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## The Role of International Law in the Settlement of Environmental Disputes Between Countries

**Zulkarnain Kesi, Ariandi Awaluddin**

**Muhammadiyah University of Kupang, Artha Wacana Christian University Kupang**

**Email: zulkarnainkesi12@gmail.com**

**Abstract:** The resolution of transnational environmental disputes has become a global challenge that requires an effective international legal approach. Globalization and cross-border human activities have intensified environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and deforestation, which demand shared responsibility. International law plays a role in regulating dispute resolution mechanisms, including through international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. However, the implementation and enforcement of international law face various challenges, such as state non-compliance and differing political interests. This study analyzes international legal instruments and available dispute resolution mechanisms with the aim of providing insights into the effectiveness of international law in addressing global environmental problems. The study emphasizes the need for closer international cooperation and stronger legal mechanisms to ensure environmental sustainability and justice for affected countries.

**Keywords:** International Law, Environmental Disputes, Dispute Resolution, International Agreements, Environmental Sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

The increase in globalization and interconnection among countries over the past few decades has had a significant impact on various aspects of human life, one of which is environmental issues. The globalization process, involving the growth of international trade, the flow of information, as well as the movement of people and goods, has triggered various transboundary environmental problems (Widianti, 2022). The negative impacts caused, such as air and water pollution, climate change, deforestation, and the reduction of biodiversity, are not limited to a single country but can spread to other nations, even creating broader and more complex environmental crises. Such environmental problems increasingly demand serious attention from the international community because the effects of the damage are transnational and do not recognize the geographical boundaries of any country.

Climate change caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions is a concrete example of an environmental issue that requires international cooperation. Global warming, resulting from air pollution generated by industrial activities, transportation, and fossil fuel combustion, is not only felt by major countries that are the primary contributors to greenhouse gas emissions but also affects developing countries that have not significantly contributed to the problem. Similarly, deforestation occurring in several tropical countries impacts the balance of global ecosystems, which in turn may contribute to climate change and reduce biodiversity that is crucial for the survival of living beings worldwide. Therefore, these transboundary environmental problems require solutions involving closer international cooperation.

To address these environmental issues, international law, particularly international environmental law, plays a very important role. International law has developed to regulate relations between countries in the context of protecting and managing natural resources that are global in nature, including both renewable and non-renewable resources (Raseuki, 2022). One of the most well-known international legal instruments is the Kyoto Protocol, which aims to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, and the Paris Agreement, which further strengthens countries' commitments to combating climate change (Mubila et al., 2024). In addition, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea also serves as an important example of international regulation focused on the protection of the seas and their ecosystems, involving countries with access to maritime areas (Hadju, 2021).

However, despite the existence of various international agreements and conventions aimed at resolving environmental disputes between countries, the implementation and enforcement of the law in practice still face many challenges (Darajati, 2020). Many countries involved in environmental disputes often lack a mutual understanding regarding their responsibilities for the environmental impacts caused by their activities. In some cases, major countries with economic and political power often fail to comply with international agreements or even withdraw from agreed treaties, resulting in stagnation in efforts to resolve environmental disputes. Moreover, existing dispute resolution mechanisms, such as international courts or mediation, are often less effective due to the lack of consensus among disputing countries or political obstacles affecting decisions.

Environmental disputes between countries frequently arise from disagreements over each country's responsibility for the damage caused. For example, in cross-border pollution caused by industrial activities or fossil fuel combustion, affected countries often feel harmed by the activities of other countries that are not accountable for the impacts. Similarly, the exploitation of natural resources that harms neighboring countries, such as mining causing environmental damage in border areas or destruction of natural habitats threatening the survival of protected species, also leads to disputes. In this context, international law is expected to provide a clear legal basis for countries to be held accountable for their actions and to offer fair mechanisms for resolving such disputes.

This study aims to explore the role of international law in resolving environmental disputes between countries by analyzing existing international legal instruments, such as conventions and international agreements regulating environmental protection, as well as the dispute resolution mechanisms available under international law. This study will also examine the challenges faced in implementing international law in the context of environmental disputes, including issues of non-compliance by countries with international agreements, disagreements over the allocation of responsibility, and difficulties in enforcing laws at the global level. Furthermore, the study will discuss potential solutions to enhance the effectiveness of international law in resolving environmental disputes and ensuring that countries are held accountable for the environmental impacts caused by their activities.

Through this study, it is hoped that new insights can be gained regarding the importance of stronger international cooperation and the strengthening of the international legal system in preserving global environmental sustainability, as well as creating more effective mechanisms for handling transboundary environmental disputes. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to efforts in creating a safer and more sustainable world for future generations.

## METHODS

The research method used in this study is qualitative with a library research approach. This study aims to analyze the role of international law in resolving transboundary environmental disputes, focusing on existing legal instruments, dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as challenges and solutions encountered in their implementation. The primary data sources are international legal documents, international agreements and conventions, decisions of international courts, and academic literature related to international environmental law. Data collection was carried out by tracing and analyzing books, scientific journal articles, reports from international organizations, and relevant legislation that provide insight into how international law addresses transboundary environmental disputes. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and content analysis techniques to identify the role of international law, dispute resolution

mechanisms, and challenges in the application of international law within the context of environmental disputes. Theories of international law and dispute resolution will be used to provide a theoretical framework for analyzing the obtained data. The results of this analysis will be compiled into conclusions that summarize the main findings, as well as recommendations regarding steps that can be taken to improve the effectiveness of international law in handling transboundary environmental disputes. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to strengthening the role of international law in protecting the environment and resolving disputes between countries in a fair and effective manner.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature study conducted on several articles, the role of international law in resolving transboundary environmental disputes can be seen through various mechanisms and principles regulated within international law. International environmental disputes often involve more complex issues, such as border problems, environmental damage, and exploitation of natural resources that cross national boundaries (Rustam, 2020). These problems frequently arise when the activities of a country—whether industrial, developmental, or natural resource management—cause negative impacts detrimental to other countries or the global environment as a whole. In this regard, international law plays a crucial role in regulating the obligations of states to protect and preserve the environment and to be accountable for the environmental impacts caused by their activities, both at regional and international levels. One of the most tangible examples is the resolution of disputes related to marine pollution or damage to marine ecosystems caused by activities such as drilling, mining, or pollution crossing national borders.

International law provides mechanisms to resolve transboundary environmental disputes based on globally accepted principles (Nasser, 2018). Some fundamental principles underpinning the settlement of international disputes include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and adjudication through international courts (Dewi, 2022). The main principle in international law is the peaceful resolution of disputes, as regulated in the United Nations Charter (Amadea, Resnawati, & Sitamala, 2022). Article 2, paragraph 3 of the UN Charter requires states to settle their disputes by means that do not endanger international peace and security. This concept emphasizes the importance of diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes without resorting to violence or aggressive actions. Therefore, states are obligated to first undertake negotiations, mediation, or other peaceful means in resolving any conflicts.

A highly relevant example in the context of environmental disputes is the marine pollution case caused by the Montara oil well leakage that occurred in the Timor Sea in 2009. The leak at the Montara oil field, located within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) shared by Indonesia, Australia, and Timor Leste, resulted in widespread oil spills that polluted the Timor Sea waters. In this case, international law played a very important role in establishing the responsibility of the liable state, namely Australia, to address the environmental damage caused. Under the provisions of UNCLOS 1982 (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), Australia, as the country that authorized PTTEP to conduct oil drilling activities in the area, is required to carry out environmental restoration and provide compensation to the affected countries, especially Indonesia, whose EEZ was contaminated. This demonstrates that a state responsible for environmentally damaging activities must bear the consequences and undertake remediation in accordance with applicable international standards.

Moreover, international institutions such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations (UN) also play crucial roles in facilitating the resolution of transboundary environmental disputes (Drajat, 2019). The UN, as the main international organization tasked with maintaining international peace and security, through its bodies like the Security Council and the International Law Commission (ILC), has the obligation to monitor and provide recommendations regarding dispute resolution. The UN also serves as a platform for member states to engage in dialogue and seek solutions to environmental disputes they face, with the aim of protecting global environmental interests and preventing harmful impacts on the international community. Additionally, the UN has various mechanisms to support environmental dispute

resolution, such as deploying peacekeeping missions or special operations in areas affected by environmental conflicts.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), as the primary judicial body of the UN, holds authority to resolve legal disputes between states concerning environmental damage, including disputes involving pollution or the management of natural resources crossing borders. The ICJ provides a neutral legal forum for states to bring their international law-related issues and obtain binding decisions. In many cases, the rulings issued by the ICJ not only provide solutions to the disputing states but also help clarify international legal principles that can be applied in similar future cases.

Regarding environmental dispute resolution, international law not only offers formal mechanisms through courts or arbitration but also establishes principles that serve as a foundation to prevent future disputes. Principles such as the "polluter pays principle" and the "precautionary principle" are essential foundations in shaping international environmental policies. States involved in environmental disputes are expected to consider these principles in their efforts to resolve conflicts and prevent further damage.

Overall, the role of international law in resolving transboundary environmental disputes is crucial for maintaining the sustainability of the global ecosystem and ensuring states are held accountable for environmental impacts resulting from their activities. International institutions such as the UN, ICJ, and regional bodies act not only as mediators but also as protectors of the common interests of humanity in preserving a healthy and sustainable environment. Therefore, the resolution of environmental disputes involving states must always prioritize international legal principles aimed at protecting the global environment and ensuring shared welfare in the future.

## CONCLUSION

International law plays a very important role in the resolution of transboundary environmental disputes, which have become increasingly critical issues in this era of globalization. Environmental problems that cross national borders, such as air pollution, climate change, deforestation, and damage to marine ecosystems, require closer international cooperation to address their global impacts. International law, particularly international environmental law, serves as an instrument to regulate the obligations of states in protecting and preserving the environment, as well as holding them accountable for damage caused by their activities. Applicable principles of international law, such as peaceful dispute resolution, play a central role in creating fair and effective settlement mechanisms.

Several international legal instruments, such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), have established legal frameworks that regulate the management of natural resources and the protection of the global environment. However, the implementation of international law in the context of environmental dispute resolution often faces major challenges, including state non-compliance with international agreements and conflicting interests among disputing countries. Major powers with dominant political and economic influence often withdraw from or fail to comply with agreed treaties, which hinders efforts to resolve environmental disputes effectively.

The case of marine pollution caused by the Montara oil spill in the Timor Sea demonstrates the importance of international law in establishing the responsibilities of states liable for environmental damage. In this case, Australia, as a state obligated under UNCLOS 1982, is required to carry out environmental restoration and provide compensation to affected countries. This reflects the significant role of international law in regulating state responsibility in transboundary environmental matters.

International institutions such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations (UN) also have strategic roles in facilitating the resolution of environmental disputes between states. The UN, through its various mechanisms, assists disputing countries in dialogue and seeking solutions to their environmental issues. The ICJ, as the UN's principal judicial body, provides a platform for states to bring their environmental disputes into the realm of international law and obtain binding decisions.

Principles such as the "polluter pays principle" and the "precautionary principle" form important foundations in the formulation of international policies aimed at preventing future environmental disputes. Therefore, states involved in environmental disputes must consider these principles to ensure that dispute resolution is conducted fairly and does not disadvantage affected parties.

Overall, the resolution of transboundary environmental disputes requires solid international cooperation and more effective international legal mechanisms. International institutions and principles of international law act as guardians of global environmental interests, which in turn support the creation of a safer and more sustainable world for future generations. Therefore, it is important for states to comply more fully with international law and commit to preserving the environment for the well-being of humanity globally.

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