

WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION



SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE NEW YORK, GERMAN HOUSE, 20. MAY 2011

Summary

Climate change poses many serious risks, including increasing food shortages and territorial losses caused by rising sea levels. A debate on the 20th of May in New York highlighted the potential implications of these two factors for global peace and security.

The Permanent Missions of Germany and Portugal to the United Nations, in cooperation with adelphi, hosted this event in the German House. Bringing together more than one hundred representatives of the diplomatic missions in New York and selected experts, the debate was scheduled two months before the planned Security Council session under the German Council Presidency on the same theme.

The discussion provided strong arguments that risks, such as sea level rise or food insecurity, are of great relevance for United Nations' organs and agencies, including the Security Council. The Council's mandate clearly goes beyond acute crisis management and includes addressing looming conflicts. Participants also stressed the need for regular considerations of the security implications of climate change by the UN. They highlighted the importance of integrating risks of climate change in peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities.

Background

In recent years the international debate on security implications of a changing climate has gained momentum. Climate change is not only among the key challenges for global development and human well-being but also for peace and security.

Numerous studies have been published describing the risks of increased water scarcity, decreasing food production, and the effects of more frequent and extreme weather events for peace and stability.

In recent years, a series of droughts and floods in several countries have led to humanitarian emergencies and contributed to the increase of food prices globally. In the Pacific, relocation of small and low-lying island populations is being considered or and is already underway.

These events unfold in a time of rapid global change signified by growing populations and economies, increasing demand for natural resources, and depletion of fertile soils and freshwater.

In light of these developments, the UN General Assembly called in 2009 upon all UN organs to consider the security implications of climate change within their respective mandates.

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The UN Secretary-General also clearly spelled out future risks in his report on the possible security implications of climate change.

The Security Council was among those UN bodies that already discussed the issue as early as 2007. Another open debate on the security implications of climate change is envisaged for July 2011.

The discussion, chaired by adelphi's executive director Alexander Carius, helped to shed light on the following questions regarding the potential role of the Security Council:

- How is climate change threatening international peace and security?
- What instruments at the disposal of the Security Council can address security implications of climate change?



H.E. Miguel Berger, H.E. José Filipe Moraes Cabral

Selected Security Threats

The welcoming remarks by the chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, **H.E. Miguel Berger**, and by the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations, **H.E. José Filipe Moraes Cabral**, clearly outlined how climate change challenges global development, human well-being, and peace and security. A careful consideration of these implications by relevant United Nations bodies, including the Security Council, can help strengthen conflict prevention.

"The two most important energy sources are food and water, not oil and gas."

In his introductory remarks, the Foreign Minister of the Marshall Islands, **H.E. Hon. John Silk**, made it emphatically clear that rising sea levels are already visibly reducing the availability of food and water in his country. The resulting scarcity of resources, he said, invites conflict. Efforts to curb climate change have been too weak and, as a result, the international community needs to address unavoidable future repercussions of climate change impacts in the security sphere, according to the Foreign Minister. The international community is heading towards a different world and this also needs to be reflected by the Security Council.

Dirk Messner, director of the German Development Institute, took this perspective further: besides the existential danger for the Small Island States, the threat also concerns cities and infrastructure in coastal regions worldwide, where an increasing portion of the world population is located. As many fragile states are affected by rising sea levels, increased efforts towards conflict prevention are needed. In addition, since there are currently no rules for climate-driven migration, these risks associated with climate change require urgent attention.

"Uncertainty has not stopped the world to act on nuclear proliferation. Climate change is no lesser threat."

Madalena Lucas, Advisor of the Portuguese Secretary of State for Environment, warned that many climate change related developments, such as sea level rise, will create public disorder. This may lead to population movements, which are likely to result in tensions in destination areas. She called for a culture of prevention and sharing of assessments. This requires a flow of information, preparedness, and coordination throughout, from ex ante to ex post stages of conflicts and disasters.

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H.E. Hon. John Silk, Madalena Lucas

The possible destabilising effects of food shortages are already endangering peace and stability in various parts of the world according to **Alexander Müller**, Deputy Director-General of the FAO. He and **Belynda Petrie**, director of OneWorld, a South African based think tank, referred to climate change trends that are likely to greatly exacerbate food shortages, which are already erupting into violence. These trends include increasing urbanisation and growing populations, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Belynda Petrie stressed the need to strengthen regional arrangements of cooperation to avoid tensions and conflicts in the future. She cited Kenya as an example for a crisis situation where it was not possible to address food deficits because of trade barriers with neighbouring countries. She further emphasised that climate change impacts on food security already hampers post-conflict recovery today.

"Many countries see climate change as a security issue. The Security Council should do so as well."

Alexander Müller referred to the violent riots related to increasing food prices in more than 20 countries in 2008, especially affecting urban areas. They are indications of what security implications of climate change may look like in the future.

In addition, he illustrated the scope of the food security challenge with the forecasts for climate change impacts on the agricultural sector in Morocco: the country is likely to face

an enormous decrease of yields - in some areas up to 60 percent - in the decades to come. Hence, adaptation needs to start today - to avoid increased resource competition and to contribute to conflict prevention.

The Way Ahead

Participants highlighted the acute security implications of climate change, which are already and increasingly challenging the international community. The discussions pinpointed the loss of territory and the failing of states as key security issue. Debating this in the UN Security Council can draw the attention to the possible negative developments of climate change for the various activity fields of the UN.



Alexander Müller, Belynda Petrie, Dirk Messner

Some participants raised the question whether the UN Security Council is the right forum to debate climate change-related challenges. The Council's workload was cited as one reason for such scepticism. It was also argued that the need to reduce emissions and thereby avoid any security risks in the first place is still the most urgent priority. In fact, other forums are better suited to address emission reductions. Climate mitigation needs to be intensified and there are well established UN fora to address this challenge.

At the same time the Security Council has an obligation to plan for the eventuality that prevention fails. Limiting global average warming to 2°C, or preferably even less, needs to remain the top priority. However, risk planning needs to be established to address the challenges of a world 3-4°C warmer than in pre-industrial times.

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"We need early warning systems, which not only identifies threats, but also level of preparedness."

Given the long-time horizons required to adapt institutional structures to new risks, planning for climate impacts is not an issue for the future, but a priority now. A clear statement by the Council that climate change is an issue of top priority can send a strong signal throughout the UN family and reinvigorate the climate negotiations.



Among the suggestions regarding the Security Council's role in addressing the security implications of climate change, H.E. Hon. John Silk proposed a set of concrete issues for the Council to consider, e.g. the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary General and an evaluation of the UN's capacities to address the security implications of climate change.

"The mood has changed. Many countries now clearly see the risks of climate change."

Further issues were identified to be addressed by the Security Council. It was highlighted that new analysis and guidance is necessary with regard to the peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities administered by the UN Security Council as well as other bodies. Both are long-lasting activities and are critical to build societal resilience towards climate impacts. They require careful assessments of vulnerabilities, but also of opportunities for supporting possible peace emerging as a result of climate change. A culture of prevention needs to be fostered and strengthened, also with regard to environmentally-related conflict risks.



The program as well as presentations are available at the "Environment, Conflict and Cooperation Platform" at

<http://www.ecc-platform.org>

More information on the activities of the Federal Foreign Office on climate change and security is available at

<http://www.diplo.de>



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