fuel markets, geopolitical pressures, corporate coercion and war. Safeguarding energy security removes dependency on conflict-prone oil and gas markets, long-term reliance on and legal risk from stranded fossil fuel infrastructure, and exposure to supply chain disruption, price shocks and political pressure from exporting states. Reducing this exposure allows genuine energy security that will benefit citizens and businesses alike.

Security matters are reliant on the scientific reality of planetary boundaries. Of the nine boundaries that maintain a stable Earth system, seven have already been crossed: biosphere integrity, climate change, land system change, freshwater use, biogeochemical flows, novel entities, and ocean acidification. When these boundaries are breached, ecosystems can shift unpredictably and irreversibly, turning environmental degradation into an economic, social and geopolitical risk. Security consequences can be seen with crop failures, intensified disasters, water stress, displacement, supply-chain disruption, and spiralling fiscal pressure on governments and Treasuries.

Many of the factors driving critical ecosystem collapse and breakdown of the Earth's climate system transcend national borders. The impacts of worsening climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation are equally global. Yet their consequences manifest in unprecedented national crises with overwhelming local impacts, from droughts, to heatwaves, wildfires, flash floods, extreme weather events, crop failures, water shortages, and displacement.

Ecosystems do not degrade gradually but can change unpredictably and irreversibly after certain thresholds are crossed. The Amazon is assessed as likely to collapse when it reaches 20-25% deforestation when combined with the rise in temperature and fires. Deforestation there currently stands at 17%. Global wildlife populations have declined by an average of 73% since 1970, and freshwater species populations by 84% over the same period. Without urgent and decisive government intervention, the remaining tipping points for multiple critical Earth ecosystems will be crossed within a generation.

International law now strengthens this security imperative. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Court of Justice, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights have clarified that states have binding obligations to prevent climate harm and protect people from foreseeable risks. The UN General Assembly's 2026 resolution following the ICJ Advisory Opinion confirms that climate action is not only a political choice, but also a legal duty, requiring implementation through national laws, budgets, and policy frameworks. The central challenge is no longer establishing obligations, but implementing them through laws. Governments must now translate international legal duties into domestic legislation, including regulatory reform, enforcement, and public investment decisions.

The 2026 European heat, drought, and wildfire season shows how these risks combine when tipping points are starting to be reached. Extreme heat and drought drove fires, reduced harvests, increased health risks and preventable deaths, strained electricity systems, and raised public costs. This regional crisis exposed how fragile societies become when climate vulnerability, ecosystem degradation, and insufficient adaptation converge.

- ⊕ Almost half a million hectares burned in two months;
- ⊕ An economic cost of €3.5bn to the five worst-hit eurozone countries alone (outstripping the €2.5bn estimated by the European Commission for the entire EU)¹;
- ⊕ Europe recorded approximately 10,000 excess deaths during one heatwave in late-June alone²;
- ⊕ Western Europe has experienced its hottest June and July on record, and global average sea surface temperatures outside the polar regions were the highest on record for July³;
- ⊕ EU and UK grain output is forecast to be around 20 million tonnes below 2025⁴.

Global risks and national exposure

The most consequential environmental risks are often viewed as long-term threats, as recognised by the World Economic Forum's 2026 Global Risks Report⁵. Geopolitical confrontation, misinformation, and societal polarisation are dominating short-term policymaker agendas. However, climate and ecosystem instability are driving underlying factors of that insecurity by amplifying competition over resources, raising living costs, disrupting supply chains, and weakening trusts in institutions.

The globalised economy has concentrated vulnerabilities and dependencies. Countries that import significant percentages of their energy, food, fertiliser, and strategic materials rely on stable production, transport routes, and ecosystems far beyond their own borders. A drought in one particular region, conflict in a maritime chokepoint, or a collapse in an ecosystem can have a significant impact across prices, trade balances, and public finances. Resilience will require collective, international co-operation in existing fora, and a deliberate reduction in remaining vulnerable to dependencies.

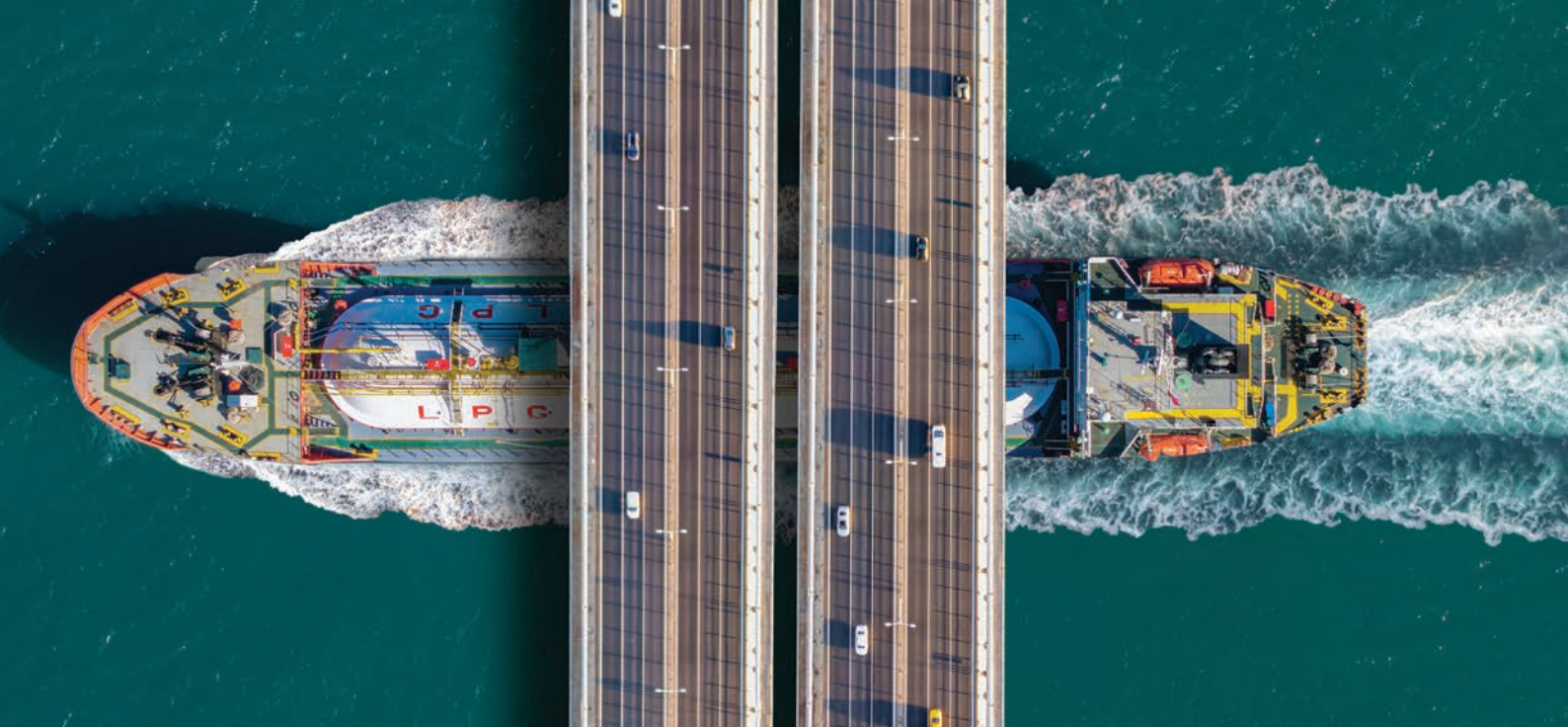
¹ [European wildfire costs this year have already surpassed €3bn](#)

² [Europe recorded 10,000 excess deaths during late-June heatwave, data show | Reuters](#)

³ [Copernicus: Highest July global ocean surface temperatures as exceptionally hot, dry conditions fuel wildfires in Europe | Copernicus](#)

⁴ [COCERAL Crop Forecast | July 2026](#)

⁵ [The Global Risks Report 2026 | World Economic Forum](#)



CHAPTER 2

Energy Security

POLICY ASK

Deliver a managed fossil fuel phase-out: Governments should adopt binding legislative and regulatory measures on fossil fuel phase-out, subsidy reform, and no new extraction at COP31, building on the UAE Consensus from COP28, the Santa Marta process, and the UN General Assembly's resolution on the ICJ Advisory Opinion.

Fossil fuel markets are volatile, politicised, and conflict-prone. Dependence on oil and gas exposes households, businesses, and public budgets to shocks beyond what national governments can fully control. Recent conflicts and disruption to maritime trade have demonstrated how quickly energy insecurity cascades into global food systems, industrial costs, inflation and the public purse. New fossil fuel extraction does not solve this vulnerability: it risks locking economies and taxpayers into infrastructure that is slow to build, increasingly exposed to legal challenges, and inconsistent with the direction needed for international climate obligations. Governments should review existing planning, licensing, and permitting frameworks to ensure they are aligned with climate obligations, energy security objectives, and the long-term public interest. Regulatory frameworks that continue to incentivise fossil fuel expansion risk deepening dependence, as well as increasing future legal and economic liabilities.

Energy security means avoiding ever-deeper fossil fuel dependence, instead accelerating a faster, fairer and better-governed transition. Governments should set out regulatory frameworks that also prioritise renewables, energy efficiency, demand reduction, electrification, storage, clean flexibility, and modern grids which can reduce exposure to volatile fossil markets, whilst also lowering costs and emissions. Establishing laws that support the expansion of energy communities and localised energy systems can also reduce dependence on a small number of actors and strengthen public consent by giving citizens a direct stake in the transition.

Fossil fuel dependence as a structural vulnerability

A significant majority of the world's population lives in countries that rely on importing fossil fuels. Exposure is not dependent on the country supplying a particular importer: all buyers are connected to global market fluctuations, and importing countries are exposed to concentrated infrastructure, strategic chokepoints, producer decisions and regional conflict. Diversifying suppliers does not eliminate the volatility inherently embedded in the fossil fuel market.

New oil and gas development is often touted as an insurance policy. Yet it takes many years to produce, commits significant capital for decades, and risks arriving after demand and regulatory conditions have shifted as the transition to clean energy continues at pace. **Governments investing in efficiency, renewable power, grids and electrification can accelerate their exposure reduction, lowering climate-changing emissions and improving air quality.**

A secure transition must also address demand. The global economy is moving into the era of electricity, driven by industrial electrification, air conditioning, the roll out of electric vehicles, and the expansion of data centres and digital infrastructure. Without focused policies, this could reproduce old vulnerabilities and choke points in new forms, including grid constraints, water pressure, critical mineral bottlenecks, land-use conflict and extractive supply chains that harm people and planet. **Energy security therefore requires clean supply, but also legal frameworks that reduce and smarten demand.**

Insulation, heat pumps, rooftop solar, efficient products, public and active transport, flexible demand and building renovations all reduce the amount of energy needed. Energy efficiency and sufficiency measures permanently lower exposure to the volatility of fuel prices and directly reduce household bills, energy poverty and industrial vulnerability.

Energy communities are an additional layer of resilience. By helping people, municipalities and local businesses participate directly in renewable energy production, storage and sharing, energy communities reduce dependence on centralised market actors.

Critical minerals require a security-conscious approach. Lithium, nickel, cobalt, copper and other materials are needed for clean technologies, but the extraction and processing can risk creating environmental degradation, human rights harms, and the creation of new geopolitical dependencies. Efforts to increase circularity, repair, reuse, and material efficiency can reduce demand for extraction. Establishing mandatory due diligence and disclosure should ensure that the transition does not create new risk for affected communities, Indigenous peoples, workers and ecosystems.

States have a legal duty to protect people and planet from foreseeable climate harm. This means public authorities must not exacerbate fossil fuel dependency where cleaner, safer, and more resilient alternatives are available. New fossil fuel planning approvals and subsidy reform may increase legal risk where they delay emissions reduction, lock in foreseeable harm, and divert public finance away from proven solutions.



CHAPTER 3

Nature security

POLICY ASK

Treat ecosystem protection and restoration as security infrastructure: Governments should enact and enforce the **conservation and the restoration** of biodiversity across all sectors and legal frameworks. They must adopt legally-binding and enforceable national restoration plans that **strengthen** ecosystems as critical infrastructure across food, water, public health, flood protection, climate stability, economic resilience and territorial security.

According to the IPBES Transformative Change Assessment (2024)⁶, the continued decline of biodiversity and the potential collapse of key ecosystem functions constitute a systemic risk to human well-being and societal stability, reinforcing concerns increasingly raised by security experts that environmental degradation can act as a threat multiplier, aggravating resource competition, fragility and instability.

The United Kingdom's 2026 redacted national security assessment is a useful example in translating biodiversity loss into the language of national resilience. Its key conclusion is that global ecosystem degradation and collapse threaten national security and prosperity, with cascading risks including food insecurity, water stress, infectious disease, geopolitical instability, conflict, migration, and competition for resources. The UK is not unique in facing these risks: all import-dependent economies are structurally exposed to ecosystem risks well beyond their own borders.

⁶ [Transformative Change Assessment | IPBES ICT guide](#)

The assessment should be read as a warning to any government whose food, fertiliser, water, health or commodities are dependent on stable ecosystems beyond their own borders. If critical ecosystems such as rainforests, coral reefs, mangroves, boreal forests and mountain water systems degrade or collapse, the consequences are not confined to environmental policy or national borders. These can lead to lower crop yields, fisheries collapse, water insecurity, inflation, displacement, and increased geopolitical pressure for resource competition.

Nature security also has a financial dimension. Economies and financial systems are embedded within, and ultimately dependent on, functioning ecosystems and a stable natural environment. Ecosystems support economic activities, and as central banks and financial supervisors increasingly recognise nature-related financial risk, governments should treat the protection of nature not as a discretionary environmental spend, but as a prerequisite for competitiveness, fiscal stability, and strategic autonomy.

Nature security ultimately depends on legal protections. Ecosystems remain vulnerable when environmental laws are weak, poorly enforced, or overridden by short-term economic interests. In many jurisdictions, the challenge is not the absence of environmental and nature protection laws, but the weak implementation and enforcement of existing laws. Governments must strengthen existing laws, including measures that strengthen compliance, effective enforcement, and establish clear accountability mechanisms for the protection and restoration of national ecosystems.

The UK security assessment deep dive

The assessment identified several global ecosystems on which wider national security depends, including the Amazon and Congo rainforests, boreal forests, the Himalayas, and South-East Asian coral reefs and mangroves. Their degradation can affect rainfall, water availability, arable land and crop yields, fisheries, disease and infection, and carbon storage. Although these are global ecosystems, their loss and degradation are affecting national finances through inflation, lower productivity, health impacts, migration pressures, and emergency disaster response spending.

The implications for food security are particularly important. Countries with productive domestic agriculture systems still depend on imported feed, fertiliser, fisheries, and stable weather systems. If the collapse of global ecosystems leads to increased competition for food, governments will face shortages and price shocks at the same time as domestic yields are affected by heat, drought, and flooding. Securing resilience therefore requires attention and investment across diversified supply chains, healthier soils, restored watersheds, reduced waste and agricultural policies that are supported by healthy natural systems.

Repeated shocks can impact inequality and create fertile conditions for polarisation, disinformation, and community social fracture. Protecting and restoring ecosystems through robust legal frameworks reduces the probability and severity of future crises.

Case Study: Poland's Green East Shield

Poland's Green East Shield shows how nature restoration can become part of national resilience planning, and how a legal mandate, long-term planning frameworks, and public accountability can embed ecosystem restoration into domestic security policy. The programme links defence planning for NATO's eastern flank with a tapestry of restored wetlands, peatlands, forests, rivers, and floodplains. These landscapes can contribute to slowing movement of hard weapons, channel access routes, retain water, reduce flood risk, store carbon, and increase biodiversity.

Restored ecosystems can deliver multiple public goods, including territorial resilience, climate adaptation, water security and biodiversity recovery. They can also lower long-term infrastructure costs. National restoration plans underpinned by legal accountability and regular reviews can be co-ordinated with adaptation and regional development and security planning. This would support improved transparency and accountability rather than separate policy siloes.

Poland's Green East Shield is significant because its interventions are practical solutions that can be applied in other jurisdictions. Restoring peatlands and floodplains, stopping drainage, retaining natural river features and reducing clear-cutting can make landscapes more resilient without relying on new hardware construction. During peace, this investment can retain water, reduce flood and fire risk, support biodiversity and agriculture and store carbon. During a potential crisis, the terrain can also serve to support territorial resilience.

By involving local governments, scientists, and affected communities in security objectives, ecological integrity can support national security. Treating forests, wetlands, peatlands and river systems as cross-border resilience infrastructure is a lesson for governments. Complementing engineered defence systems and protection of citizens, this investment could align nature restoration funding with regional development and benefit local communities and wider national governments.



Budgets for energy and nature security

POLICY ASK

Align budgets and public finance with climate and nature security imperatives:

Governments should establish legal requirements for Treasuries to publish and act on comprehensive assessments on a fossil fuel dependency exit plan that identifies the true cost of fossil fuel dependence, and the cost of inaction, redirects public finance and subsidies with a fossil fuel phase-out, as well as establishing the legal, financing, and social protections needed to deliver a just transition for citizens, households, businesses, and communities. They should likewise publish and act on plans to eliminate all environmentally harmful subsidies, such as those that support overfishing or prevent the transition to agro-ecological farming.

Public budgets are security instruments. They determine whether societies deepen dependence and exposure to volatile fossil markets, degrade ecosystems and emergency disaster response costs, or invest in resilience before crises emerge. Transparency and disclosure requirements would also enable taxpayers and investors to scrutinise whether public spending is supporting or undermining climate and nature action.

Fossil fuel subsidies and nature-harming incentives conceal the true cost of dependency and direct public money towards energy systems that increase long-term risk. **The economic case for action is compelling: the world is already estimated to be losing between €3.5 and €18.5 trillion annually in ecosystem services, while land degradation alone generates losses estimated at €5.5 to €10.5 trillion per year⁷.** Protecting and restoring nature is therefore not merely an environmental objective but a prerequisite for economic resilience, competitiveness and strategic autonomy. Redirecting public finance towards energy efficiency and sufficiency, clean power, ecosystem restoration, resilient food systems and community-level transition measures would strengthen climate delivery, nature protection and national security.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework also requires countries to identify and eliminate, phase-out or reform incentives harmful to biodiversity, reducing them by at least \$500bn per year by 2030. In Europe, the Eighth Environmental Action Programme similarly calls for the phase-out of environmentally harmful subsidies, including fossil fuel subsidies. These commitments should be operationalised through legislation, fiscal governance rules, and public finance regulations that require all public finance to support, or at minimum not to undermine, climate and nature security. These legal frameworks should support transparency, accountability, and the regular review of environmentally harmful expenditures.

⁷ [factsheet-business-case-biodiversity_en.pdf.pdf](#)

Credible budgets should therefore ask:

- ⊕ Does spending reduce fossil fuel dependence and exposure to market shocks?
- ⊕ Does this protect or restore the ecosystems on which food, water, health and resilience depend?
- ⊕ Does this support those citizens and communities most affected by the transition, including farmers, fishers and other workers?

Treasuries should assess dependency, not just emissions. Fiscal risk statements should identify exposure to imported fossil fuels, degraded ecosystems, food and fertiliser imports, water stress, disaster liabilities and vulnerabilities through supply chains.

Governments should reform incentives and subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity. Greater transparency would allow these to be assessed against climate and nature commitments and phased out with protection for vulnerable households and support for businesses that can transition.

Conclusion

The security case for action across climate and nature is now clear. International courts have clarified legal obligations. Scientists have identified the instability that comes from breaching planetary boundaries, and the trajectory we are collectively on. Governments are increasingly beginning to recognise nature loss and fossil fuel dependency as strategic risks. The remaining gap is implementation. Governments must translate the legal obligations, science, and security risks into domestic legislation, regulatory reform, and public finance decisions. Laws must respond to the existing climate and nature crises, but also prevent the risk of future escalations should we exceed global tipping points.

Security agendas that ignore climate and nature risks can increasingly be considered incomplete, and energy strategies that do not include affordability, or continue to subsidise fossil fuel dependence and ecosystem destruction are directly financing wider insecurities. Security agendas must incorporate these, and protect them through enforceable legal frameworks.

Governments should treat the phase-out of fossil fuels, and investment in renewable energy, efficiency and sufficiency, ecosystem protection and restoration, as well as public finance reform as core security measures. Acting now through the establishment of adequate legal protections will allow governments to be better placed to protect their economies and citizens from shocks, reduce legal and financial risk and build a more resilient future economy.

A New Security Agenda

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and Economic Security

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