

WEATHERING RISK

The Impact of
Climate Change &
Food Insecurity on
the Maintenance of
International **Peace**
& **Security**

October 2024

*Report on Guyana's Signature Event during
its Presidency of the UN Security Council*



Permanent Mission of the Co-operative Republic of
Guyana to the United Nations

adelphi 

Background

Conflict, climate extremes, economic shocks, and soaring fertilizer prices are creating a food crisis of unprecedented proportions. According to the 2024 Global Report on Food Crises, in 59 countries and territories experiencing food crisis, 281.6 million people or 21.5 percent of the analysed population faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 2023.¹

The global food crisis is driven by converging governance, social and economic challenges. Conflict, competition for resources related to agriculture or pastoralism, political reform processes that can lead to occurrences of land grabbing, rising costs of agricultural commodities, mass displacement, speculation and geopolitical manipulation all combine to reinforce food insecurity and hunger. The biggest driver of hunger is still conflict, with 70 percent of the world's hungry people living in areas affected by war and violence. Events in Ukraine illustrate how conflict feeds hunger – causing displacement, unemployment and economic devastation on a national scale.

Across the globe, these conditions are being aggravated by the impacts of climate change such as weather extremes. The climate crisis is compounding the steep rise in global hunger. The resulting food, water, and energy insecurities can cascade into multiple, wider security risks when interacting with these diverse contextual factors.

On 13th and 14th February 2024, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), on the initiative of Guyana, convened a high-level open debate to examine the impact of climate change and food insecurity on the maintenance of international peace and security, prompting a discussion on the complex and interconnected relationship between climate, food security and conflict. The nexus between climate change, conflict and food insecurity and its impact on the maintenance of international peace and security was one of Guyana's priorities for its tenure on the Council. As such, it used its first presidency to advance dialogue on the topic and developed the present report to capture the key recommendations.

This report offers insights into the climate-food security nexus and how climate change exacerbates the mutually reinforcing trap of hunger and conflict. It (1) summarises the current debate around the climate, food insecurity and conflict nexus and its impact on international peace and security; (2) elaborates on the question of whether climate security, albeit outside the UNSC's traditional scope of action, is an issue to be dealt with in the UNSC; (3) summarises the UNSC High-Level Open Debate "The Impact of Climate Change and Food Insecurity on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security," convened on 13th and 14th February 2024; and (4) suggests a way forward by proposing operative measures that the wider UN system, international organisations, Member States and civil society can take and highlights the precedent on which this can be built.

¹ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2024. GRFC 2024. Rome. <https://www.fsinplatform.org/grfc2024>.

The State of Play: The Climate, Food Insecurity and Conflict Nexus

The prevalence of high levels of acute food insecurity doubled from 11 percent in 48 countries/territories in 2016, to 21.5 percent in 59 countries/territories in 2023.² In their November 2023 to April 2024 outlook, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) identified 18 hunger “hotspots”³ in a total of 22 countries where food security is expected to significantly deteriorate. The highest levels of concern are in Burkina Faso, Mali, South Sudan, Sudan and Palestine.⁴ There has also been an increase in hunger overall; more than 800 million people are suffering from a lack of food around the world.⁵

The food crisis is a result of interconnected, mutually reinforcing drivers – conflict and insecurity, economic shocks, and weather extremes.⁶ On the one hand, unstable food prices and associated food insecurity are a critical risk to social stability. When staple food prices skyrocket, as was the case during the global food price crises in 2007/08, 2010/11, and 2021/22, the price spikes put pressure on governments and undermine their legitimacy. Many countries are highly dependent on cereal imports and often provide subsidies to keep food prices low. Therefore, rising food prices can combine with other political pressures and grievances to create volatile situations and act as catalysts for protests and political unrest, which have often escalated into violence. On the other hand, conflicts can cause a severe reduction in access to, and the availability of, nutritious, affordable, and safe foods, essential health and nutrition services, and humanitarian assistance. These can form a vicious circle where conflict gives rise to increasing food prices and vice versa.⁷

Countries experiencing protracted crises or a high risk of famine are frequently affected by both violent conflicts and the impacts of extreme weather events in parallel. Conflict and insecurity are among the most significant drivers of acute food insecurity, affecting more than 117 million people. Competition over resources related to agriculture or pastoralism, like land availability or distribution - and reform processes that lead to land-grabbing, often drive food-related instability. 40 percent of civil wars have been linked to natural resource competition over the last 50 years.⁸ Food insecurity in areas where livelihoods depend on natural resources can increase vulnerability to recruitment by non-state armed groups. These groups often exploit existing grievances between populations and the lack of public services by offering incentives such as food provisions and education.

² FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2024: The Global Report on Food Crises 2024. <https://www.fsinplatform.org/grfc2024>.

³ These countries include: Afghanistan, the Sahel (Burkina Faso and Mali), Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

⁴ Hunger Hotspots 2024: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, November 2023 to April 2024 outlook: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/hunger-hotspots-fao-wfp-early-warnings-acute-food-insecurity-november-2023-april-2024>.

⁵ Haga, Marie 2021: Opinion: Breaking the vicious circle of hunger and conflict. Devex. <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-breaking-the-vicious-circle-of-hunger-and-conflict-98952>.

⁶ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2024: The Global Report on Food Crises 2024. <http://www.fsinplatform.org/grfc2024>.

⁷ Taken from the adelphi and Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research report “10 insights on climate impacts and peace”: [10_insights_on_climate_impacts_and_peace_report.pdf \(adelphi.de\)](https://www.adelphi.de/en/10_insights_on_climate_impacts_and_peace_report.pdf).

⁸ WFP USA 2017. Winning the Peace: Hunger and Instability. World Food Program USA. Washington, D.C. <https://www.wfpusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2017-Winning-the-Peace-Hunger-and-Instability.pdf>.

War and conflict are also causing environmental impacts like damage to critical ecosystems and biodiversity loss, which can further increase food insecurity and contribute to political instability.

International geopolitical crises can also affect stability and food security in countries distant from the immediate crisis. These kinds of crises can further compound issues of food insecurity and drive record-high food prices by disrupting supply chains. The conflict in Ukraine, in particular, continues to contribute to rising fuel prices. This drives inflation and increases the costs of transport, food, and imports. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, climate change impacts impose additional barriers for the poorest households to adapt. This can increase competition over resources and escalate grievances and local conflicts.

Economic factors are of key importance in considering the linkages between food and conflict. For example, commodity price fluctuations can result in the instability of food systems and lead to food riots because of the inelasticity of food.⁹ Food price spikes and competition over resources related to agriculture or pastoralism are frequently driven by short-term weather variations since agriculture is strongly affected by changes in temperature and rainfall patterns.¹⁰

Food insecurity both drives and is a result of displacement. In 2023, more than 90 million refugees and asylum seekers were displaced in 59 food-crisis countries/territories, an increase from 86 million in 2022 and 76 million in 2021.¹¹ As people lose access to their livelihoods, food, water, and other necessities, they are often forced to flee their homes while simultaneously facing significant barriers to income, humanitarian aid, healthcare and other essential services. This further exacerbates their vulnerability to food insecurity and undernutrition.¹²

The challenges posed by climate change are amplified for women and children. Female-led and single-parent households are less resilient to climate-related security risks in general,¹³ and climate hazards further correlate with increased violence against women, children, and the elderly.¹⁴ In many cases, gender-specific adaptation strategies have been well-documented where men migrate in search of economic opportunities, and women remain behind with the family and take on new roles and increased workloads.

Climate change will continue to make food supplies and prices more volatile. Extreme weather events such as heat waves can increase instability, with unusually warm periods associated with increases in conflict between farmers and nomadic groups. Developing countries are disproportionately affected in these cases since crops are usually grown in

⁹ adelphi and WFP 2023: Building climate and conflict resilient livelihoods and food systems: Insights from East Africa. https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/Building_climate_and_conflict_resilient_livelihoods_and_food_systems_Insights_from_East_Africa.pdf.

¹⁰ WFP USA 2017: Winning the Peace: Hunger and Instability. World Food Program USA. Washington, D.C. <https://www.wfpusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2017-Winning-the-Peace-Hunger-and-Instability.pdf>.

¹¹ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2024: The Global Report on Food Crises 2024. www.fsinplatform.org/grfc2024.

¹² FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2024: The Global Report on Food Crises 2024. www.fsinplatform.org/grfc2024.

¹³ adelphi and WFP 2023: Building climate and conflict resilient livelihoods and food systems: Insights from East Africa. [Climate_Peace_Security_Study_West_Nile_Uganda.pdf \(weatheringrisk.org\)](https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/Climate_Peace_Security_Study_West_Nile_Uganda.pdf).

¹⁴ adelphi and PIK 2022: Weathering Risk: The climate-security nexus in the IPCC report Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/IPCC_ClimateSecurity_Quotations_WR_0.pdf.

areas closer to their biophysical heat limits. This makes crop yields more vulnerable to temperature increase.¹⁵

Food and hunger are also increasingly being weaponised in conflict situations, particularly in contexts with constrained food production and distribution systems. This can have fatal implications. The cascading consequences of these global trends have made food and livelihood security a priority for policymakers, governments, and UN agencies given their important role in supporting sustainable peace.

Dispelling the Myths: Should Climate and Security be Linked? And is Climate Security an Issue for the UNSC?

Myth 1: Climate security is beyond the mandate of the UNSC and belongs in other UN bodies e.g. the UNFCCC or ECOSOC.

Climate security is understood by the UN Climate Security Mechanism **as the ways in which climate change, directly or indirectly, affects the risks of violent conflict**. This recognises the more traditional definition of security focused on military violence.¹⁶ This focus on violent conflict is the closest to the UN's conflict prevention usage. Other definitions of climate security focus on socioeconomic well-being, or a human security lens.¹⁷ This should be distinguished from research concerning the loss of life from direct exposure to extreme weather events and natural disasters¹⁸ or the significant literature on climate vulnerability. On the community level, the definition of climate vulnerability focuses more on the capacity of a community to cope with climate change, while on the systems level, it focuses on "the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, the adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes."¹⁹ It is important to acknowledge that the combination of high vulnerability, poor socio-economic indicators, and humanitarian needs such as hunger is often crucial contributors to conflict risks.²⁰

At the time the present report was published, the UNFCCC did not have a mandate to address peace and security. Executive Secretary Simon Stiell's (UNFCCC) briefing during the High-Level Open Debate on climate, food insecurity and conflict marked the first instance of the UNFCCC addressing the Security Council directly about the security risks posed by climate

¹⁵ For more information on the link between the environment, conflict and peace, see also: Rüttinger, Lukas; Raquel Munayer, Pia van Ackern, and Florian Titze: The nature of conflict and peace. The links between environment, security and peace and their importance for the United Nations. Gland: WWF International; Berlin: adelphi consult GmbH, 2022. https://climate-diplomacy.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/WWF-adelphi_The%20Nature%20of%20Conflict%20and%20Peace_mid%20res_0.pdf.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Roland Paris 2001: Human Security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security* 26(2): 87-102. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092123>.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Joshua Busby et al. 2014: In harm's way: Climate security vulnerability in Asia. *World Development* 112: 88—118; P.K. Krishnamurthy et al., "A methodological framework for rapidly assessing the impacts of climate risk on national-level food security through a vulnerability index," *Global Environmental Change* 25: 121-132. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X18302365>.

¹⁸ H-M Füssel 2007: Vulnerability: A generally applicable conceptual framework for climate change research, *Global Environmental Change* 17 (2): 155-167. NB: The IPCC defines security in terms of loss of life due to extreme climate-related events. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959378006000525>.

¹⁹ UNFCCC 2024: Glossary. <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Pages/glossary.aspx#:~:text=Vulnerability%20The%20degree%20to%20which,incluing%20climate%20variability%20and%20extremes>.

²⁰ See also W.N Adger et al. 2014: Human Security in C.B. Field et al. eds., *Climate change 2014: Impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability* Cambridge University Press. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIAR5-Chap12_FINAL.pdf.

change. This underscores the interconnections between the climate crisis and international stability as well as the growing understanding within the international community that addressing climate-related conflicts is essential for peace and stability. Stiell made clear that, unlike the UNFCCC's advisory capacity, the mandate of the UNSC enables it to act, which is exactly what is needed to tackle the crisis. This, however, does not mean that the Council would replace the UNFCCC on the topic of climate change, but rather that it would serve as a complement with regard to the security risks associated with climate change. Similarly, several Member States, including Algeria, the Dominican Republic, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, emphasised the interlinkages between climate change, food insecurity, and conflict and how they may drive inter-communal violence, hunger, and war. They brought forward evidence that climate shocks are expected to result in declining food production, food shortages, price spikes, and hunger. They emphasized that the highest impact would be on those whose livelihoods rely on these sectors, or women, and those who belong to vulnerable groups, including youths, the elderly and Indigenous populations.

While the launch of the Declaration on Relief, Recovery, and Peace at COP28 under the United Arab Emirates' presidency took an important step toward acknowledging the risks posed by climate change to relief, recovery and peace, the Declaration fell outside of the formal negotiations. Similarly, other UN organs such as the General Assembly and ECOSOC can indeed address climate security themes pertaining to human security, but the fact that 113 countries co-sponsored the Irish-Nigerien draft resolution on climate security²¹ offers the strongest indication yet of the broad consensus on climate change being addressed within the UNSC as it relates to threats to international peace and security.

In this regard, the High-Level Open Debate on 13–14 February 2024 revealed that doubts among UN Member States about this nexus and whether the UNSC should discuss the interlinkages between climate change and global peace and security have decreased.

Myth 2: There is insufficient evidence that climate change causes conflict.

The last IPCC report²² stated that there is no direct and automatic link between climate change and conflict. It also underlined that “there is no consensus on the causal association between observed climate change and conflicts.” This position can be attributed to the difficulties of establishing direct causality and the fact that in the past 20 years, most research has focused narrowly on the relationship between environmental factors and armed conflict in isolation. The view is also influenced by the authors' focus on more quantitative rather than qualitative studies, and the narrow search for direct rather than contributory risk pathways.

²¹ See United Nations Security Council Resolution S_ 2021/990: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_990.pdf.

²² While non-climatic factors are the dominant drivers of existing intrastate violent conflicts, in some assessed regions extreme weather and climate events have had a small, adverse impact on their length, severity or frequency, but the statistical association is weak (medium confidence). Through displacement and involuntary migration from extreme weather and climate events, climate change has generated and perpetuated vulnerability (medium confidence) IPCC 2022, p1-54 see: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryVolume.pdf.

There is a wealth of rich, locally informed, qualitative research, much of which resides in ‘grey literature’, that can deepen our understanding of these risk pathways considerably, but which was not included in the IPCC’s review.²³

Today, it is widely accepted that the most meaningful approach, as with all other scholarly analyses of the drivers of conflict, is to examine the indirect causal links, where climate-induced socio-economic changes may have a consequential impact on the risks of violence.²⁴

While there are many competing views, it is now incontrovertible that climate change may be a contributing factor to violent conflict.²⁵ Systematic studies of the literature point to a 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.

Climate change exerts an indirect and conditional effect on conflict risks, often increasing the gap between wealthier communities capable of adapting to new dynamics and poorer ones that already face greater risks of instability. 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. Adapting to and mitigating climate change can also play an important role in addressing many drivers of conflict and building peace.

Myth 3: The indirect nature of climate change risks to peace, cannot trigger the UNSC mandate.

Without an impending or ongoing conflict, the UNSC has been reluctant to call on states to enact climate measures. But as climate change effects put increasing pressure on existing social, economic and environmental challenges in many countries, questions of whether the UNSC could and should address the security implications of climate change more directly, have become increasingly pertinent. The growing evidence based on the linkages between climate change and its implications on security has gained significant attention which has aided the discussion on an extension of the Council’s mandate.

Questions of *whether* climate and security should be linked seem to have opened the space for the question of *how* the UNSC can tackle climate change and security linkages.

The High-Level Open Debate showed a growing trend of countries expressing concerns about climatic impacts on their governance, economic, and societal systems. For instance, many Member States voiced concerns about the existential threat that climate-driven sea level rise poses to their peoples; among them Ecuador, Malta, and Japan. Similarly, Mozambique stressed that climate change impacts exacerbate food insecurity leading to social disruptions and displacement.

²³ NB: The IPCC predominantly relies on academic sources, which do not always include the wealth of existing knowledge.

²⁴ See United Nations Climate Change 2022: Climate and Conflict. <https://unfccc.int/news/conflict-and-climate>.

²⁵ See Rüttinger, L.; R. Munayer, P. van Ackern, and F. Titze 2022: The nature of conflict and peace. The links between environment, security and peace and their importance for the United Nations. Gland: WWF International; Berlin: adelphi consult GmbH. https://climate-diplomacy.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/WWF-adelphi_The%20Nature%20of%20Conflict%20and%20Peace_mid%20res_0.pdf.

Another issue of concern that was voiced during the High-Level Open Debate was the impact of the war in Ukraine and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which have both deeply impacted the global food systems. Agriculture and food systems are pivotal in maintaining peace. Stiell's intervention underlined the inseparability of national security and food security in the face of climate-related challenges such as food shortages, production disruptions, price fluctuations, and conflicts, and the demand for inclusive and conflict-sensitive climate funds. During the debate, Member States also emphasised the importance of cooperation and partnership in building resilience among those most affected. Given this, the Council must be informed by the voices of those directly affected by climate change.

Myth 4: The link between food insecurity and conflict is one-directional.

Rapidly rising food prices, which can in turn propel food insecurity, are associated with higher levels of social unrest and conflict. The inverse is also true - higher levels of social unrest and conflict give rise to increasing food prices and can lead to social instability.

Global crop production is often concentrated in a few regions, making supply chains, markets, and prices vulnerable to extreme events in major producing countries such as Russia, China, Canada, and the US. For countries importing a large part of their food, these extreme events can have dramatic economic and political consequences. Rapid increases in food prices create strong pressures for governments to implement systems to make food affordable for their populations. In countries that are highly dependent on cereal imports, rising food prices can combine with other political pressures and grievances to create a conflict situation. There is strong evidence that food prices have acted as catalysts for protests and political unrest, which have often escalated into violence. Beyond these global events, food prices on local markets can fluctuate even when global and national prices are stable and can interact with violent conflict to form a vicious circle where conflicts give rise to increasing food prices and vice versa.²⁶

Households that experience recurrent hunger face a double-edged sword: on the one hand, their diets are inadequate, which potentially impacts their lives and livelihoods, while on the other they are unable to build resilient livelihoods, which makes them more vulnerable to future food crises.²⁷

While food prices are shaped by many factors, climate is a major driver of variations in agricultural production and thus food prices. Anthropogenic climate change is already causing noticeable increases in drought intensity, water scarcity, and extreme air temperatures, all of which put pressure on crops and livestock. Global warming is also expected to increase the frequency and intensity of severe water scarcity events. A recent study calculated that the likelihood of simultaneous severe droughts across the world's major wheat-growing areas would double between 2041 and 2070 compared to current conditions even under strong mitigation scenarios.²⁸ Therefore, it is plausible that recent climate

²⁶ Taken from the adelphi and Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research report "10 insights on climate impacts and peace": [10_insights_on_climate_impacts_and_peace_report.pdf \(adelphi.de\)](https://www.adelphi.de/en/publications/10_insights_on_climate_impacts_and_peace_report.pdf).

²⁷ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2024: The Global Report on Food Crises 2024. <http://www.fsinplatform.org/grfc2024>.

²⁸ Trnka et al., 2019: Mitigation efforts will not fully alleviate the increase in water scarcity occurrence probability in wheat-producing areas. *Sci. Adv.* 5. [Mitigation efforts will not fully alleviate the increase in water scarcity occurrence probability in wheat-producing areas | Science Advances](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba0000).

change-related events have already contributed to increases in violent conflict via its effect on food prices, even though this link still needs to be consolidated with attribution studies. Food price-related violent unrest in urban settings is emerging more often in democratic countries than in autocratic countries, suggesting that discontent over food prices may be even more widespread than observed.²⁹

Myth 5: Food security is an issue within the humanitarian sphere.

Food insecurity is a factor that exacerbates other political, economic, and social drivers of conflict, while simultaneously being a consequence of conflict itself. Sudden supply shocks and related price spikes, for instance, can contribute to the outbreak of riots and protests. Much like climate change is now considered a national security concern, food security has recently moved from the realm of the humanitarian, international development, and foreign assistance sphere to national and international security discourse. Already in the early 90s, the UNSC began to show a greater willingness to prescribe measures in internal situations of humanitarian emergency, thereby articulating a broader approach to what constitutes a threat to international peace and security (clearly described in Presidential Statement S/23500, 31 January 1992). Since then, the Council has intervened in a range of internal settings and has increasingly recognised the linkages between its peace and security agenda and issues more closely linked to development and human security. Its 2016 Sustaining Peace resolution laid out a broad concept of conflict prevention, aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict, recovery, reconstruction, and development. The Council acknowledged the link between conflict and hunger, and condemned the use of starvation as a weapon of war when it adopted its landmark Resolution 2417 in 2018. The Council's growing willingness to consider non-conventional security risks, and its wide-ranging concept of conflict prevention, provide a promising basis for a future inclusion of climate change and security on the Council's agenda.³⁰

Key Insights from the UNSC High-Level Open Debate: “The Impact of Climate Change and Food Insecurity on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security”

Introduction

Under the presidency of Guyana, represented by Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the United Nations Security Council convened a High-Level Open Debate on 'The Impact of Climate Change and Food Insecurity on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security', on 13th and 14th February 2024. The Member States' contributions showed growing consensus that the UNSC should address the issue of food security and especially, related climate finance, agriculture, inequalities, and the priorities of

²⁹ Taken from the adelphi and Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research report “10 insights on climate impacts and peace”:
[10_insights_on_climate_impacts_and_peace_report.pdf \(adelphi.de\)](https://adelphi.de/files/10_insights_on_climate_impacts_and_peace_report.pdf).

³⁰ Taken from Vivekananda, Janani, Adam Day and Susanne Wolfmaier 2020. What can the UN Security Council do on Climate and Security?
https://climate-diplomacy.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/What%20can%20the%20UN%20Security%20Council%20do%20on%20Climate%20and%20Security_.pdf.

Small Island Developing States. They also demonstrated a readiness to collaborate with different stakeholders, among them regional (economic) organisations and civil society, to advance the shared goal of a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Climate change, food insecurity and conflict

In his opening statement, Secretary-General António Guterres stressed the importance of cooperation and partnerships in addressing the climate and food crisis, linking climate action directly to food security and peace. Simon Stiell, Executive Director of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), emphasised the connection between hunger and conflict, advocating for increased information sharing and climate-sensitive programming funds to address the complex interplay between climate change and conflict-driven hunger. Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations and stressed the importance of cooperation in building resilience among those most affected. Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, Director of Global Initiatives and Head of Peace, Climate, and Sustainable Development of the International Peace Institute (IPI), proposed a reassessment of the relationship between sovereignty and territorial loss in addressing climate and food insecurity, suggesting the invocation of Article 34³¹ to investigate potential disputes. During the debate, Member States emphasised the interlinkages between climate change, food insecurity, and conflict, noting the expected impacts on declining food production, shortages, and hunger, particularly affecting vulnerable groups and potentially altering the relationships between sovereignty and territorial loss.

Other perspectives on widening the UNSC's mandate

The Russian Federation and India articulated a different perspective on broadening the Council's mandate to climate change and food insecurity. The former stated that there is no direct link between climate and socioeconomic issues and the mandate of the Security Council, while the latter maintained that climate change is interlinked with development matters and should therefore be discussed in forums that have universal participation. Additionally, although South Africa condemned the use of starvation as a weapon of warfare and acknowledged the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable states that can be addressed through multilateral partnerships, it nevertheless maintained that the connection between climate change and natural disasters on the one hand, and threats to international peace and security on the other, remains unclear and should therefore not be a matter to be dealt with in the UNSC. Similarly, Bolivia offered a critical view of widening the scope of the UNSC's mandate in this regard. China has generally maintained a consistent position, describing climate change as predominantly a development issue, outside the purview of the UNSC.³² During this open debate, China called for targeted actions to help developing countries enhance climate resilience and ensure food security.³³

³¹ In the UN Charter, Article 24 in Chapter VI on the Pacific Resolution of Disputes states: "The Security Council may investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security."

³² For an overview of different members' views on climate, peace and security in the UNSC, see: <https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/cooperation/climate-change-security-council-obstacles-opportunities-and-options>.

³³ For China's position on climate security in the UNSC, see: http://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/hyfy/202402/t20240220_11247245.htm.

Recommended action for the UNSC, Member States and International Organisations

A common recommendation proffered by Guyana, the Secretary-General, the briefers, and several Member States, centred on the establishment of a platform for communication and cooperation between the UNSC and other UN bodies, international organisations, regional (economic) organisations, scientific institutions, and civil society. This platform would mobilise concerted preventative action of the international community and would constitute a “reinforced multilateralism”. The UNSC was advised to acknowledge that its mandate includes acting on climate change-related conflicts by invoking Article 34 through which “the Security Council may investigate *any* dispute or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute...” Along these lines, Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch recommended that the Council set up a provisional investigative body to better understand the link between food security, climate and conflict at current warming levels. According to Roesch, such a body would need to provide space that includes a full range of views and should seek input from both permanent and elected members. This new body would signal the Council’s seriousness about protecting the smallest of nations. Additionally, it was recommended that the Council establish a platform for climate security cooperation, improving strategic coordination between all stakeholders on all levels. Moreover, the representatives from France and Algeria asked the Council to establish regional climate, peace and security hubs as well as conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, asked the Council to actively request a regular stream of information, including regular analysis and reports on climate change-related risks from the wider UN system, including relevant UN main organs such as ECOSOC and UN specialised agencies such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and other agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

On the other hand, it was recommended that Member States should adapt their National Action Plans (NAPs) to set food security as a top priority and align their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) more strictly with the Paris Agreement, including by outlining measures to address food insecurity, such as prioritising investments for climate-resilient agri-food systems and building up the resilience of their citizens in a climate- and peace-sensitive manner.

An important throughline was improving climate finance to make all programming of funds climate- and conflict-sensitive and to find mechanisms to help developing countries receive adequate financial support. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, as well as representatives from the United States, Germany, and Slovenia asked to make agriculture and food systems equitable and inclusive and rights-based and community-led; to build resilient communities by investing in sustainable agricultural practices and water; to empower women as leading agents; and to strengthen global humanitarian assistance. Slovenia suggested looking at all UNSC matters through a climate-sensitive lens to identify potential conflict triggers through early warning. Other Member States emphasised the need to address global peace and security through a holistic and integrated approach that considers environmental, socio-economic, and political responses. They further underlined that parties can work towards a

sustainable solution that promotes equity, peace and resilience, putting human security at the core. Through their contributions, China, the Republic of Korea, and Mozambique emphasised that actors must work together to bridge the gap between the Global North and South.

Finally, another recommendation was for International Organisations (IOs) to enhance cooperation among themselves. Alongside the UNSC, international organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF, and WWF should expand, rather than reinvent, their mandates. As requested by the representatives from Sierra Leone and France, ECOSOC and the wider UN system, alongside international organisations should regularly brief the UNSC on the impact of climate change and food insecurity on the maintenance of international peace and security.

What Can the UN Security Council Do on Climate, Food Insecurity and Conflict?

Operative measures that the UNSC can take in case a climate-related risk is identified as a threat

UNSC interventions have arguably been most successful when drawing on a broad range of tools, spanning from solving the root problems of the conflict and fostering institutional development and reform, to orchestrating coherence within the UN framework and integrating them into security operations. Considering this, there are three avenues through which the UNSC can address climate change and food insecurity.

It can do so:

1. by widening the scope of its mandate,
2. as part of its general response to conflict situations, for example through integration of climate/food security tenets in peacekeeping missions, and
3. by addressing climate change through its conflict prevention efforts, such as mediation, or peace negotiations that address the links between climate and security.

The UNSC can address climate change and food insecurity by widening the scope of its mandate.

Historically, the UNSC primarily focused on addressing isolated military conflicts. However, several provisions of the UN Charter give the legal basis for an expansion of the Council's mandate to issues that are traditionally not military. For instance, Article 34 states that "the Security Council may investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute..." This article empowers the Council to investigate *any* (future) dispute or situation with the potential to escalate to international friction.

The Security Council is primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. To take action however, it must first determine whether there is a "threat to peace", a "breach of peace", or an "act of aggression," as outlined in Article 39 of the UN Charter.

Thus, the determination of what constitutes a threat to peace and security is solely the responsibility of the Council. Furthermore, Article 39 states that the Council “shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.” If the UNSC finds a threat to peace under Article 39, it can use its authority to impose economic/diplomatic sanctions (Article 41) or authorise the use of force (Article 42). Consequently, and in accordance with Article 39, if the UNSC finds that a conflict is exacerbated by climate change and/or food insecurity, it can make recommendations to address them alongside other measures being imposed to address the drivers of the conflict and restore international peace and security.

A disproportionate burden of climate impacts and food insecurity continues to be borne by vulnerable groups, such as Small Island Developing States and those already facing pre-existing inequalities. In this regard, Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch proposed a reassessment of the relationship between sovereignty and territorial loss, as regulated by the Montevideo Convention³⁴. International law requires a state to possess a defined territory. However, climate change and rising sea levels pose the question of whether a state automatically goes extinct as it loses its territory. There is a strong assumption in the literature in favour of the continued existence of a state.³⁵ The logic behind this assumption is that one of the functions of international law is the maintenance of order, which in turn is based on the stability of international relations and, where possible and appropriate, the preservation of the status quo. Furthermore, membership of the UN is a *prima facie* evidence of statehood and appears to imply recognition by all other members. Continued membership, even in the event of territorial loss through rising sea levels, can therefore be seen as an implicit recognition of the continued existence of a state.

The UNSC can address climate change and food insecurity as part of its general response.

Second, the Council can address climate change and food insecurity in several situations of ongoing hostilities as part of its general peacekeeping responses. In 2022, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen faced famine-like conditions and were, simultaneously, affected by armed conflict or extreme levels of violence. In all of these conflicts, climate change-related weather events such as droughts, storms and extreme flooding contributed to existing food insecurity and political and economic instability. Addressing climate change and food insecurity in peacekeeping missions can, therefore, play a crucial role in mitigating conflict and fostering stability within fragile regions. For example, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has been distributing high-yielding seeds and farming tools to fight food insecurity, which is one underlying contributing factor to conflict dynamics in the country.³⁶ As increased pressure on livelihoods and food security can drive communal conflict, future UN peacekeeping missions are well-advised to include these considerations in their peace programming.

³⁴ The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States of 1933 stipulates that all states were equal sovereign units consisting of a permanent population, defined territorial boundaries, a government, and an ability to enter into agreements with other states.

³⁵ Wong, Derek 2013: Sovereignty sunk? The position of 'sinking states' at international law. https://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/1687485/02Wong-Depaginated.pdf.

³⁶ WFP 2023: Climate crisis drives malnutrition in South Sudan to unprecedented levels in flood-affected areas, WFP warns. <https://www.wfp.org/news/climate-crisis-drives-malnutrition-south-sudan-unprecedented-levels-flood-affected-areas-wfp>.

Additionally, in different UNSC resolutions and presidential statements, the Council has emphasised the need to assess climate change and food insecurity and its relationship to security risks. For instance, the 2023 Presidential Statement addressing conflict-induced food insecurity in armed conflict situations could serve as a model for the UNSC's general peacekeeping responses. More country-specific resolutions and presidential statements are needed to offer important precedents for a more expansive and systematic approach to climate and food security. And beyond resolutions, agreed measures require adequate resourcing – financing and technical capacity - to ensure the operationalisation of mandates.

The UNSC can address climate change and food insecurity through its conflict prevention efforts.

Although Article 1(1) of the UN Charter clearly assigns the responsibility to the UN “to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace”, the UNSC generally does little operative work on prevention. However, the Council's growing willingness to consider non-conventional security risks, and its wide-ranging concept of conflict prevention as laid out in the 2016 Sustaining Peace resolution, provide a promising basis for putting climate change and food insecurity on the Council's agenda.

Thus, the Council should actively ensure the mainstreaming of climate change and food security into its conflict prevention endeavours. This can be done through climate-sensitive mediation and peace negotiations, by enhancing peacekeeping missions' capacities to assess climate-related risks and opportunities across early warning, planning, and prevention as well as by including climate-specific language in mandates. More specifically, the UNSC's prevention toolkit should include climate forecasting, locally-grounded and climate-informed early warning systems, it must deepen its cooperation with regional and sub-regional mechanisms and the Secretary-General should include climate fragility issues in his reports. In addition, a preventative approach requires sustainable land management practices, climate-resilient agriculture, equitable access to water resources and tackling the root causes of resource scarcity and social disparities, especially strengthening the role of women and youth. Lasting peace can be built by mainstreaming a climate change and food insecurity mandate in peacekeeping missions.

In this context, it is important to note that in addressing climate and food insecurity, the Council does not supersede the UNFCCC but complements the latter's work. While, for instance, the UNFCCC mandate does not extend to taking action, the UNSC's mandate does, which gives it powerful capacity to respond with appropriate actions. The UNSC has the power to investigate any conflict where climate change is central as long as it triggers international friction. The potential this offers for strengthening accountability in this area should not be underestimated.

Existing precedent for situation-appropriate action

During the High-Level Open Debate, Member States' contributions demonstrated one key position: a broad consensus that the UNSC should address the issue of climate change and

food security-induced conflict as part of its mandate. Participants' proposals to achieve this common goal centred around relying on existing precedent to establish a legal basis for legitimising the UNSC's wider scope of action.

From a military security approach to a human security approach

As stated above, the UNSC has historically, focused primarily on addressing isolated military conflicts. However, following the end of the Cold War, the UNSC began to show a greater willingness to also prescribe measures in internal situations of humanitarian emergency and conflict prevention, thereby articulating a broader approach to the understanding of what constitutes a threat to international peace and security. This demonstrates the important role of creating precedence to achieving an expansion of the Council's mandate.

The Council can expand its mandate within the scope of Article 34 of the Charter which states that "The Security Council may investigate any dispute or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute..." Additionally, resolution 2457 'Silencing the Guns' on the impact of climate change on stability in Africa outlined steps to enhance international cooperation and partnership as well as robust support for peace operations led by the African Union. The adoption of resolution 2417 in 2018 was welcomed as a landmark expression of unity on prohibiting the starving of civilians as a method of warfare - essentially weaponizing food – as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations.

A widening scope of action in non-traditional security issues

Another important example of the thematically widening scope of the UNSC is resolution 1983 on the impact of HIV/AIDS on international peace and security. It recognised that UN peacekeeping operations were important in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and welcomed its inclusion in the UN's peacekeeping mandates, stressing the needed support against social stigma and discrimination. Similarly, Resolution 2177 determined that the unprecedented extent of the Ebola outbreak in Africa constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Additionally, as the following instances will demonstrate, the UNSC is more attuned to, responsive to, and active on environmental security than is often realised. Already in resolution 687 in 1991 the Council expressed its concern about Iraq setting fire to Kuwaiti oil wells and spilling oil into the Persian Gulf. The UNSC named Iraq as 'liable under international law for any direct loss, damage – including environmental damage and depletion of natural resources – or injury to foreign governments, nationals and corporations as a result of its unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait.' In 2007, the UNSC held its first-ever debate on the "Maintenance of international peace and security: the impact of climate change,". The Council expressed concern that the possible adverse effects of climate change could, in the long-run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security and that the loss of territory in some States due to sea-level rise, particularly in small low-lying island States, could have possible security implications. Further precedent on environmental security, on the conflict prevention side, includes resolution 1625 in 2005 to act against the illegal exploitation of natural resources in Africa, resolution 2195 in 2014 on the development of transnational organised crime and terrorism through the illicit trade of natural resources as well as several open debates and Arria Formulas on climate or environment-related

security issues since 2007. More recently, the UN Security Council has recognised the importance of climate change and environmental change for the stability of regions and countries through several resolutions. Resolution 2349 on Lake Chad from 2017 explicitly refers to climate change and its impact on "water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation and food insecurity" and establishes a link between these factors and the rise in violent extremism.

Available Course of Action Within the Respective Mandates of other UN Organs and Intergovernmental Agencies

During the High-Level Open Debate, representatives from the United Kingdom and Switzerland urged the Council to enhance multi-stakeholder **cooperation** by establishing a coordination platform and conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, thereby expanding and strengthening its mandate, while also fostering cooperation and partnership on the intertwined issues of climate change, food insecurity and conflict. This calls for a paradigm shift towards strengthened coordination and partnership to better prevent, anticipate, and target the root causes of food crises, rather than responding to their impacts when they have occurred already. This "reinforced multilateralism" requires innovative approaches and more coordinated efforts by international organisations, governments, the private sector, regional organisations, civil society and communities.

Cooperation is a vital tool in building resilience among those most affected by climate change, emphasising the need for collaborative efforts to address these complex challenges. This can be supported by **E10 members** who can use their role on the Council to introduce new evidence of the climate-security link. Commissioning empirical research, inviting expert briefers from the field, and sharing of experiences by Council members, all help to generate more evidence of the causal relationship between climate change and security.

Establishing a shared understanding of the scientific evidence could be another important tool in reducing prevailing tensions over the inclusion of this topic in the Council's mandate. During the High-Level Open Debate, the Council was advised to actively request a regular stream of information, including annual analysis and regular reports on climate change-related risks from the wider UN system including main organs such as ECOSOC and specialised agencies such as FAO, WFP, UNEP, UNDP, IMF, and IFAD. By doing so, it can play a role in building and facilitating partnerships. Additionally, the briefers suggested that the platform should also include regional climate, peace and security hubs as well as conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms.

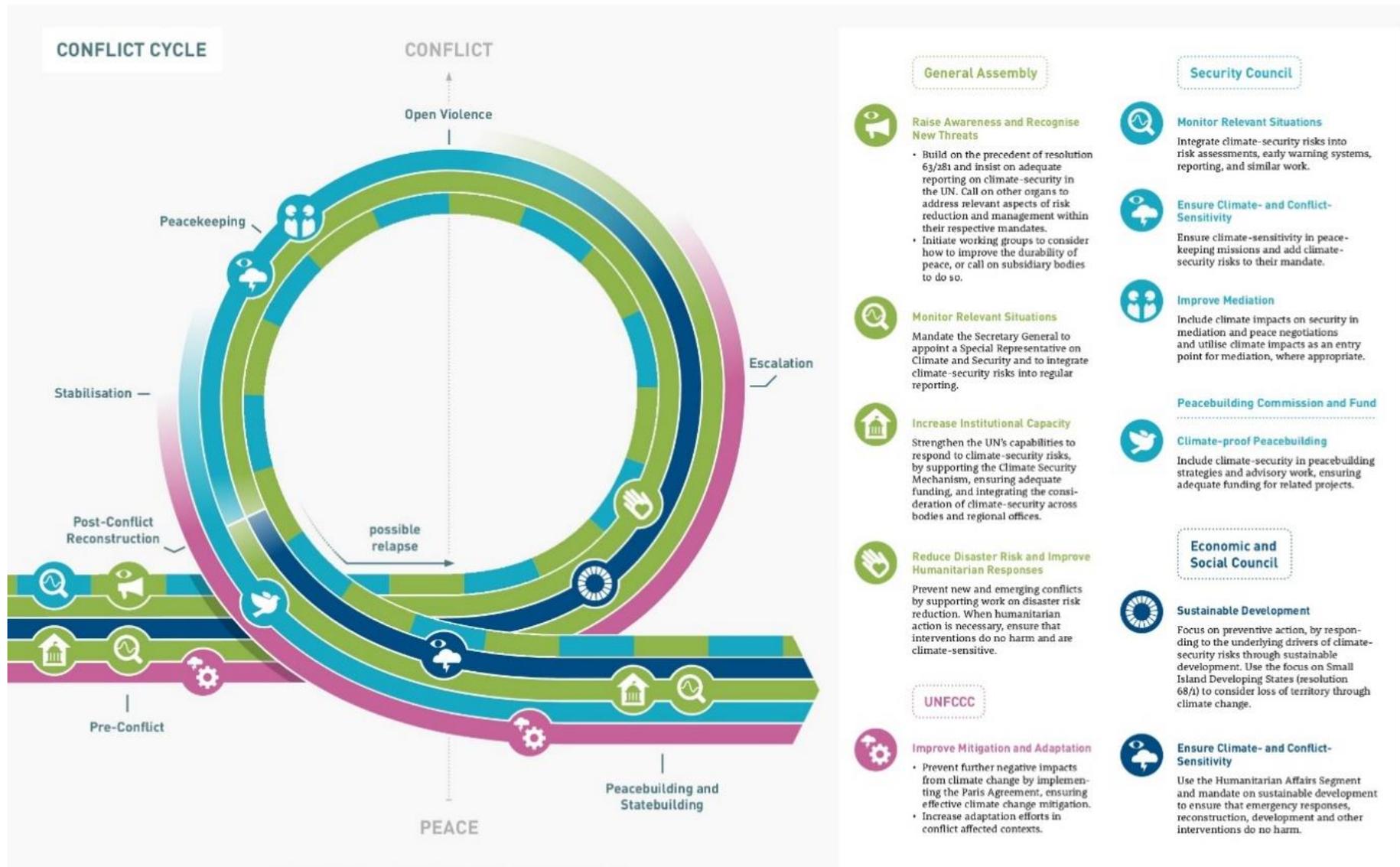
Regional strategies covering most of the fragile, conflict-affected parts of the world, and regional envoys can provide briefings to the Security Council. UNOWAS' briefings to the Council have been some of the most important in placing regional climate trends on the agenda, but according to several experts, 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 on key climate security trends.

Informal settings can often lead to successful outcomes. Formal sessions of the Council are rarely where agreements are reached in today's geopolitical environment. 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.

Country-specific resolutions often generate the biggest support. Thematic resolutions have often generated more pushback from Council members than would have been the case if only country-specific resolutions had been sought. 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.

Other UN bodies besides the UNSC have essential roles in addressing the risks and vulnerabilities impacted by climate change too, which may be complemented by UNSC engagement. Often, the deepest disagreements tend to arise around creating new mandates and new resources. But existing mandates already offer room to maneuver, particularly amongst the regional envoys, but also within peacekeeping missions. The following is an elaboration of potential actions in line with institutional mandates of key UN institutions:

HOW CAN UN ORGANS RESPOND TO CLIMATE-SECURITY RISKS?



Source: Climate Security Expert Network 2020: <https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/conflict/csen-briefer-how-can-un-organs-respond-climate-security-risks>.

- 1. UN General Assembly (UNGA):** There have been many instances so far where the General Assembly has acted when the UNSC had become deadlocked. UNGA Resolution 377—also known as the *Uniting for Peace* resolution—allows the General Assembly to call emergency sessions on threats to peace and security when this happens. After lying unused for 25 years, the resolution was invoked in February 2022 in relation to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, resolution 63/281 noted the respective responsibilities of the principal organs of the UN, including that of the UNSC for peace and security, and of the UNGA and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for sustainable development issues. Importantly, the UNGA has a powerful role in setting the mandates of other bodies. For instance, it oversees the work of the Peacebuilding Commission and could consider expanding its mandate to include climate-related risks more explicitly.
- 2. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP):** UNEP advocates for a more expansive environmental approach to peacekeeping. It has conducted several post-conflict assessments and brought attention to the wider implications of environmental security across the entire lifecycle of conflict. Moreover, UNEP has issued reports on the impact of climate change on women and transnational crime.
- 3. UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC):** ECOSOC is the central UN forum for discussing and formulating policy recommendations on international economic, social, cultural, educational, and health issues. Since 2008, the body agreed that addressing the issue of climate change effectively requires comprehensive approaches encompassing the challenges of economic growth and development, food security and energy, evident in its *Measures To Reduce The Impact Of Climate Change On Agriculture And Global Food Security*. Since that time, however, there has not been much progress on the subject. The Charter tasks ECOSOC with promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress, identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems, facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This mandate is applicable to issues related to climate change and food insecurity.
- 4. The World Food Programme (WFP):** WFP supports governments and local communities to anticipate, prevent and respond to food crisis, including those relating to conflict and climate change. To stop climate change from aggravating risks to food security, social and economic stability, it is critical that communities increase preparedness and protection from extreme weather events. This means becoming better at acting ahead of floods, storms, droughts, and heatwaves – and having the capacity in place to respond quickly. Climate risk analysis and early warning systems, attached to forecast-based financing programmes are the first line of defense to protect lives, food security, and social cohesion. Strong institutional partnerships to operationalize the nexus between humanitarian, development, peace, and climate action are also critical. Finally, to harness the management of climate risks for international peace and stability it is essential to empower local institutions, as they

are the first and most efficient resource for disaster preparedness and resilience building.

- 5. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):** FAO helps crisis-affected and at-risk populations to withstand future shocks by embedding resilience-building within humanitarian activities. FAO could embed a climate-sensitive lens in all its activities. Furthermore, FAO can influence the general narrative around the climate-food-conflict nexus, as it has done in its *2023 Thematic Review on Climate Security and Peacebuilding* which suggests guidance for future investments.
- 6. UN Secretary-General (UNSG):** The UNSG submits or transmits reports to the Security Council on various issues as requested in its resolutions. For instance, the UNSG's report on the protection of individuals in armed conflict included a section on the environmental impact of conflict (2018). As this followed from the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Toxics, it demonstrates the importance of partnership and the power of a multilateral system.
- 7. UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food:** The mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food should be broadened to include the impact of climate change on food security and stability. As a UN Special Rapporteur can choose to intervene directly with governments on allegations of violations of human rights that fall under their mandate, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food could intervene with countries that, as a consequence of conflict, fail to ensure their populations are food secure.
- 8. UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator:** The mandate of the UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator should be broadened. This office was created to lead and organise a cohesive system-wide response to rising food insecurity. It can help to scale up operations quickly in countries facing the highest risk of famine by strengthening system-wide coordination; identifying and helping to develop long-term solutions to improve community-resilience; raising global awareness to mobilise support and funding; and helping to unlock financial resources from donors.
- 9. High-Level Task Force on Famine Prevention:** This task force has repeatedly rung the alarm bell, exposing the seriousness of food insecurity and conflict, for instance through a joint *FAO-WFP Call for Action to Prevent Famine* in March 2021. The impacts of climate change should continue to be taken into consideration as well. Additionally, the task force can coordinate advocacy efforts or brief the UNSG, the UNSC and other UN bodies, calling for action and raising awareness.
- 10. Regional Offices:** For instance, in a UNSC meeting in 2023, the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) called for expanding the United Nations-African Union partnership to tackle rising violence and humanitarian crises across Africa. Similar calls for action must now be made regarding the link between climate change, food insecurity and conflict.

11. UN Climate Security Mechanism (CSM): The CSM can further coordinate and streamline action between its founding entities: the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO). As a mechanism that brings together different entities and promotes joint action on addressing climate fragility risks, it should expand its work on climate finance and food security.

12. UN University: The UN University is supporting new research on the connections between climate change, peace, and security in fragile, climate-vulnerable regions and can deliver valuable input for the regular stream of information to the UNSC. It could support reports and analyses in the same way that it has supported the FAO in writing the *2023 Thematic Review on Climate Security and Peacebuilding*.

Annex 1: Recommendations from the United Nations Security Council High-Level Open Debate, 9547th meeting on 13-14 February

“The Impact of Climate Change and Food Insecurity on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security”

Actions recommended by the Presidency, the Secretary General, the briefers and several Member States included the establishment of a **platform for communication and cooperation between the UNSC and other UN bodies**, international organisations, regional (economic) organisations and science-based entities. This platform would mobilise concerted preventative action of the international community and would constitute a **“reinforced multilateralism”**.³⁷ Member States proposed tightening their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), adapting their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), prioritising investments for climate-resilient agri-food systems and building the resilience of their citizens in a climate- and peace-sensitive manner. Slovenia suggested an early warning approach that involves looking at all UNSC matters through a climate-sensitive lens to identify potential conflict triggers.³⁸ Member States emphasised the need to address global peace and security using a holistic and integrated approach that considers environmental, socio-economic and political responses. Country representatives underlined that parties can work towards a sustainable solution that promotes equity, peace and resilience, putting **human security** at the core.³⁹ Through their contributions, China, Korea and Mozambique emphasised that actors must work to bridge the gap between the Global North and South.⁴⁰

Member States also made other recommendations addressed to the Security Council, the UN membership as a whole, and to international organisations.

They recommended that the UN Security Council:

- establish a platform for climate security cooperation, improving strategic coordination between all stakeholders on all levels;⁴¹
- establish regional climate, peace and security hubs;⁴²
- establish conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms;⁴³
- invoke Article 34 of the UN Charter (which states “The Security Council may investigate any dispute or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.”) and establish a provisional investigative body to better understand the link between food security, climate and conflict at current warming levels;⁴⁴
- outline steps that include a full analysis of the impact of climate change on food security and conflict;⁴⁵

³⁷ Representative of Switzerland

³⁸ Representative of Slovenia

³⁹ Representative of Mozambique, the United Kingdom, Thailand

⁴⁰ Representative of China, Korea, Mozambique

⁴¹ Representative from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Beth Bechdol, FAO

⁴² Beth Bechdol, FAO

⁴³ Representative of Algeria, France

⁴⁴ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

⁴⁵ Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Guyana Presidency

- request a regular stream of information from other UN bodies, including analysis and report on climate change-related risks;⁴⁶
- support UN missions on the ground;⁴⁷

Member States were urged to:

- adapt NAPs to set food security as a top priority;⁴⁸
- align NDCs more strictly with the Paris agreement, including measures to address food security;⁴⁹
- improve climate finance
 - Make all programming of funds climate-sensitive;⁵⁰
 - Find mechanisms to help developing countries receive adequate financial support;
 - Repurpose climate funds;⁵¹
 - Increase adaptation finance: green investments for climate adaptation through better food systems;⁵²
- reform agriculture
 - Make food systems equitable and inclusive, rights-based and community-led;⁵³
 - Build an open, fair, and inclusive food production and supply chain;⁵⁴
 - Create national strategies for reducing food loss and waste;⁵⁵
 - Prioritise investments for climate-resilient agri-food systems, such as diversified crops and irrigation systems;⁵⁶
- build resilient communities by
 - investing in sustainable agricultural practices and water;⁵⁷
 - empowering women to be leading agents in this;⁵⁸
- promote innovation, research and development, especially in the agricultural sector⁵⁹
- invest in peacebuilding initiatives;⁶⁰
- introduce, or, where already available, make more systematic use of, early warning systems;⁶¹
- strengthen global humanitarian assistance
 - Access to humanitarian supplies should not face any conditions;⁶²
 - Integrate humanitarian and development assistance;⁶³

⁴⁶ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC; Beth Bechdol, FAO

⁴⁷ Representative of France

⁴⁸ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

⁴⁹ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

⁵⁰ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

⁵¹ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

⁵² Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

⁵³ Representative of the United States, Germany

⁵⁴ Representative of China

⁵⁵ Representative of the United States

⁵⁶ Beth Bechdol, FAO; Representative of Sierra Leone

⁵⁷ Representative of Algeria

⁵⁸ Representative of Slovenia

⁵⁹ Representative of Algeria, the United Kingdom

⁶⁰ Representative of Sierra Leone

⁶¹ Representative of Sierra Leone, Dominican Republic, Germany

⁶² Representative of China

⁶³ Representative of France

It was recommended that International Organisations:

- enhance cooperation among each other;⁶⁴
- alongside the UNSC, other international organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF, IFAD, WWF etc. should expand, rather than reinvent, their mandates;⁶⁵
- ECOSOC and the wider UN system, alongside other international organisations, should regularly brief the UNSC of the topic.⁶⁶

ANNEX 2⁶⁷: A short history of climate and security in the Council

The UNSC held its [first debate](#) 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 predominantly 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, stating that “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 impacts caused by climate change and the legacy of this PRST is one of limited follow-up action (though it remains an

⁶⁴ Representative of Algeria

⁶⁵ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

⁶⁶ Representative of Sierra Leone, France

⁶⁷ This section is taken from “Climate change in the Security Council: Obstacles, opportunities, and options” by Dr. Adam Day and Dr. Erica Harper: <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Research%20Brief%20Climate%20Change%20in%20the%20Security%20Council.pdf>.

important reference point and one of the few general climate-security statements by the Council).

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

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.

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 SRSRG of UNOWAS on the issues facing the Sahel region in particular.

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 recognise the broader relationship between climate change and security via so-called “thematic” resolutions. Germany’s 2020 presidency oversaw an important [open session](#), 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.” 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 that are country or region specific, we strongly disagree that climate is a generic security issue.” 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).⁶⁸ 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](#)).

ANNEX 3: Presentations of the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the Secretary General and the briefers

The presentations of the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the United Nations Secretary General, and the briefers can be accessed [here](#) including:

- Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana (pp. 8 ff.),
- António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations (pp. 2 ff.);
- Mr. Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (p. 4 f.);
- Ms. Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (p. 6 f.); and
- Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, Director of Global Initiatives and Head of Peace, Climate and Sustainable Development, International Peace Institute (p. 7 f.).

Statements delivered during the resumed session of the open debate on 14th February are available [here](#).

⁶⁸ See United Nations Security Council Resolution S/2021/990 2021: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_990.pdf.

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office@adelphi.de
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Contacts

Alexandra Steinkraus (adelphi)
steinkraus@adelphi.de

Permanent Mission of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana
to the United Nations
801 Second Avenue, Suite 501, New York, NY 10017
+1 (212) 573 5828
pmny@mission.gov.gy
www.un.int/guyana

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