

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 4 February 2019 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the
United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to refer to the Security Council ministerial open debate on the theme “Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security”, held on 25 January 2019 under the Dominican Republic presidency of the Council.

In that connection, I have the honour to transmit herewith the Chair’s summary prepared by the Dominican Republic (see annex). I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Marcos **Montilla**
Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative
and Chargé d'affaires a.i.



Annex to the letter dated 4 February 2019 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

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Chair's summary of the open debate of the Security Council held on 25 January 2019 on the subject "Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security"

Introduction

On 25 January 2019, the Dominican Republic, as President of the Security Council for the month of January, organized an open debate on addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security. The meeting was chaired by Miguel Vargas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic. The Council was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, Achim Steiner; the Chief Scientist of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Pavel Kabat; and a research assistant with the Environmental Security programme of the Stimson Center, Lindsay Getschel.

With more than 80 speakers – many of whom spoke on behalf of regional groupings – explaining their positions over the course of more than eight hours, the Security Council saw more delegations than ever take the floor on the issue. The debate had a greater focus on the security impacts of climate-related disasters and climate change than previous Council discussions and indicated converging views among a large majority of those participating, showing the progress that the Council is making on the issue. However, disagreement from several delegations demonstrated the need for further discussion.

The debate marked the fourth time that the Security Council had devoted time to deliberating the impacts of climate change on international peace and security in a formal meeting, and the first open debate since that organized in 2011 under the German presidency of the Council. The very first Security Council debate had taken place under the presidency of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2007. In connection with the second debate in 2011, the Council adopted a statement by the President ([S/PRST/2011/15](#)), in which it expressed concern that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security and requested the Secretary-General to include analysis on the possible security implications of climate change in his reporting when such issues were drivers of conflict, represented a challenge to the implementation of Council mandates or endangered the process of consolidation of peace. The third debate, which took place in July 2018, under the Swedish presidency of the Council (see [S/2018/749](#)), reflected on progress in that respect and on further needs for the Council to more effectively assess and address security risks related to climate change.

Over the past two years, the Security Council has increasingly recognized climate and environmental change-related security risks in different regional contexts, in particular in the Lake Chad region (see Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#)), Somalia (see Council resolution [2408 \(2018\)](#)), West Africa and the Sahel (see [S/PRST/2018/3](#)), Mali (see Council resolution [2423 \(2018\)](#)) and Darfur (see Council resolution [2429 \(2018\)](#)). In that regard, it underscored the need for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies in several of those documents and, for

Darfur, included a request for the Secretary-General to provide information on such assessments in mandated reporting as appropriate.

The objective of the debate on 25 January was:

- (a) To arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the security risks and vulnerabilities associated with climate-related disasters, drawing on the wide range of Member States' experiences;
- (b) To understand what Member States were doing in response to those risks, and how the United Nations system could better help States to address them;
- (c) To discuss what role the Security Council could and should play in responding early and adequately, in line with its primary responsibility for international peace and security;
- (d) To debate how the field missions mandated by the Security Council could help in preventing and better managing climate-related crises;
- (e) To consider what support the Security Council could request from other parts of the United Nations family in order to help prevent and contain security risks associated with climate-related disasters;
- (f) To discuss what early warning capabilities the Council would need to respond early and effectively;
- (g) To learn how Member States are and could be engaging young people, anticipating the needs of future generations and planning ahead accordingly.

The present summary presents the ideas and arguments expressed by the participants in the debate. It is not a complete or official record, nor does it necessarily represent an endorsement of the statements by any Member State or participant. It will be circulated to all members of the Security Council, as well as all delegations that participated in the debate.

Briefings

In the first briefing to the Security Council, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs made a persuasive case that the risks related to climate-related disasters represent real, global and serious security threats, not just a scenario for the future. While they amounted to security risks for the entire world, she argued, they were most acutely felt in the most vulnerable countries. Recalling that climate change threatens the very existence of coastal communities and small island developing States, she underscored that it also affects peace and security in indirect but important ways. In particular, she noted the series of devastating disasters along the Atlantic Coast of the Americas and the Caribbean and how increased rainfall variability had contributed to greater instability in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa through heightened competition for natural resources, water and food insecurity and reduced opportunity costs for joining armed groups.

Stressing that addressing the security implications of climate change was a collective problem which requires a collective response, the Under-Secretary-General noted that most Member States already regarded climate change as a security threat in their national security strategies, that the United Nations could not afford to lag behind and that words needed to be followed up by actions. In that respect, she explained that the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in collaboration with practitioners from across and beyond the Organization, were developing an integrated risk assessment framework to analyse climate-related security risks and that the United Nations was also working to ensure that such analysis was better reflected in

mandated reports. She underlined the need to strengthen the evidence base to support the development of climate risk prevention and management strategies at the field level, inviting both Member States and other institutions to inform the United Nations of good practices to that end. In addition, she highlighted the importance of developing regional strategies, strengthening regional cooperation and engaging in preventive diplomacy.

In the second briefing, via audio link from Davos, the UNDP Administrator underlined the urgency of the situation. Pointing to the *Global Risks Report 2019* of the World Economic Forum and the fact that disasters and failed adaptation constituted two top risks identified therein, he argued that the convergence of impacts could lead to catastrophic consequences. He warned that, without urgent action, more than 140 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America would migrate within their countries' borders by 2050. Having an effective and integrated agenda on climate, disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding would be possible only by collectively reducing emissions. Noting that UNDP was witnessing how climate change was driving conflict and affecting human security, he said that the international community was not keeping up with the challenge. With the science in terms of impacts, not just on the atmosphere but also on the biosphere, becoming ever clearer, he emphasized the need for integrated risk management strategies and the opportunities for leveraging nationally determined contributions to that effect. He underlined that investment in adaptation and resilience must be scaled up, noting that UNDP already provided support with hundreds of projects across 140 countries. As an example, in the Dominican Republic, the Government, in partnership with UNDP, had developed a climate shocks vulnerability index – the first of its kind worldwide – to measure household vulnerability to hurricanes, storms and other climate phenomena.

The Chief Scientist of WMO also noted the *Global Risks Report 2019*, in which it was reported that extreme weather, natural disasters, climate change and water crises were the top four existential threats to the planet. Observing that the debate marked the first time that WMO officially briefed the Security Council, he emphasized that climate change affected security in a multitude of ways, from increased food insecurity and greater wildfire risks to increased potential for water-related conflict and other factors driving more internal displacement and migration. Therefore, he argued, new political investment was necessary to create better weather forecasting infrastructure, which needed to become a “must have” of every country’s infrastructure, just like roads or schools.

The fourth and final briefing by Ms. Getschel, a research assistant with the Environmental Security programme of the Stimson Center, highlighted that youth would bear the consequences of today’s actions. She focused on steps that the Security Council could take to reduce security risks from climate change. Specifically, she suggested that:

(a) The Security Council should formally recognize climate change as a threat to international peace and security in a resolution and incorporate climate sensitivity into the mandates of all peacekeeping and special political missions;

(b) United Nations field missions should analyse the impact of climate change on local youth and identify how youth could be involved in strengthening resilience and sustainability;

(c) United Nations field missions should transition to using clean energy in the field more systematically, thereby reducing their own emissions while building sustainable infrastructure for host communities. She recommended committing to 50 per cent of energy from renewables in United Nations deployed missions by 2025.

Debate on addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security

The debate saw great interest from among United Nations Member States, with more than 80 speakers taking the floor over the course of more than eight hours. Representatives of Kuwait, Belgium, Indonesia, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, China, Russia, Côte d'Ivoire, Peru, France, the United States of America, Equatorial Guinea, South Africa, Guatemala, Hungary, the Philippines, the Maldives, Haiti, Canada, Fiji, Nicaragua, Norway, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Japan, Greece, Latvia, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, India, Spain, Barbados (on behalf of the Caribbean Community), Portugal, Turkey, Switzerland, Australia, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Papua New Guinea, Sweden, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Kenya, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ireland, Chile, Nauru (on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum), Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Viet Nam, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Uruguay, Sudan, Finland, Uzbekistan, Romania, Qatar, Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Belize (on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States), Tuvalu (on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States), Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Mauritius and the Dominican Republic in a national capacity took the floor, 17 of which (Kuwait, Belgium, Indonesia, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Hungary, the Philippines, the Maldives, Haiti, Canada, Fiji, Nicaragua, Norway and Estonia) were represented at the political level. The Permanent Observers of the Holy See, the European Union, the African Union and the International Committee of the Red Cross also delivered statements.

The debate saw more delegations than ever speak about the impacts of climate change on international peace and security in the Security Council. Many delegations focused on the security impacts of climate change rather than only climate change as such – to a greater extent than in all previous Council debates on the issue. That showed that reasons to worry about Security Council encroachment on the mandates of other United Nations bodies should be on the wane. The debate also demonstrated that views among a large majority of those participating were converging, with a large majority calling on the Council to acknowledge the existential threat that, in certain cases, climate change presents to international peace and security and to embrace its role in addressing those security impacts. In particular, many delegations emphasized:

(a) That climate change is a real, tangible, acute, global and existential threat to humanity; that developing countries are particularly vulnerable despite their disproportionately small contribution to emissions, and that that vulnerability extended beyond the African continent, with respect to which the Security Council had already passed resolutions, reflecting the need for appropriate risk management strategies; and that efforts to reduce climate-related disaster impacts and to increase synergies between adaptation efforts and peace-building would benefit international peace and security by strengthening global stability and conflict prevention;

(b) That the entire United Nations system needed to be engaged on climate change; that the Security Council ought to focus specifically on the security impacts of climate change; and that that was complementary to the mandate and actions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies;

(c) That the United Nations needed to enhance its analytical capacity in order to better understand the interlinkages between climate change, disasters and threats to peace and security and to better shape response strategies, based on systematically building evidence on what works and what does not; and that progress to that end would depend on building adequate capacity across United Nations agencies, United Nations regional coordinator offices, regional organizations and Member States;

(d) That early warning systems needed to be improved and integrated climate-security risk assessments be advanced; that the new “climate security mechanism” bringing together UNDP, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNEP, as well as other practitioners from within and beyond the United Nations system was a significant first step to that end and that they would like to see it further strengthened into an institutional focal point, with several calling for a special representative to be appointed;

(e) That the impacts of climate change on international peace and security should feature regularly in the Security Council; that there should be annual briefings on climate security risks and progress made and that small island developing States needed to be represented at such briefings

(f) That a number of Security Council resolutions adopted in 2017 and 2018 were helpful examples of targeted climate security action by the Council;

(g) That implementing the principles of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was of critical importance for adapting to and preventing climate-related disaster impacts. In that context, many delegations underscored the urgency of staying below 1.5°C warming, referring to the special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, and evoking the 2019 climate summit as a critical meeting for raising international ambition.

Although a large majority of delegations supported Security Council engagement on the issue of the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security, a number of delegations also voiced disagreement or discomfort with debating climate change in the Council. The criticism that they voiced was essentially five-fold, with some speakers arguing:

(a) That the evidence on the effects of climate change on violence was contested and not fully understood and that it was difficult to demonstrate the direct link between climate change and natural disasters and conflict;

(b) That the “securitization” of climate change was potentially counterproductive and might falsely be interpreted to imply that climate change always led to conflict and, worse, that it might entail the wrong responses in the form of nudging States to emphasize competition instead of cooperation and their thinking towards militarized responses;

(c) That a focus on climate change as a driver of conflict would distract from more important, political drivers of conflict such as external interventions in the domestic affairs of other States;

(d) That the Security Council should not encroach on the mandates of existing specialized organizations of the United Nations;

(e) That the Security Council was not the appropriate forum because of its structurally unrepresentative, exclusionary and secretive nature, which contrasted negatively with the more democratic and equitable institutional framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

Although the large number of delegations taking the floor did not allow for interactive deliberation of those concerns, several delegations contested the relevance or significance of the arguments. Numerous delegations described the links between climate-related disasters and threats to security as beyond reasonable doubt and insisted that the Security Council must address those threats. Many more stressed that Security Council engagement with the security impacts of climate change and disaster

did not duplicate any other body's work, but was perfectly compatible with and complementary to the engagement of other United Nations bodies with environmental and development-related impacts of climate change. Some noted that the General Assembly, in resolution 63/281 had invited the relevant organs of the United Nations to intensify their efforts in addressing climate change, explicitly including its possible security implications, with regard to which the relevant organ was clearly the Council, and that there was hence no question of the Council encroaching on the prerogatives of other United Nations bodies. Many also noted the multidimensional nature of climate change impacts, which implied the need for a multidimensional response, including from the Council where international peace and security was concerned.

Those divergences should not overshadow the significant areas of consensus that the debate highlighted. All delegations agreed that, in specific cases, effects of climate change represented important challenges to peace and security. There was also consensus around the need for a holistic and comprehensive approach in tackling the multidimensional impacts of climate change, which practically by definition cannot exclude the consideration of security implications. Moreover, there was in fact consensus that the Security Council was not the organ responsible for addressing climate change as such or questions of sustainable development, but that its mandate entailed a focus on the maintenance of international peace and security. Those delegations critical of excessive "securitization" tended to stress the heterogeneity of such impacts in different regions, implicitly or explicitly acknowledging that climate change and disasters might have consequences for international peace and security in specific regional contexts, while opposing generalized assumptions to that effect.

Policy recommendations

Many delegations underscored the need to go beyond discussing the impacts of climate-related disasters on security and to take action to strengthen resilience, noting the critical role that international cooperation needed to play in combating climate change and its multiple negative effects. In that vein, they made a number of suggestions. The section below seeks to synthesize those ideas that focused specifically on addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security, identifying three broad avenues for United Nations Security Council action and a fourth that primarily addressed Member States. Thus, many delegations:

(a) Stressed the need for a better and more systematic understanding of how the risks related to climate change and disasters impact international peace and security; in that context, delegations called for:

(i) The creation of an institutional focal point or institutional home that could pull together expertise from across and beyond the United Nations system, analyse information and put appropriate syntheses at the disposal of the Secretary-General and the Security Council; many delegations asked that that focal point be designated a Special Representative of the Secretary-General;

(ii) The further strengthening of the United Nations climate security mechanism, which could in time grow into such an institutional home;

(iii) Regular reports on possible security implications of climate change by the Secretary-General;

(iv) Improved information-sharing and coordination of efforts within the United Nations system;

(b) Called for better early warning capabilities and early action enabled by integrated risk assessments and risk management strategies at the level of national governments, regional organizations and United Nations regional offices, improved

analytical capacities and better disaster preparedness, with one speaker summarizing that “if we predict better through early warning and prepare better through early action, we can prevent conflict”;

(c) Requested the better integration of climate-related factors into the mandates and capabilities of United Nations field missions, with some suggesting that peacekeepers could be equipped with capacities to undertake military operations other than war such as “climate peace missions”, as long as those focused on assisting but not interfering with affected countries;

(d) Stressed the need to support developing countries by means of financing, capacity-building and technology transfers to prevent climate security threats and conflicts.

Conclusion

The debate of 25 January left no doubt that most countries regarded climate change as a grave peril for peace and security and that they wished the Security Council to address those security-related impacts, complementing the responsibility of other United Nations bodies for combating climate change and for the impacts of climate change on development. Even if, as summed up by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, “some have not yet grasped the depth of our fears, hopefully the message was clear enough”. Maintaining international peace and security requires combating climate-related security impacts, and the primary responsibility for peace and security that the Charter of the United Nations confers on the Council entails a responsibility not only to manage conflict, but also to seek to address its root causes, with due respect to the mandates and responsibilities of other international and regional organizations, as well as Member States. Debate on how best to do so must continue in the Council, but it also needs to be complemented by ambitious action at Headquarters, as well as in the field.
