

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

Introduction

Under the presidency 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 13 and 14 February 2024. The climate-conflict-food insecurity nexus is one of Guyana's priorities for its tenure on the Council and it decided to use its first presidency to advance dialogue on the topic. The debate provided an important forum for UN Member States to address the urgent, complex and interconnected challenges posed by climate change and food insecurity on global peace and security.

The Member States' contributions showed broad consensus that the UNSC should address the interconnection between food insecurity, climate change and conflict and especially revolved around climate finance, agriculture, Small Islands Developing States and pre-existing inequalities. 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. Those that clearly articulated a different perspective on the Security Council discussing climate change were the Russian Federation, India, South Africa and Bolivia. Russia stated there is no direct link between climate and socioeconomic issues and the mandate of the Security Council, while India maintained that climate change is interlinked with development matters and should therefore be discussed in forums that have universal participation.

Participants

Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of Guyana, adopted the agenda and invited the Secretary General, the Heads of State, distinguished ministers, and all high-level representatives. He invited the briefers Simon Stiell - Executive Director, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); Beth Bechdol - Deputy Director General, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch - Director of Global Initiatives and Head of Peace, Climate, and Sustainable Development, International Peace Institute (IPI) to participate in the meeting. Moreover, he invited the participation of Ambassador Stavros Lambrinidis, Head of Delegation of the EU to the UN, and Laetitia Courtois, Permanent Observer and Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations.

Non-Council members that participated in the meeting were: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium¹, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada², Colombia, Chile, Croatia, Czechia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Micronesia, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Ireland³, Israel, Italy, Jamaica⁴, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lichtenstein, Maldives, Mauritania⁵, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru⁶, NL, Nigeria, Norway⁷, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Singapore, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tonga⁸, Türkiye, Ukraine, UAE, Vanuatu⁹, Vietnam.

¹ On behalf of Benelux countries.

² On behalf of the 23 members of the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti

³ On behalf of the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger

⁴ On behalf of CARICOM

⁵ On behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

⁶ On behalf of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security

⁷ On behalf of Nordic countries

⁸ On behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum

⁹ On behalf of Pacific Small Island Developing States

The debate

In the Opening Statement, Secretary General António Guterres underscored the significance of cooperation and partnerships in addressing the climate chaos and the global food crisis, stating that, **"Climate action is action for food security and action for peace."**

The Secretary General highlighted the interconnected relationship between the three, noting that climate and conflict were two leading drivers of global food crises, and that climate chaos is imperilling food production across the world. He stated further that they posed serious and mounting threats to global peace and security, and that it is only right that they be addressed by the Security Council. He urged the Council to act urgently in order to break the deadly links between conflict, climate and food insecurity. In the first briefing of the debate, Simon Stiell, Executive Director of the UNFCCC, affirmed the links between hunger and conflict, highlighting the relationship between food scarcity and inter-communal violence, hunger and war. He maintained that there is no national security without food security and acknowledged that while the UNFCCC mandate does not extend to taking action, it can build partnerships. He underlined the need for increased information sharing and awareness within the council, as well as the need for climate-sensitive programming of funds. He suggested aligning National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and climate funds with food security initiatives to better address the complex interplay between climate change and conflict-driven hunger. Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director General at FAO, underscored in her briefing the disproportionate impact of climate change on the most vulnerable populations. She reiterated the interconnectedness of food security and peace, stating that, **"10% of the land suitable for large-scale agriculture will become climatically unsuitable by mid-century."** Bechdol stressed the importance of cooperation as a vital tool in building resilience among those most affected by climate change, emphasising the need for collaborative efforts to address these complex challenges. Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, Director of Global Initiatives and Head of Peace, Climate, and Sustainable Development at IPI, presented the unifying potential of climate change as a global issue, suggesting it could foster unity among nations. Roesch proposed a reassessment of the relationship between sovereignty and territorial loss, as regulated by the Montevideo Convention. She maintained that the Council addressing climate and food insecurity does not supersede the UNFCCC but rather serves as a complement to it, proffering that Article 34 of the UN Charter empowers the Council to investigate any dispute or situation with the potential to escalate international friction.

During the debate, several Council members (and other Member States) emphasised the interlinkages between climate change, food insecurity, and conflict and how they may drive inter-communal violence, hunger, and war. They brought forward that climate shocks are expected to result in declining food production, food shortages, price spikes, and hunger, particularly impacting those whose livelihoods rely on these sectors or who belong to vulnerable groups, including women, youth, the elderly, or indigenous populations. Furthermore, in the context of territorial loss occasioned by climate change, there will have to be a rethink of the relationship between sovereignty and territory regulated by the Montevideo Convention, (especially in cases where governance is weak or pre-existing grievances lead to violent escalation).¹⁰

Vanuatu, on behalf of Pacific Small Island Developing States, along with the Dominican Republic and Mozambique maintained that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) encounter obstacles in adapting to climate change impacts like rising sea levels.¹¹ Climate finance emerged as another focal point in the debate, with the current costs of adaptation to climate change being overshadowed by anticipated future costs. Agriculture was another discussion point, as climate change may significantly affect crop production and fisheries, displace farmers, alter migratory routes, create tensions between farming and herding populations and introduce new health risks. The debate concluded that cooperation would be among the most important tools to address these complex and compounding crises.

¹⁰ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

¹¹ Representative of the Dominican Republic, Vanuatu (on behalf of Pacific Island Developing States), Mozambique, Singapore

“10% of the area suitable for large-scale agriculture as of now, will be climatically unsuitable by mid-century.”¹²

The Russian Federation stated that climate security falls beyond the scope of action for the UNSC. Simon Stiell and Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch had stated in their presentations at the beginning of the debate that the scope of the UNSC’s mandate to take action, in contrast to the UNFCCC’s capacity, is essential for addressing the crisis effectively. The briefers’ position was that the Council should play a more active role. In contrast to the consensus observed throughout the two-day-long debate, the Russian representative expressed reservations about including climate and socio-economic themes in the UNSC’s mandate. He maintained that there was no acute food deficit but a misallocation of resources in a time of increasing prices, caused by the current agro-industrial complex. India stated that climate change is interlinked with development matters and should rather be discussed in forums that have universal participation. The country’s representative emphasised the need for more climate-resilient crops. While 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, the country maintained that the connection between conflict and food security remains unclear and should therefore not be a matter to be dealt with in the UNSC. Bolivia stated that while climate change and food insecurity have an impact on international peace and security, it is not the role of the UNSC but, instead, the UNFCCC to address the issue. China, also a permanent member, emphasised that climate change negatively impacts food insecurity, particularly in developing nations. The country proposed that each situation should be studied separately as some conflicts may not have a direct linkage to climate change.

“Food and climate are part of many conflicts, but not part of the UNSC security agenda. This is why Guyana believes that the UNSC should address food and climate as well.”¹³

Recommendations

“Climate change is not an enemy we can name. It is a topic that most parties agree about and therefore, it could actually unify humanity.”¹⁴

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”**.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ Through their contributions, China, Korea and Mozambique emphasised that actors must work to bridge the gap between the Global North and South.¹⁸

¹² Beth Bechdol, FAO

¹³ Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Guyana Presidency

¹⁴ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

¹⁵ Representative of Switzerland

¹⁶ Representative of Slovenia

¹⁷ Representative of Mozambique, the United Kingdom, Thailand

¹⁸ Representative of China, Korea, Mozambique

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;¹⁹
- establish regional climate, peace and security hubs;²⁰
- establish conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms;²¹
- 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;²²
- outline steps that include a full analysis of the impact of climate change on food security and conflict;²³
- request a regular stream of information from other UN bodies, including analysis and report on climate change-related risks;²⁴
-
- support UN missions on the ground;²⁵

Member States were urged to:

- adapt NAPs to set food security as a top priority;²⁶
- align NDCs more strictly with the Paris agreement, including measures to address food security;²⁷
- improve climate finance
 - Make all programming of funds climate-sensitive;²⁸
 - Find mechanisms to help developing countries receive the adequate financial support;
 - Repurpose climate funds;²⁹
 - Increase adaptation finance: green investments for climate adaptation through better food systems;³⁰
- reform agriculture
 - Make food systems equitable and inclusive, rights-based and community-led;³¹
 - Build an open, fair and inclusive food production and supply chain;³²
 - Create national strategies for reducing food loss and waste;³³
 - Prioritise investments for climate-resilient agri-food systems, such as diversified crops and irrigation systems;³⁴
- build resilient communities by

¹⁹ Representative from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Beth Bechdol, FAO

²⁰ Beth Bechdol, FAO

²¹ Representative of Algeria, France

²² Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

²³ Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Guyana Presidency

²⁴ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC; Beth Bechdol, FAO

²⁵ Representative of France

²⁶ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

²⁷ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

²⁸ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

²⁹ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

³⁰ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC

³¹ Representative of the United States, Germany

³² Representative of China

³³ Representative of the United States

³⁴ Beth Bechdol, FAO; Representative of Sierra Leone

- investing in sustainable agricultural practices and water;³⁵
- empowering women to be leading agents in this;³⁶
- promote innovation, research and development, especially in the agricultural sector³⁷
- invest in peacebuilding initiatives;³⁸
- introduce, or, where already available, make more systematic use of, early warning systems;³⁹
- strengthen global humanitarian assistance
 - Access to humanitarian supplies should not face any conditions;⁴⁰
 - Integrate humanitarian and development assistance;⁴¹

It was recommended that International Organisations:

- enhance cooperation among each other;⁴²
- alongside the UNSC, other international organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF, IFAD, WWF etc. should expand, rather than reinvent, their mandates;⁴³
- ECOSOC and the wider UN system, alongside other international organisations, should regularly brief the UNSC of the topic.⁴⁴

“The less action the UNSC takes on climate, the more action the UNSC will have to take on conflict.”⁴⁵

“Done right, climate action can help build peace.”⁴⁶

³⁵ Representative of Algeria

³⁶ Representative of Slovenia

³⁷ Representative of Algeria, the United Kingdom

³⁸ Representative of Sierra Leone

³⁹ Representative of Sierra Leone, Dominican Republic, Germany

⁴⁰ Representative of China

⁴¹ Representative of France

⁴² Representative of Algeria

⁴³ Dr. Jimena Leiva Roesch, IPI

⁴⁴ Representative of Sierra Leone, France

⁴⁵ Representative of the United Kingdom

⁴⁶ Simon Stiehl, UNFCCC