



Security Council

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Letter dated 24 August 2020 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the ministerial-level open debate of the Security Council on the theme "Climate and security", held on 24 July 2020, under the presidency of Germany.

In this regard, Germany has prepared the attached Chair's summary of the debate (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and Chair's summary would be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Günter **Sautter**
Chargé d'affaires



Annex to the letter dated 24 August 2020 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Ministerial-level open debate of the Security Council on “Climate and security” 24 July 2020 Chair’s summary

Introduction

On 24 July 2020, Germany co-organized a ministerial-level open debate on “Climate and security” in an open videoconference format with nine other Security Council members: Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, the Niger, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Heiko Maas, chaired the meeting. Three briefers addressed Council members: the Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, Miroslav Jenča; the Director of the Centre national d'études stratégiques et de sécurité, Mahamadou Magagi, of the Niger; and the Director of the Sustainable Pacific Consultancy, Coral Pasisi of Niue. The briefings and most of the statements from the meeting were compiled in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General and the members of the Council ([S/2020/751](#)) from Germany, Council President for the month of July.

This represented the Security Council’s fifth thematic debate specifically on climate security issues. The first thematic debate on the topic was initiated by the United Kingdom in April 2007 and focused on the relationship between energy, security and climate ([S/PV.5663](#)). The Council’s most recent climate security debate, prior to the one described in the present summary of the Chair, was convened in January 2019 at the initiative of the Dominican Republic ([S/PV.8451](#)) and explored the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security. The impacts of climate change on security were also addressed in Council debates spearheaded by Germany and Sweden, respectively, in July 2011 ([S/PV.6587](#)) and July 2018 ([S/PV.8307](#)). At the July 2011 meeting, the Council adopted its only thematic outcome on climate and security to date: a presidential statement ([S/PRST/2011/15](#)) in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to ensure that his reporting to the Council include contextual information on the possible security implications of climate change, when “such issues are drivers of conflict, represent a challenge to the implementation of Council mandates or endanger the process of consolidation of peace”.

Climate security matters have gained considerable traction in the Security Council’s work in recent years. Most Council members strongly support the organ’s engagement on such matters, although others have expressed reservations. Concerns about the security implications of climate change are now frequently raised in the Council’s country- and region-specific meetings. In addition, the Council has addressed the security impacts of climate change in 13 resolutions since 2015. These include resolutions on: women and peace and security ([2242 \(2015\)](#)); the Lake Chad Basin region ([2349 \(2017\)](#)); the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia ([2461 \(2019\)](#)); the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali ([2480 \(2019\)](#) and [2531 \(2020\)](#)); the African-Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur ([2429 \(2018\)](#)); the African Union Mission in Somalia ([2431 \(2018\)](#), [2472 \(2019\)](#) and [2520 \(2020\)](#)); the “Silencing the Guns in Africa” initiative ([2457 \(2019\)](#)); the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([2499 \(2019\)](#)); the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ([2502 \(2019\)](#)); and the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan ([2524 \(2020\)](#)).

The co-organizers circulated a concept note in preparation for the open debate (S/2020/725), in which it was stated that the aim of the meeting was to define how best to provide the Security Council with a comprehensive and authoritative information basis on the security implications of the effects of climate change. Members were encouraged to share their experience with and assessment of the following questions:

(a) How can we ensure that the Security Council has authoritative information on the impact of climate-related security risks in conflict settings?

(b) What tools, partnerships and early warning capabilities would support the timely assessment of and response to climate-related security risks in order to prevent the escalation of conflict?

(c) How can United Nations in-country resources, including peace operations and special political missions, be enabled to better collect, analyse and report on relevant information in specific country or regional situations while also applying a gender-sensitive analysis?

(d) Which existing tools may the Council wish to use in addressing implications of climate change on international peace and security?

(e) How would these need to be enhanced to appropriately respond to climate-related security risks?

(f) How can the Council's operational readiness in cases of climate-related security risks be increased?

Briefings

In the first briefing, the Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas made the case that the global climate emergency threatened global peace as climate change exacerbated existing risks and created new ones. He said that record temperatures, rising sea levels and frequent extreme weather events affected the entire planet, causing people and the natural environment to suffer and resulting in the loss of lives and livelihoods. Climate change-related impacts, he argued, led to displacement and increased competition for resources. He also said that the effects of climate change on peace and security varied across regions, offering examples from the Asia-Pacific region, Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Climate-related security risks also affected women, men, girls and boys in different ways and, as a result, could have far-reaching consequences on societies. Noting that 7 of the 10 countries most vulnerable and least prepared to deal with climate change hosted a United Nations peacekeeping operation or special political mission, he added that fragile and conflict-affected countries were more exposed and less able to cope with the effects of climate change.

The Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas contended that the failure of peace and security actors to consider the growing impacts of climate change undermined efforts aimed at conflict prevention, peace-making and sustaining peace, and risked trapping vulnerable countries in a vicious cycle of climate disaster and conflict. In order to address those concerns, he proposed several steps that the United Nations and its partners could take, including the following:

(a) Leveraging new technologies and enhancing analytical capacity to translate long-term climate foresight into actionable, near-term analysis;

(b) Placing people at the centre of those efforts and learning from those who experienced on a daily basis the consequences of climate change on their security;

(c) Integrating peacebuilding, environmental and gender equality goals by utilizing women and youth as agents for change;

(d) Strengthening multi-dimensional partnerships and linking the efforts of the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations and others on the issue.

The Assistant Secretary-General concluded by noting that the multilateral response to the security implications of climate change did not match the magnitude of the challenge that, collectively, the United Nations and its Member States must work faster to address.

Mr. Magagi provided the second briefing, focusing on Africa's Sahel region. He maintained that there were few places in the world where climate change was felt more drastically than in the Sahel, identifying a number of ways in which it was harming the livelihoods of its people, especially farmers and herders. Changing weather patterns, such as increasing temperatures, decreasing annual rainfall and more frequent heavy rains, floods, strong winds, sandstorms and droughts, had a severe impact on the region. With water tables drying up, crop yields had decreased and desertification had caused fertile land to grow fallow. As a result, personal income and living standards had decreased, competition among rural populations for scarce natural resources had grown and forced migration had increased. Although he argued that the link between climate change and conflict was not always straightforward, he stressed that climate change should be seen as a "threat multiplier". While there were other factors causing conflict in the region, climate change was certainly among them.

Mr. Magagi highlighted initiatives that his home country, the Niger, had taken to respond to climate change both in-country and regionally. He noted that his country's 3N (Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens) initiative helped the Niger to avoid famines, despite frequent droughts, while the country hosted a weather forecast and food security regional centre for the entire Sahel. In addition, the Niger chaired the Climate Commission for the Sahel region, which comprised 17 African countries and was intended to facilitate the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Using the experience of the Sahel as a guide, Mr. Magagi offered a number of recommendations that the United Nations could take, including the following:

- (a) Conducting an integrated climate security assessment before undertaking assistance in a given country;
- (b) Assisting in the creation of national-to-local capabilities to monitor and manage climate change effects;
- (c) Tasking United Nations country teams with collecting and making available information on the impact of climate-related security risks;
- (d) Including gender-sensitive climate-related security risks as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework;
- (e) Establishing a United Nations-wide climate security risk management coordination mechanism.

In her briefing, Ms. Pasisi, in noting that the Pacific Islands Forum leaders had frequently stated over the past decade that "climate change presents the single greatest threat to the security of our region", highlighted the challenges that the Pacific islands faced in the context of climate change. She argued that the established international legal order with regard to maritime boundaries was under threat owing to rising sea levels, which threatened the associated legal rights of States. This was particularly harmful in a region that consisted of 98 per cent ocean area, which regional States depended on for their well-being. As many of the States in the region were small, low-lying atolls, they were threatened by rising sea levels, ocean acidification and degrading coral reef systems, with significant consequences for statehood, national identity, sustainable development, livelihoods and law and order. Ultimately, she said,

there was no greater security threat than the potential loss of one's entire nation and its jurisdictions established under international law.

She said that another threat was to the region's "blue economy", primarily the severe potential losses in tourism and fisheries, especially global stocks of tuna. She expressed concern that the degradation of tuna stocks would not only affect government revenue, but also cause a steep rise in food insecurity, which could lead to conflict. Lastly, the region was already being harmed by displacement and forced migration. In addition to land loss as sea levels rose, existing land became unproductive from saltwater intrusion, coastal erosion and coral reef degradation, harming complex and often-contested traditional land tenure systems and limiting land resources. That, according to Ms. Pasisi, increased the potential for conflict and instability.

In order to address those threats, Ms. Pasisi argued that the United Nations should assist in further implementing the Paris Agreement. In her view, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) presented an important opportunity for countries to refocus on creating healthy, connected and resilient societies. She called upon the Security Council and the United Nations system at large to integrate the best-available models and risk assessments; to coordinate with development, humanitarian and climate bodies of practice; and to mobilize the capacity and resources to address the threat of climate change.

Open debate on climate and security

A total of 49 Member States and the European Union participated in the open debate. In addition to the 15 Security Council members, several Member States spoke on behalf of regional or other groups: Belize (Alliance of Small Island States); Denmark (the Nordic group); Fiji (Pacific small island developing States); and Nauru (Group of Friends on Climate and Security). Kenya and Ireland, which will serve on the Council in 2021–2022, also made statements. In addition to those interventions and in accordance with an agreement among Council members for the videoconference, a further 29 non-Council Member States submitted statements in writing: Brazil, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tuvalu, and the United Arab Emirates.

There was widespread support in the meeting for the view that climate change had implications for international peace and security and should be addressed in the Security Council, although there were some exceptions to that perspective. In general, the oral and written statements went beyond analysing the security impacts of climate change and focused on a forward-looking way at what could be done by the Council, the United Nations and its Member States, as well as by other actors, to most effectively tackle that global challenge. The following section highlights key themes that were raised and the proposals made in the statements to address the threat of climate change to international peace and security.

Key themes

Many delegations emphasized that climate change was a "risk multiplier" that intensified political, social and economic factors in ways that exacerbated, prolonged or contributed to conflict and instability. By contributing to risk factors such as drought, desertification, water and food scarcity and rising sea levels, climate change was a complex security challenge that affected different countries and regions in varied ways. For example, several delegations highlighted conflicts over limited water and land resources in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin and the security threat of more frequent and severe weather events and rising sea levels to the survival

of small island developing States. It was noted that the impacts of climate change on security were multi-dimensional and varied, depending on the context.

The view that the security impacts of climate change were relevant to the different phases of United Nations engagement was widespread. In that regard, one delegation emphasized the importance of “mainstreaming climate change considerations throughout the whole peace continuum: from conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery, on a case-by-case basis”. Another delegation underscored the role of the United Nations system in helping to incorporate climate resilience in its development, peacebuilding and humanitarian work. A number of Member States also maintained that peacekeeping operations should integrate climate security considerations into their work.

Several delegations appealed for the Security Council to be provided with a stronger base of information and analysis on climate security risks. It was noted that that would help the Council to improve its early warning capacities, to develop strategies to respond to climate-related risks and to make informed decisions. The climate security mechanism, consisting of staff from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme, was recognized for the progress that it had made in integrating climate-related security analysis into the work of the United Nations, including through the development of a “toolbox” to provide guidance to United Nations staff and Member States in assessing and responding to climate security challenges. It was also noted that climate-related risk assessments should inform policy decisions at the national, regional and multilateral levels.

The importance of linking the needs and interests of women and young people to the analysis of and response to climate-related security risks was highlighted in the debate. It was observed that women and girls were disproportionately affected by climate change and that they had a critical role to play in responses to climate security challenges. The importance of including young people in decision-making responses, as they would be most affected by climate change in the future, was also underscored.

Participants drew parallels between COVID-19 and climate change, with some delegations noting that those were global threats requiring international responses reflecting solidarity and cooperation. One delegation argued that the intensification of climate change was likely to lead to a rise in the spread of vector-borne diseases.

Several delegations argued that a key way to mitigate the security impacts of climate change was for countries to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement and to work collectively to prevent temperatures from exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. There were also calls for developed countries to honour their obligations with regard to climate financing and to make technology transfers to developing countries.

Although there was widespread recognition that the Security Council had an important role to play in addressing climate-related security threats, a small minority of delegations, including some of the Security Council’s permanent members, expressed reservations about Council engagement on the issue, especially at the thematic level. They maintained that the links between climate and security were tenuous, as there was a lack of evidence connecting climate change directly to armed conflict, although some of the participants said that it might be appropriate for the Council to deal with the security implications of climate change in specific countries where it was relevant. They argued that climate change was primarily a sustainable development issue and emphasized the role of other United Nations entities in addressing that challenge. One delegation expressed the view that Council involvement on the issue could divert resources and time from the root causes of conflict and could result in ineffective solutions based on unreliable and imprecise interpretations of risk

factors. It was similarly posited that viewing climate change through a security lens could narrow the range of responses to that multi-dimensional challenge.

Proposals for action

Several delegations made a number of proposals for integrating climate security concerns more systematically into the work of the Security Council and the United Nations system more broadly, including how the United Nations could more effectively tackle climate security challenges in collaboration with a range of stakeholders at the global, regional, subregional, national and local levels:

(a) Initiate an informal expert group on climate and security as a means to institutionalize climate and security more firmly into the Council's work;

(b) Establish a periodic report of the Secretary-General to the Council on climate-related security risks, which could:

(i) Strengthen the Council's knowledge of the security impacts of climate change in various regions over different time horizons;

(ii) Provide recommendations to the Council and the wider United Nations system for integrating climate security considerations into their work in ways that promote long-term stability in conflict-affected countries;

(iii) Provide a platform for dialogue between the Secretariat and Member States on climate security matters;

(c) Create the post of a Special Representative on climate and security, appointed by the Secretary-General, who could coordinate the work of different pillars of the United Nations system on climate security issues and enhance cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations to promote comprehensive action on such matters;

(d) Make country-specific reports to the Council climate-sensitive, while the Secretariat could conduct horizon-scanning briefings for Council members on climate security matters;

(e) Use the Peacebuilding Commission's advisory role to the Council to help to promote climate-sensitive approaches in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. In this regard, the Commission and its country-specific configurations could provide written advice to the Council regarding climate security concerns in advance of Council meetings;

(f) Strengthen the capacity of the climate security mechanism to achieve various goals:

(i) Generate linkages with the international research community;

(ii) Coordinate with stakeholders (e.g., women, youth and indigenous communities) and pull together expertise from different parts of the United Nations system to develop more inclusive and integrated approaches;

(iii) Mainstream climate security considerations across the United Nations system;

(iv) Provide strategic advice to the Council, the Secretariat and other United Nations entities.

(g) Continually update the "tool box" that the climate security mechanism has developed to guide the United Nations system's work on climate security matters, with input from Member States, and integrate the guidance provided by the "tool box" into the political, social and economic assessments of United Nations country teams;

(h) Provide training on climate security risks in United Nations missions and on how they interact with other risk factors. Peacekeepers, in collaboration with national stakeholders, could help to build resilience in local communities and monitor environmental changes;

(i) Collect gender-disaggregated data in United Nations peace operations to determine the impact of climate security challenges on women;

(j) Build the capacity of local and regional actors on climate security matters and include them in the development of risk analyses to enhance their ownership in managing climate-related security risks.

Conclusion

The debate showed that the implications of climate change on international peace and security were of significant concern for most Security Council members. It also illustrated that much of the wider United Nations membership shared the view that climate change was a threat to international peace and security and that the Council had a role to play regarding the issue. While some permanent Council members and other Member States had reservations about the organ's work on the issue, the debate was not focused primarily on whether the Council was an appropriate venue to engage on the matter. Rather, participants dealt in large part with proactive steps that could be taken by the Council, the United Nations system as a whole, and regional, national and local actors to most effectively counteract the security impacts of climate change.
