

From traceability to international security

Why natural resources have become a global governance issue



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Long version

1. July 22, 2026: a paradigm shift

A session extending beyond the Democratic Republic of the Congo — On July 22, 2026, the United Nations Security Council dedicated its monthly session to the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. At first glance, the agenda appeared to focus on a regional conflict characterized by the illicit exploitation of natural resources. Yet, beneath these headlines, a much deeper shift was taking shape. For the first time, the issue of traceability was no longer treated merely as a commercial or customs requirement. It had emerged as a component of international security, the governance of strategic resources, and trust among states, financial institutions, and markets. This evolution extends far beyond the Congolese case alone: it signals the emergence of a new international framework in which the ability to produce reliable evidence becomes an instrument of stability, sovereignty, and peace.

Natural resources at the heart of peace issues — Long viewed simply as sources of economic wealth, natural resources are now recognized as factors capable of either fueling or defusing conflicts. When they slip beyond public control, they finance illicit networks, weaken institutions, and sustain cycles of violence. Conversely, when identified, documented, and integrated into a verifiable chain of trust, they can serve as instruments of stabilization. Peace, therefore, no longer depends solely on territorial control, but also on the ability to govern resource flows, establish their origins, and secure their movement to market.

When traceability becomes a security tool — This shift marks a profound change in how natural resource security is approached. For a long time, such security relied primarily on monitoring extraction sites, securing transport routes, and controlling borders. The ability to establish a continuous, verifiable, and legally robust chain of evidence is now becoming a strategic issue in its own right. A resource whose origin, successive transformations, and transfers of responsibility can be demonstrated inspires greater confidence among public authorities, investors, financial institutions, and international partners. Traceability thus ceases to be merely a logistical or commercial tool, becoming instead a genuine instrument of governance, a means of preventing illicit flows, and a component of collective security.

From commercial compliance to international governance — For several decades, traceability systems primarily served commercial compliance objectives. They were designed to meet the requirements of customs regulations, certification mechanisms, due diligence procedures, or standards imposed by specific markets. The evolution observed in 2026 marks a shift in scale. Traceability is no longer intended solely to secure a transaction or demonstrate product compliance; it now plays a role in the international governance of natural resources. The information accompanying a resource throughout its lifecycle becomes a source of trust that can be leveraged by states, international organizations, financial institutions, and economic actors. The documentary chain thus acquires a strategic dimension that extends far beyond mere commercial exchange.

2. An evolution years in the making

Initial feasibility work — The paradigm shift observed in 2026 did not stem from an isolated decision. It was part of a deliberative process initiated years earlier regarding the limitations of traditional natural resource traceability systems. Early feasibility studies gradually revealed that a mere succession of certificates or ad hoc checks was no longer sufficient to meet the growing demands of states, financial institutions, and international markets. These studies prompted consideration of a more holistic approach based on documentary continuity, the identification of stakeholders, the generation of verifiable evidence, and the ability to reconstruct a resource's entire journey. This evolution paved the way for the emergence of a genuine digital governance of trust, designed to extend well beyond the scope of commercial compliance.

Viewing the resource as a system — Initial feasibility work gradually shifted perspectives on natural resources. They were no longer viewed merely as raw materials to be extracted, transported, and sold, but as complex systems involving a multitude of stakeholders, processes, and responsibilities. Every stage—from extraction permits to industrial processing, from transport and regulatory checks to final sale—generates information that helps establish the credibility of the entire process. Consequently, a resource's value no longer depends solely on its physical characteristics or market price; it also rests on the quality of the evidence accompanying its lifecycle. This systemic approach paves the way for governance based on documentary continuity rather than a series of independent checks.

The "solution country" and digital governance — This line of thinking gradually led to a shift in how producer nations are perceived on the international stage. Long viewed primarily through the lens of risks associated with conflict, corruption, or illicit trafficking, these nations can now become drivers of trust by implementing digital governance infrastructures. The ability to document the origin of resources, ensure a continuous chain of evidence, and guarantee operational transparency is becoming a factor in institutional credibility. In this context, the "solution country" is no longer defined solely by its abundance of natural resources, but by its capacity to organize their governance according to recognized standards, thereby creating an environment conducive to peace, investment, and sustainable development.

From forests to minerals — Initial thinking on digital governance is not limited to the mining sector. It is becoming increasingly clear that the same requirements for traceability, transparency, and the generation of evidence apply to all strategic natural resources. Whether dealing with minerals, forest resources, carbon credits, or environmental assets more broadly, states face a common challenge: guaranteeing the origin of resources, documenting their lifecycles, and strengthening the trust of national and international partners. This convergence marks the emergence of a cross-cutting approach to governance, in which the "chain of trust" becomes a shared infrastructure—one that can be adapted to different sectors while meeting the same standards of credibility, compliance, and sovereignty.

3. From traceability to value creation

The limitations of product-centric traceability — Traditional traceability systems were long designed to track the physical movement of a product throughout the supply chain. While this approach effectively meets flow management and trade compliance needs, it quickly reaches its limits when issues involve resource origins, stakeholder accountability, or the prevention of illicit trade. Merely tracking an ore is insufficient to demonstrate that it was extracted, processed, and marketed in accordance with recognized standards. Trust does not stem solely from knowing a resource's location; it relies on the ability to establish consistent, verifiable, and interconnected evidence for every stage of its lifecycle. This evolution paves the way for a new concept of value creation.

Identification is no longer enough — Identifying a resource is a necessary condition, but it is no longer sufficient to establish trust. A batch number, a certificate of origin, or a digital identifier allows one resource to be distinguished from another, yet fails to demonstrate the legitimacy of its journey. True credibility stems from the ability to continuously document all operations affecting the resource: the stakeholders involved, checks performed, successive transformations, transfers of responsibility, and regulatory approvals. Identification thus becomes the starting point for a much broader documentation process, in which every event generates evidence that contributes to a unique digital record. Trust, therefore, arises not from identity alone, but from the coherence of the body of evidence associated with it.

The documentation chain as public infrastructure — Evolving governance requirements are leading to the recognition that the documentation chain is far more than a mere traceability tool. By organizing the production, preservation, and verification of evidence throughout a resource's lifecycle, it becomes a trust infrastructure that can be leveraged by all stakeholders. Government agencies, regulatory bodies, financial institutions, economic operators, and international partners can thus rely on a common documentary framework based on consistent, verifiable, and legally binding information. The documentary chain ceases to be merely a tool specific to a single company or sector; instead, it becomes an integral part of public governance itself, enhancing transparency, legal certainty, and the credibility of natural resource management policies.

Moving from evidence to governance — The evolution seen in recent years reveals an even deeper transformation. The evidence generated throughout the natural resource lifecycle no longer serves solely to demonstrate operational compliance or meet audit requirements. When aggregated within a continuous documentary chain, this evidence becomes a decision-making tool for public authorities, a source of confidence for economic partners, and an instrument of cooperation for international organizations. Governance is thus no longer based exclusively on declarations, spot checks, or isolated certifications; it relies on the ability to generate, share, and verify evidence throughout the resource's journey. The chain of trust thus emerges as the foundation for a new model of digital governance for natural resources—one that reconciles state sovereignty, market transparency, and secure trade.

4. A new responsibility

The true significance of the New York announcement — The scope of the July 22, 2026 session extends beyond merely addressing a regional crisis. It reflects the growing recognition of a principle destined to shape the long-term governance of natural resources: the stability of states now depends as much on their ability to manage evidence as on their ability to administer territory. In this context, trust no longer rests solely on political commitments or ex post oversight mechanisms; it relies on systems capable of establishing, preserving, and verifying the origin of resources and the successive responsibilities marking their lifecycle. The New York announcement thus marks not so much the culmination of a deliberative process as the beginning of a new phase, in which digital governance is gradually becoming a fundamental component of international security.

A new phase for producer states — This evolution ushers in a new stage regarding the responsibilities of states that produce natural resources. Their role is no longer limited to issuing extraction permits, collecting royalties, or monitoring physical flows. They are now called upon to foster trust by implementing systems that guarantee actor identification, documentary continuity, evidence verification, and operational transparency. This new responsibility goes beyond mere compliance; it serves as a lever for sovereignty, economic appeal, and international credibility. In an environment where trust is becoming a strategic resource, a state's ability to govern the evidence accompanying its natural wealth emerges as a key condition for fully realizing the value of those resources.