

Joint efforts needed on climate change

INTERNATIONAL law needed to take into account environmental degradation and the conflicts arising over natural resources, delegates at a seminar on environmental security and law heard yesterday

JOCELYN NEWMARCH

Published: 2010/11/11 06:33:28 AM

INTERNATIONAL law needed to take into account environmental degradation and the conflicts arising over natural resources, delegates at a seminar on environmental security and law heard yesterday.

Africa is already experiencing conflict over scarce environmental resources, including the Nile river and fertile pastures in Darfur, Sudan.

Hosted by the South African Institute of International Affairs, the seminar was organised by North West University.

Traditional security analyses only considered warring states, but the underlying sources of insecurity often included unsustainable development, said Prof Werner Scholtz of North West University.

Prof Scholtz said international law had to take cognisance of environmental security and its implications for governance.

He said environmental problems frequently crossed political borders, so states would have to co-operate to solve problems — with climate change being the most obvious international example, but not the only one.

Donald Mwiturubani, a researcher with the Institute of Security Studies in Nairobi, said East Africa was already experiencing conflict related to environmental degradation.

Egypt and Sudan, he said, which are almost totally dependent on the Nile for their water supply, had threatened to go to war with upstream users Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda over the amount of water in the river.

Mr Mwiturubani said existing agreements regarding the Nile were made before independence and therefore were not recognised by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. But the root of the problem was that the source of the Nile was becoming degraded, meaning less water was available.

Climate change was the ultimate cross-cutting issue, said Andrew Gilder, director of Imbewu Sustainability Legal Specialists.

Mr Gilder said the nature of climate change raised interesting political implications. For example, the southeastern border of the US was demarcated by Florida's Everglades.

If the Everglades were to disappear beneath rising sea levels, the US border could be redrawn, allowing Cuba to take control of the Gulf of Mexico.

Certain low-lying island states, such as Tuvalu, could cease to exist because of rising sea levels, but it was not clear what would happen to their exclusive economic marine zones.

newmarchj@bdfm.co.za