

## RESEARCH BRIEF

### CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL OBSTACLES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND OPTIONS

Addressing the impacts of climate change on security risks is one of the top priorities for many current and former members of the Security Council. As recent elected members (E10) have found,<sup>1</sup> however, placing climate change on the Council's agenda is a complex and risky process, where several recent attempts to reach consensus have failed. The difficulties of more systematically including climate change on the Council's agenda should be set against a growing evidence based of the causal links between environmental change and security risks, as well as the recent recognition of a human right a clean, healthy, sustainable environment, both of which may offer new opportunities.

This paper provides a roadmap for engaging on the issue of climate, peace and security in the Security Council. It draws from previous research and advisory support that UN University Centre for Policy Research provided to E10 members on the Council,<sup>2</sup> the expert opinions of key climate-security actors, and the Geneva Academy's in-depth knowledge of UN system. The paper has four sections: (1) a brief overview of the main causal pathways between climate change and insecurity recognized by the Security Council, offering a light literature review and background; (2) a short history of how the Council has addressed climate change in the past; (3) an analysis of key challenges and opportunities for the 2023-24 period; and (4) specific advice for how member states can engage on climate and security. It offers an annex of all relevant climate-security events in the Security Council as a reference tool.

MAY 2023 | DR ADAM DAY AND DR ERICA HARPER

## 1. CLIMATE AND SECURITY – A THREAT MULTIPLIER

The starting point for climate-security discourse is the scientific consensus on the long-term changes to ecosystems resulting from increasing global temperatures. Global climate models used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predict a continued increase in global temperatures over the coming 70 years, which is already driving droughts, desertification, greater variation in rainfall, and severe weather events including hurricanes and typhoons.<sup>3</sup> Despite this high degree of correlation, causal links between climate change and violent conflict are complex and often difficult to demonstrate directly. This is in part because climate change tends to affect human security indirectly, such as via sea level rises, floods, extreme weather, and drought.<sup>4</sup> These changes in turn interact with a variety of other conflict drivers, including socio-political, structural, and economic factors. Instead of a conflict driver, most scholarship today points to climate change as a “threat multiplier” for conflict, increasing risks of widespread violence via human security.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, we here define **“climate-security” as the ways in which climate change, directly or indirectly, affects the risks of violent conflict.** This recognizes the more traditional definition of security focused on military violence,<sup>6</sup> but we have adopted violent conflict as the term that appears closest to the UN’s conflict prevention usage. Our definition differs from other uses of the term “climate-security,” some of which are focused on socio-economic well-being, or a human security lens.<sup>7</sup> This should be distinguished from the significant literature on climate vulnerability, which focuses more on the capacity for a community to cope with climate change, or the research concerning loss of life from direct exposure to extreme weather events and natural disasters.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, we acknowledge that the combination of high degrees of vulnerability, poor socio-economic indicators, and humanitarian needs are often crucial contributors to conflict risks.<sup>9</sup>

### DIRECT CAUSES OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON CONFLICT RISKS

For the past 20 years, significant research has focused quite narrowly on the relationship between environmental factors and armed conflict.<sup>10</sup> Von Uexkill et al examined whether climate-induced droughts increase the likelihood of violent conflicts to extend over longer periods of time.<sup>11</sup> Others have pointed to climate change’s impact on transboundary water disputes.<sup>12</sup> These studies explore the possible **direct** links between climate change and conflict risks, but have not achieved consensus to date. For example,

studies showing high degrees of correlation between average rainfall and violence, or on average temperatures and interpersonal violence, have been criticized for describing correlation as causation.<sup>13</sup> More common is the scholarship examining the **indirect** causal links, where climate-induced socio-economic changes may have a consequent impact on the risks of violence.

### THE RESOURCE-CONFLICT LINK

In many instances, global climate trends appear to cause increased competition over resources and thus greater risks of violent conflict. Global changes in weather patterns are already having significant direct impacts on major resources, such as drinking water,<sup>14</sup> the waters of the major rivers,<sup>15</sup> arable land,<sup>16</sup> and forests.<sup>17</sup> In some settings, a direct causal link between changing resources and conflict is identified. For example, variations in rainfall can have an impact on small-scale African conflicts over natural resources.<sup>18</sup> Sal Burke et al’s historical study demonstrates that higher temperatures were strongly correlated with increases in the likelihood of violent conflict over resources.<sup>19</sup> Butler and Gates found evidence that climate-related drought affects the availability of contested resources such as cattle and land and thus contributes to risks of violence.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Raleigh and Urdal found that climate-induced land degradation and water scarcity had only a negligible impact on resource-driven conflicts.<sup>21</sup>

Climate-driven shocks to agricultural production may exacerbate fragile settings, where droughts, floods, heat waves, or cyclones may disrupt production or contribute to significantly reduced yields and food insecurity.<sup>22</sup> In some settings less rainfall is typically associated with lower crop yields,<sup>23</sup> where one study found that the risks of violent conflict in Sahelian countries were correlated with changes in rainfall the previous year.<sup>24</sup> A study of sub-Saharan Africa found that areas experiencing sustained droughts were more likely to see civil conflict, as economic grievances became more pronounced.<sup>25</sup> Johnstone and Mazo argued that extreme weather drove up global food prices, acting as a proximate cause of the civil unrest that became the Arab Spring in 2011.<sup>26</sup> In some cases, loss of local agricultural output caused by elevated temperatures does not fully account for increases in violence, though may be a contributing factor.<sup>27</sup> In at least one case, reduction in rainfall may have had a pacifying impact on existing tensions.<sup>28</sup> While this research helpfully speaks to the impact of drought and desertification on societies, it may be critiqued for an overreliance on neo-Malthusian assumptions about population growth and dwindling resources.<sup>29</sup>

## SHIFTING POPULATIONS

Climate-driven population movements are another example of possible climate-security links, with a strong body of evidence in farmer-herder conflicts. One study showed a direct correlation between rising temperatures and violent competition between the cattle herding communities, which depend upon flooding Nile waters for their survival.<sup>30</sup> Evidence from East Africa demonstrates that climatic changes to vegetation and precipitation contributed to the escalation of pastoral conflicts, cattle raiding, and competition over natural resources.<sup>31</sup> In the Sahel, there is a strong evidentiary case that a combination of factors, including climate-driven desertification and erratic rainfall patterns, are heightening farmer-herder tensions and contributing to increased violence levels.<sup>32</sup>

There are similar links between climate change and migration.<sup>33</sup> Given that large numbers of people are expected to be displaced by climate change – particular in low-lying coastal regions, but also in areas where climate change may be increasing violence levels – migration has been cast by many Member States as one of the most important security risks.<sup>34</sup> However, there is no necessary relationship between migration and insecurity, and several scholars have criticized simplistic models that assume populations movements will destabilize receiving countries.<sup>35</sup> Summarizing the literature in this area, Brzoska and Fröhlich argue that migration is but one of many factors that may affect conflict risks, and not always in a negative manner.<sup>36</sup>

## CLIMATE-CHANGE AS PART OF A COMPLEX SOCIO-ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Some scholarship points to a risk that some of the research to date may have overstated the causal relationship between climate change and insecurity.<sup>37</sup> These scholars do not contest a potential indirect causal role for climate change in driving conflict risks – indeed they all suggest there is one – but they point to the need for more rigorous approaches in defining that role alongside other factors.<sup>38</sup>

In part as a response to the difficulties of establishing direct causality, an important strand of scholarship acknowledges that climate change may be a contributing factor to violent conflict.<sup>39</sup> For example, Halvard Buhaug has suggested that ethno-political exclusion, poor economic growth, and post-Cold War state collapse are better predictors of armed conflict than climate change, though climate change may play a role in exacerbating tensions.<sup>40</sup> Other studies have similarly concluded that political and economic dynamics are far more immediate determinants of violent conflict

than climate change.<sup>41</sup> In rare instances, climate change could interact in positive ways with underlying structural issues, reducing risks.<sup>42</sup>

While there are many competing views, systematic studies of the literature point to a fairly high degree of consensus that **the relationship between climate change and violent conflict is a mediated one, interacting with a complex set of other variables** that make direct causality difficult to establish with certainty.<sup>43</sup> Climate change thus exerts an indirect and conditional effect on conflict risks, often acting as a **threat multiplier** by increasing the gap between wealthier communities capable of adapting to new dynamics and poorer ones that already face greater risks of instability.<sup>44</sup> Climate-related shocks to the economy and/or food production tend to be most acutely felt in poorer communities, exacerbating underlying grievances, reducing the opportunity costs for violence, and imposing an overall downward pressure on economic development.<sup>45</sup>

As the following section illustrates, these questions of indirect causality and empirical evidence feature centrally in the work of the Security Council.

## 2. A SHORT HISTORY OF CLIMATE AND SECURITY IN THE COUNCIL

The UNSC held its first debate<sup>46</sup> about the security impacts of climate change 16 years ago, in 2007. In a session led by the UK, Papua New Guinea spoke on behalf of the Pacific Small Island and Developing States and declared that the “impact of climate change on small islands was no less threatening than the dangers guns and bombs posed to large nations.” The UK added that climate change was “exacerbating many threats, including conflict” and underlined that the Council needed to “build a shared understanding of the relationship between energy, security and climate.” At the time, other countries expressed doubts over whether the Security Council was the appropriate body to discuss the environment. The Chinese representative noted that climate change “could have certain security implications, but generally speaking, it was, in essence, an issue of sustainable development.” Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the “Group of 77” suggested the Security Council was not the right forum for a climate-security discussion. The Russian Federation noted that the “Council should only deal with issues under its mandate.”

Over time, these positions have evolved somewhat, driven in part by efforts of the non-permanent members of the Council. In 2011, Germany led an open debate on climate security. Again, Pacific Small Island and Developing States took the lead, with the President of Nauru describing climate

change as being “as serious a threat as nuclear proliferation and terrorism.” Under the Obama administration, tackling climate change had become a core part of US foreign policy and the US was increasingly advocating for the Council to tackle emerging non-traditional security threats. In contrast, Russia and China have maintained a fairly consistent position, describing climate change as predominately a development issue, outside the purview of the UNSC.

The UNSC did agree to a climate-related Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2011/15), but it contained concessions to those opposed to a more engaged Security Council, referring only to “the *possible* adverse effects of climate change *may*, in the *long run*, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security” (emphasis added). The statement was silent about potential measures by the UNSC to mitigate security effects caused by climate change and the legacy of this PRST is one of limited follow-up action (though it remains an important reference point and one of the few general climate-security statements by the Council).

## ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

While climate change itself may be contentious, the UNSC has been attuned to environmental issues for some time. It issued a resolution in 1990 when Iraq set fire to the Kuwaiti oil wells. It has also been seized with the relationship between natural resources and conflict since its engagement in Sierra Leone, the DRC, Liberia and the Ivory Coast since the early 1990s. Resolution 1625 (2005) for example, specifically linked armed conflict with the exploitation of natural resources, while resolution 2195 (2014) refers to the link between terrorism and illicit trade in resources.

## COUNTRY-SPECIFIC BREAKTHROUGHS (2017-2020)

A series of breakthroughs took place starting in 2017, when the Council began to acknowledge the causal links between climate change and security in specific settings. The first, Resolution 2349, on Lake Chad, specifically cited climate change and the effects that it had in fostering water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity. Specifically, these changes were linked to recruitment into Boko Haram, a group squarely on the Council’s agenda. This was followed by a number of similarly worded resolutions on Somalia (Resolution 2408 (2018)), Mali (Resolution 2423 (2018)), and Darfur (Resolution 2429 (2018)). At the regional level, a presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel in 2018 referenced the role of climate change on stability in Africa, and in Resolution 2457 ‘Silencing

the Guns.’ These constituted the first explicit recognitions by the Council of the correlation between the effects of climate change and regional and national stability. They also prompted more regular briefings to the UNSC, including repeated briefings by the SRSG of UNOWAS on the issues facing the Sahel region in particular.<sup>47</sup>

## BROADENING THE CLIMATE-SECURITY CASE (2020-PRESENT)

Over the past few years, there have been attempts within the Council to go beyond country-specific outcomes and recognize the broader relationship between climate-change and security via so-called “thematic” resolutions. Germany’s 2020 presidency oversaw an important open session,<sup>48</sup> where many members (including the P3) clearly acknowledged climate change as a risk-multiplier in a wide range of settings, though this did not result in a resolution. Indeed, efforts to translate that broader recognition into a unified Council position have thus far failed, including recent attempts by Ireland and Niger in 2021.

While several non-permanent members have expressed opposition, the main obstacle to a broader recognition of the relationship between climate change and international peace and security has been the Russian Federation. For example, in 2016, the Russian PR noted that natural resources were “neutral in nature and cannot, a priori be regarded as an underlying reason for conflicts.”<sup>49</sup> This position has changed slightly over time. In 2020, the Russian PR stated, “We agree that the security and stability of individual countries and regions may be affected by adverse impacts of climate change as one of the multiple factors. But the root-causes of conflict are much more complex. Where climate change may be one of the factors country or region specific, we strongly disagree that climate is a generic security issue.”<sup>50</sup> In 2022, Russia blocked the Niger/Ireland joint approach to adopt a climate-security resolution, threatening to use its veto (India also expressed opposition, while China abstained). China has taken a similar, if less vocal line, pointing out that “climate change may exacerbate resource shortages and tensions, but it does not necessarily lead to armed conflict (2022 session).<sup>51</sup>

## 3. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE 2023-24 PERIOD

As the above background indicates, the climate/security issue has not progressed evenly. Instead, it appears there are occasional moments of opportunity in the Council where like-minded states can advance the agenda, and other periods where the headwinds against further progress are too strong. For example, between 2020 and early 2021 there was a relatively active period where many meetings were held on

the links between climate change and various risks, whereas 2022 witnessed a slowdown in such discussions.<sup>1</sup> The only formal session on climate Security in 2022 was the Gabon-led discussion on 12 October.<sup>52</sup> Part of the 2022 slowdown was due to the membership of the Council: the presence of Brazil and India on the Council meant vocal opposition to some of the more ambitious discussions over the past two years. And part is also due to broader geopolitical division – the war in Ukraine has led to a deepening rift between Russia and the P3, emboldening both Russia and China to “use climate as a bargaining chip for other issues in collaboration with the G77.”<sup>53</sup> This section explores some of the key challenges and opportunities for the climate-security agenda.

## A. NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

As of 2022, eleven members of the Council clearly supported more systematic integration of climate-security on the Security Council’s agenda: Albania, France, Gabon, Ghana, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, the UAE, the UK, and the US. Brazil, India, and Russia have generally positioned themselves against broader inclusion of climate-security, while China abstained from the December 2021 Ireland/Niger draft resolution.

This context is important for the 2023-24 period and should be the starting point for an assessment of opportunities for E10 members. The end of India’s term and the change of government in Brazil at the beginning of 2023 may create a greater opening for discussions, but this should not be overestimated. While ostensibly supportive of the global climate agenda, Brazil’s current government is unlikely to see the Security Council as the right venue for climate discussions. Indeed, Brazil is likely to continue to press for climate to be positioned within the development agenda, not the Security Council, though it seems willing to consider the issue of food security within a climate context.

New E10 members appear broadly favorable to climate-security discussions. **Malta** in particular has made climate change a top priority for its tenure, and has specified that sea level rise should be considered a threat to international peace and security. While a relative newcomer to global discussions of climate-security,<sup>54</sup> since 2020 **Japan** has increasingly prioritized the issue within its broader push to be a leader in climate mitigation, and may well be a proponent of dedicated discussions in the Council.<sup>55</sup> Importantly, Japan’s leadership in advancing the concept of “human security” within the UN system offers an entry point for assessing how climate change may be undermining livelihoods, food

security, and safe population movements.<sup>56</sup>

**Switzerland** has clearly stated that climate change is a top priority for its tenure on the Security Council. It is very well-placed to advance this agenda for many reasons: (1) it is a smaller state with a long history of neutrality, allowing it to raise issues without necessarily entering into P5 dynamics (NB: Ireland played this role very well during its tenure on the SC); (2) it has played a crucial role in shaping the Sustaining Peace and peacebuilding work of the UN, which likely offer the most viable pathways in to a climate-security discussion in the SC; and (3) Geneva is home to the Human Rights Council, where the right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment was first recognized last year.

**Ecuador** is deeply affected by climate change, including through sea-level rise, coastal erosion, extreme weather, biodiversity loss, and changing rainfall patterns.<sup>57</sup> The principal areas where climate change is likely to be a priority for Ecuador will be food security and natural disaster risk reduction.<sup>58</sup> However, a recent increase in floods and fires in Quito may generate greater willingness to consider a broader range of threats to human security as well.<sup>59</sup> As it develops its four year climate mitigation plan, Ecuador’s focus on issues of biodiversity loss and pollution may be important reference points as well.<sup>60</sup>

**Mozambique** may be the most complex new Council member in terms of positioning on climate and security. Firstly, Mozambique has strong energy ties with Russia<sup>61</sup> and has taken a neutral position on the war in Ukraine, abstaining from the recent GA vote to censure Russia.<sup>62</sup> This would make Maputo a natural ally of Moscow in terms of blocking a broader acceptance of climate-security in the Council. However, Mozambique has also indicated that addressing terrorism is its top priority on the Council for the coming two years. The Islamist insurgency in its northern region is taking place in one of the most climate-affected places on Earth, where floods, droughts and tropical storms have caused large-scale loss of livelihoods. This may mean that Mozambique is willing to push for climate-security discussions within the Council,<sup>63</sup> and indeed Russia has in the past shown itself open to discussing climate-driven recruitment into violent extremist groups.<sup>64</sup>

Though countries with climate-driven security risks may be more likely to push for Security Council discussions on the issue, there is not a necessary link between the two. In the past, some countries have been willing to consider general discussions of climate-security, while staunchly opposing any inclusion of their own country settings on the Council’s

1 For a good overview of this dynamic, see <https://www.crisisgroup.org/b8-united-states/ten-challenges-un-2022-2023>.

agenda (e.g. Mexico and Vietnam).

Finally, it is worth noting that both Slovenia and Denmark's early bids for future Council seats have included strong indications that climate change will be a top priority.

## **B. A GROWING EVIDENCE BASE IN AFRICA**

One of the most important opportunities is the growing evidence base and willingness amongst A3 members in particular to raise the issue. During its October 2022 presidency, Gabon held the only climate-security session of the year, with a focus on the risks facing the African continent as a whole.<sup>65</sup> This session included a significant amount of empirical evidence, provided by the A3 countries themselves, but also from experts at ICRC and others, clearly linking climate-driven factors to a range of destabilizing trends on the continent. Ghana spoke of the "sufficient link" between climate change and insecurity to generate action by the Council.<sup>66</sup> The US referred in detailed terms to the ways climate change is affecting livelihoods and security, suggesting it was "dumbfounding" that member states would try to deny the empirical link.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the subsequent statement by Russia, claiming that climate belonged "exclusively in the realm of economic development,"<sup>68</sup> and India's statement that the UNFCCC was the only forum for addressing climate change, appeared increasingly out of synch with the clear evidence provided by the A3 and experts.<sup>69</sup>

While scientific research and the work of climate-security think tanks continues to grow this evidence base, it is worth noting the progress within the UN system as well. There are five new "Climate Security Advisors" in the UN system, providing important ground-truthed analysis to missions, envoys, and the Secretariat. In some cases, like Somalia, this work is not only generating new empirics, but is also feeding improved peacebuilding strategies.<sup>70</sup> Certainly, the 2023-24 period will offer Council Members ample opportunities to draw from this growing evidence base, and to contribute to it during their presidencies.

## **C. FOOD AND ENERGY SHOCKS**

The war in Ukraine has accelerated two interrelated trends at the global level: soaring energy prices, and critical food systems failures. While this is in part the result of the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change has a key role to play as well. Crop failures and large-scale livelihood losses in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel in particular (but also in South Asia and parts of Latin America) are likely to play an increasingly central role in instability, whether by driving populations towards urban areas, triggering tensions over limited resources, or leading to social

unrest. As the Arab Spring proved, shifts in food and energy prices can rapidly lead to massive instability. While this poses serious challenges more broadly, the likely confluence of food and energy crises during the next two years is also an opportunity to advance the issue.

## **D. THE HUMAN RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT**

The July 2022 General Assembly resolution recognizing the right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment may seem like a distant issue to the climate-security debate within the Security Council. However, it opens another door through which environmental issues could be brought into the Council's discussions.

These opportunities are not the only ones. Indeed, ongoing discussions on Security Council reform could offer openings in the future to reshape the constellation of member states involved in shaping the Council's agenda, including on climate change. But as of today, the above areas appear the most realistic avenues for advancing the goal of increasing the SC's climate-security engagement.

## **4. A WAY FORWARD**

Today, the Security Council at one of the lowest points in its history.<sup>71</sup> Deep rifts amongst P5 members have ground most Council action to a halt, and the risks that the war in Ukraine will infect other issues is demonstrably high. Any approach to climate-security will need to carefully navigate these geopolitical hurdles and account for the risk that attempting ambitious action today could have the unintended consequence of setting issues backward. Despite these challenges, E10 members could advance a climate priority in the Council in a number of ways, some of which are laid out here:

### **A. OPEN THE DOOR TO NEW EVIDENCE**

As Norway and Ireland did during their time on the Council, new E10 members can use their role on the Council to introduce new evidence of climate-security. Commissioning empirical research, inviting expert briefers from the field, asking for the experiences of global South Council members in particular, all help to put more evidence of the causal relationship between climate change and security on the table.

### **B. USE EXISTING MANDATES**

The deepest disagreements tend to arise around new mandates and new resources. For example, some member states held up the process for appointing the climate-security advisor to Somalia by refusing funding for the post in the Fifth Committee. And disagreements over introducing

climate change and the environment into peace operations' mandates are likely to constrain many new mandates in the coming two years. But existing mandates already offer room to maneuver, particularly amongst the regional envoys, but also within peacekeeping missions. MONUSCO and MINUSMA, for example, both refer explicitly to the links between natural resources and insecurity in their mandates; more could be done to leverage these mandates to address climatic changes.

### **C. PUSH FOR AN EXPANDED PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION MANDATE**

The lead up to the 2024 Summit of the Future may offer another opening. Though still under development, several tracks leading to the Summit may focus on the climate-security link. For example, the recent report by the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism recommends that the mandate of the Peacebuilding Commission be expanded and strengthened, specifically to help it address climate-driven security risks.<sup>72</sup> It is likely that an expanded approach to climate change, peace and security will be central to the forthcoming New Agenda for Peace as well. E10 members are in a good position to advocate for the Summit of the Future to take forward these recommendations.

### **D. GO REGIONAL**

The country-specific briefings are helpful, but tend to raise concerns that the development agenda may be securitized, particularly amongst G77 members. However, the UN has recently developed regional strategies covering most of the fragile, conflict-affected parts of the world, and regional envoys can helpfully provide briefings to the Security Council. UNOWAS' briefings to the Council have been some of the most important in placing regional climate trends on the agenda, but according to several experts this approach has not been replicated in other regions. Pushing for more interaction with the envoys from the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa, Central Africa, and the regional offices in the Middle East and West Asia could help broaden the discussion to key climate security trends.

### **E. GO INFORMAL**

Formal sessions of the Council are rarely where agreements are reached in today's toxic geopolitical environment. But recent E10 members have had success in pushing issues quietly in informal settings, including Arria formula meetings, lower-level sessions on the margins of the Council, or even by finding informal groups of states that can agree on some baseline issues. Indeed, the Informal Expert Working

Group on Climate Security is a far more energetic forum for pushing climate issues than any of the recent sessions of the Security Council itself.

### **F. VOID THEMATIC RESOLUTIONS, FOR NOW**

Over the past several years, repeated attempts to pass a "thematic" resolution covering climate change and security in general terms has failed. Indeed, according to several experts, the attempts to negotiate thematic resolutions have likely generated more pushback from Council members than would have been the case if only country-specific resolutions had been sought.

### **G. GO BEYOND CLIMATE**

Climate change is only one of the ways environmental shifts are affecting peace and security. Indeed, deforestation, depletion of fisheries, destruction of arable land, and a wide variety of unsustainable development practices are contributing to both the triple planetary crisis and conflict risks. Building up an environmental repertoire within the Council could help avoid some of the more toxic dynamics while advancing the underlying goal of placing the Anthropocene within the UN's security arena.

### **H. LEVERAGE THE HUMAN RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT**

While none of the below has yet been tested, some options could include:

#### **a. Environmental issues within existing SC mandates**

This could include SC-mandated peace operations, special envoys, and/or sanctions. While such a process would be very contentious, in areas with clear links between environmental change and violent conflict and clear history of illegal exploitation of natural resources (e.g. Mali, South Sudan, DRC) an incremental expansion of UN mandates could be considered.

#### **b. An SC consideration of the right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment**

As of today, both the HRC and GA have passed resolutions on this right, but the SC has not acted or seriously considered the issue. The SC has acted in the past in response to grave human rights violations, including by the creation of tribunals, appointment of special envoys, deployment of peace operations, imposition of sanctions, and other actions. While it is likely to face considerable opposition from Russia and China, an SC discussion on environmental rights could be a significant step forward, and could build on the 2016

Sustaining Peace resolutions which broadened the security discussion well beyond military threats..

**c. Expanding the mandate of the International Criminal Court to include the crime of ecocide.**

Based on the human right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment. Given that the Security Council is one of the only bodies mandated to refer cases to the ICC, the recognition of ecocide could create a new opportunity.<sup>73</sup>

**d. Elevate the mandate of UNEP, linking it more directly to other UN bodies**

The High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism also recommends that the right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment catalyze a dramatic increase in the position of the environment across the multilateral system.<sup>74</sup> Part of this elevation would require UNEP and UNEA to be better connected to other UN organs, allowing it to inject environmental concerns more directly into development, security, and human rights. As this recommendation is considered in the lead up to the Summit of the Future.

Today's geopolitical landscape presents serious obstacles to any major step forward in the Security Council's approach to climate change and security. Indeed, the number of issue areas where Council consensus can be achieved may be at a low watermark of the past 30 years. At the same time, the evidence base linking climate change to insecurity is growing stronger by the day, as are the calls by affected countries for more meaningful action by the UN. This brief has offered a range of options for Council members and other actors to leverage the growing climate crisis to catalyze greater action by the UN system, despite the gridlock in many of its main bodies.

## Security Council Events on Climate and Security (2007 to present)

Year	Date	Name/Title of Session	Remarks
2022	12-Oct		Chaired by Gabon, focused on increasing risk analysis and integrating climate into peacemaking.
2022	9-Mar	Arria-formula meeting on climate finance	Chaired by UAE, expected to creating these strategies requires financial investments in water and food management, infrastructure development, and other activities related to climate change adaptation
2021	11-Dec	Climate Change & Security: Vote on a Resolution	The SC voted on a joint Irish/Nigerian resolution on climate security, focused on integrating climate risks into UN conflict prevention. Threatened veto by Russian Federation and opposed by India, China abstained, all other members in favor.
2021	9-Dec	Climate change high-level open debate	Chaired by Nigerian President, the debate aimed at drawing attention between climate change and terrorism (also echoing the high level debate dated Sep 23, 2021)
2021	18-Oct	Climate and Security: Arria-formula Meeting on Sea-Level Rise	The meeting aimed to “improve the Council’s understanding of sea-level rise and its link to international and regional peace, security and stability. The meeting will also allow the Council to discuss how it can support affected countries’ mitigation efforts to address these threats.”
2021	23-Sep	Climate & security: high level open debate	Chaired by Ireland’s Prime Minister, debate aimed at “deepen substantive awareness of how climate security risks are relevant to the work of the Security Council”
2021	23-Feb	Climate & security: high level open debate over videoconference	Chaired by UK Council, aimed at “Addressing climate-related security risks to international peace and security through mitigation and resilience building”
2020	24-Jul	Climate & Security ministerial-level open debate	Chaired by German, UN DPPA briefed “how climate-security risks play out differently within and across various regions and affect vulnerable communities and populations.”
2020	22-Apr	Arria-formula Meeting on “Climate and security risks: the latest data”	This is the 5th meeting on the topic; To discuss “ways to strengthen knowledge across the UN system of the relationship between climate change and security”
2019	25-Jan	Open Debate: “Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security”	Chaired by Dominican Republic: “Climate change has gained some traction in the Security Council’s work”.
2018	11-Jul	Understanding and addressing climate-related security risks open session of the Security Council	Chaired by Sweden, links changing water levels in Lake Chad Basin to livelihoods in Boko Haram affected areas.
2017	15-Dec	Climate & Security Arria-formula meeting “Preparing for security implications of rising temperatures”	“Droughts, floods or water scarcity can generate humanitarian crises, unrest and conflict”, and emphasises that “...as the effects of climate change become more severe, they become a multiplier of various crises”. It further states that “climate-induced security threats have become more pressing”..
2017	10-Apr	Arria-formula meeting on “Security Implications of Climate Change: Sea Level Rise”	Organised by Viet Nam, Ireland, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tunisia. Frames climate change as a risk multiplier which worsens global security and development challenges... threatens the territorial integrity and, in some cases, the existence of many low-lying and small island developing states

Year	Date	Name/Title of Session	Remarks
2017	6-Jun	Maintenance of Int'l Peace and Security, Preventive Diplomacy and transboundary waters	Chaired by Bolivia, SG gave speech on links between transboundary water disputes and conflict, pointing to rising tensions over freshwater.
2016	20-Nov	Open Debate "water, peace and security"	Chaired by Senegal, concerned various disputes over freshwater and links to violent conflict.
2016	25-May	Briefing on the Sahel: Impact of Climate Change and Desertification	Requested discussion by Spain, co-hosted by Egypt, focused on the factors contributing to conflict in the Sahel region, in particular the role of climate change and desertification.
2015	30-Jul	Open debate "Peace and Security Challenges Facing Small Island Developing States"	Chaired by NZ's foreign minister, discussions related to "transnational crime and piracy, the illicit exploitation of natural resources, climate change and uneven development"
2015	30-Jun	Arria-Formula Meeting on Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier	Co-Chaired by Malaysia and Spain, to "discuss the interconnected threats to international peace and security posed by climate change and focus on ways these threats can be addressed"
2013	15-Feb	Arria Formula Meeting on Climate Change on "Security Dimensions of Climate Change"	Co-Chaired by Pakistan and UK, "climate change on its agenda has been quite a contentious issue for the Council"
2011	20-Jul	SC 66th year meeting (discussion of climate change)	SG acknowledged "Climate change is real, and it is accelerating in a dangerous manner. It not only exacerbates threats to international peace and security, it is a threat to international peace and security. "
2011	19-Jul	Climate Change Negotiation	German presidency pushed for negotiations on a possible presidential statement on climate change but was unable to achieve consensus.
2007	20-Jul	SC adopted a presidential statement	The statement expressed its concern that "possible security implications of loss of territory of some States caused by sea-level rise may arise, in particular in small low-lying island States"
2007	17-Apr	SC 62nd year meeting (open debate: Relationship between Energy, Security and Climate)	Chaired by UK, SC first took up the issue of climate change. Debate participants acknowledged climate change is a real issue.

- 1 Statement made on behalf of Ireland and Niger 'Stakeout following Vote on the Climate and Security Resolution' (13 December 2021) <<https://www.dfa.ie/pmun/newyork/news-and-speeches/securitycouncilstatements/statementsarchive/stakeout-following-vote-on-the-climate-and-security-resolution-.html>>
- 2 UNU-CPR was commissioned to provide direct advisory support to Germany during its first year on the Security Council and advised Ireland on several issues during its Council tenure as well. In addition, UNU-CPR has partnered with adelphi to offer public advice to the Council on the issue of climate-security, available here: <https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/conflict/csen-policy-paper-what-can-un-security-council-do-climate-and-security>.
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This project will develop guidance to inform security, human rights and environmental debates on the linkages between environmental rights and conflict, and how their better management can serve as a tool in conflict prevention, resilience and early warning.

Homing in on six country hotspots for environmental conflict spillovers, we will also identify entry points for engaging at the UN Human Rights Council and UN Security Council, as well as strategies to overcome challenges to policy uptake.

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