

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 2 January 2019 from the Permanent Representative  
of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations addressed to the  
Secretary-General**

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of the Dominican Republic, the Security Council plans to hold an open debate on 25 January 2019, on the theme “Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security”.

In that regard, the Dominican Republic has prepared the attached concept note (see annex). I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Francisco **Cortorreal**

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic  
to the United Nations



**Annex to the letter dated 2 January 2019 from the Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme, “Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security”, to be held on 25 January 2019**

**Climate change is one of the most urgent challenges to the maintenance of international peace and security**

1. We must continue to address climate-fragility risks in a sustained manner. As stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, climate change is the defining issue of our time and a direct, existential threat.<sup>1</sup> It brings about harmful slow-onset hazards such as sea-level rise, as well as rapid shocks such as floods. The frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters are set to increase further. In many regions, these phenomena are already harming critical systems, such as water security, food security and health, in addition to contributing to displacement around the globe. All these factors undermine human dignity and people’s ability to develop and prosper, especially young people. Women in particular are also affected, in terms of both their livelihoods and their security, by the impact of climate change in conflict-affected settings, owing to the central role they play in agriculture and in the collection and management of natural resources, including food, water and energy. Those adverse impacts must be addressed, not only because of their direct consequences on human security, but also because they tend to multiply existing vulnerabilities and risk making conflict more likely, more intense and longer-lasting. They impair or reverse progress in economic and social development, especially in countries with a strong reliance on few economic drivers, or a single one, such as tourism. This, in turn, correlates with lower human security, greater instability and higher risk of conflict and represents a threat to international peace and security.

2. The international community made significant progress in building a framework for systematically addressing climate change, most notably by establishing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and adopting the subsequent Paris Agreement. Progress on addressing disaster risks under the Hyogo Framework for Action and its successor, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, has also been encouraging. However, much less progress has been made in addressing the risks of social and political instability, insecurity and conflict that arise from the interaction of climate change and social, economic, demographic and political factors. Clearly, the climate-fragility risks affecting international peace and security extend beyond the mandate of the Framework Convention and fall under the responsibility of the Security Council.

3. In recent years, the Security Council has increasingly recognized those impacts and has begun to call for better information and appropriate risk management in specific regional circumstances. However, the risk management approach must become far more systematic and comprehensive. The first Council debate on the impact of climate change on peace and security was convened in 2007 by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Since then, the issue has been raised on a number of occasions in Council debates and informal meetings. In 2011, the Council held a second debate, under the presidency of Germany, entitled “Maintenance of international peace and security: the impact of climate change”. In

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<sup>1</sup> António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, remarks to delegates on climate change, New York, 10 September 2018. Available from [www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-09-10/secretary-generals-remarks-climate-change-delivered](http://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-09-10/secretary-generals-remarks-climate-change-delivered).

July 2018, Sweden contributed to the understanding of the issue by leading a Council debate on the theme “Understanding and addressing climate-related security risks”. In parallel to those initiatives, which highlighted the security implications and dimensions of climate change, the Security Council has, in recent resolutions and statements, acknowledged the adverse effects of climate change on the stability of some countries and regions, in particular in Africa, such as in the Lake Chad Basin region (resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#)), Somalia (resolution [2408 \(2018\)](#)), West Africa and the Sahel ([S/PRST/2018/3](#)), Mali (resolution [2423 \(2018\)](#)) and Darfur (resolution [2429 \(2018\)](#)).

4. The Dominican Republic is strongly affected by climate change, as is the entire region of Central America and the Caribbean. The present concept note bears witness to the impacts we are experiencing, but we are very aware that many other regions around the world also face critical vulnerabilities related to climate change and associated security challenges. Furthermore, the Dominican Republic is the first small island developing State to be elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. This will present an opportunity for the Dominican Republic to facilitate the inclusion of additional perspectives on the unique and particular vulnerabilities faced by those States as a result of climate change.

#### **Extreme weather and climate-related disasters threaten international security in the Caribbean and beyond**

5. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has reported that the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season was the costliest in history and severely affected socioeconomic development.<sup>2</sup> In Central America and the Caribbean, where most countries either have long coastlines or low-lying coastal areas, or are islands, weather and climate events such as hurricanes, storms and floods take a heavy toll on people’s livelihoods. They also stall progress on development, security and stability. The Dominican Republic ranks tenth among the countries most affected by extreme weather-related disasters over the past 20 years, and our neighbour, Haiti, ranks second.<sup>3</sup> In our own country, 69,000 people were newly displaced by natural disasters in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Extreme weather events and disasters can compound existing grievances and stress overburdened governance systems. In Haiti, a long sequence of natural disasters, with nine significant floods and eight storms since the devastating earthquake that occurred in 2010, has led to protracted displacement.<sup>5</sup> The vicious cycle of political instability and vulnerability to natural hazards has not only affected us as that country’s neighbour, but also resulted in extensive and expensive international engagement. The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was active in the country from 2004 to 2017 and has seen its tasks challenged by natural disasters (for example, the earthquake in 2010, which measured 7.0 on the Richter scale, and Hurricane Matthew in October 2016). Clearly, breaking the vicious cycle of extreme weather-related disasters and prolonged governance challenges would not only benefit affected countries and populations, but also reduce the burden on the international community in dealing with protracted crises. As an example, in its resolutions relating to the mandate of the successor to MINUSTAH, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (resolutions [2350 \(2017\)](#) and

<sup>2</sup> World Meteorological Organization (WMO), *WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2017* (Geneva, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> David Eckstein, Vera Künzel and Laura Schäfer, *Global Climate Risk Index 2018: Who Suffers Most From Extreme Weather Events? Weather-related Loss Events in 2016 and 1997 to 2016* (Bonn, Germanwatch, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Bina Desai and others, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2018* (Geneva, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

2410 (2018)), the Security Council took into account that correlation by reiterating the need for security to be accompanied by sustainable development in its environmental dimension, among other aspects, including efforts in risk reduction and preparedness that addressed the country's extreme vulnerability to natural disasters and in which the Government of Haiti played a leading role, with the assistance of the United Nations country team.

6. Extreme disasters also threaten populations and stability beyond our region. While 4 of the 10 States most affected by extreme weather-related disasters over the past 20 years were in Central America and the Caribbean, the other 6 were in South or South-East Asia, where annual average death tolls varied between 140 in Thailand and almost 7,100 in Myanmar.<sup>6</sup> Disasters also lead to large-scale displacement, causing 2.5 million people to be displaced in the Philippines in 2017, for example.<sup>7</sup> The events that occurred in the aftermath of the 2010 floods in Pakistan or the 2011 monsoon in Thailand illustrate how dissatisfaction with disaster responses can fuel social and political instability.

### **Droughts affect livelihoods in Central America, in the Caribbean and around the world**

7. Beyond hurricanes, floods and mudslides caused by severe storms, our region is also significantly affected by increasing temperatures that lead to lengthy drought periods, which in turn reduce crop yields and water supplies. The effects are palpable in the arid zones of the Dominican Republic, but are particularly dire in the "dry corridor" of Central America. In 2016, the population of the "northern triangle", consisting of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, was hit hard by an El Niño-induced drought, leading to crop losses of 50 to 90 per cent and leaving 3.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>8</sup> Such losses in livelihoods leads to displacement and can undermine national and regional stability, often through the unplanned and unsustainable urbanization it entails.

8. Increasingly numerous and intense droughts affect not only our region, but many others around the world. The Security Council has already acknowledged the negative security implications of such impacts in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. There are many other countries where these findings remain relevant, where droughts and desertification add to the potential for instability and conflict through loss of livelihood and food insecurity, including in other African regions, in the Middle East and in parts of Asia. In addition, the major humanitarian impacts of recent droughts in conflict-affected countries illustrate their particularly limited capacity to cope with climate shocks.

### **Slow-onset hazards will lead to existential threats and significant displacement**

9. Disasters are not the only climate change-induced developments that affect security. Slow-onset hazards such as sea-level rise endanger the very existence of some small island developing States, especially the atoll nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, among the most vulnerable of those island States are the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Tonga, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Cook Islands in the Pacific Ocean; Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean Sea; and Maldives in the Indian Ocean. Low-lying islands will become uninhabitable long before they are submerged, as storm surges, erosion and salinization undermine livelihoods.

<sup>6</sup> Eckstein, Künzel and Schäfer, *Global Climate Risk Index 2018*.

<sup>7</sup> Desai and others, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2018*.

<sup>8</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Dry corridor: Central America", Situation Report, June 2016. Available from <http://www.fao.org/3/a-br092e.pdf>.

Moreover, given that many small island developing States are dependent on fisheries for proteins, the effects of ocean acidification and coral reef bleaching on traditional sources of food security also represent existential threats for many communities and will lead to significant displacement.

10. Sea-level rise has already had detrimental impacts on low-lying coastal areas around the globe, affecting populations far bigger than those of small island developing States. Because much of their economic activity is concentrated along coastlines, many megacities and critical infrastructure elements, as well as agricultural and tourism-based livelihoods, are threatened by coastal erosion, salinization, land degradation and water scarcity. In the large river deltas that house and feed hundreds of millions of people, the effects of sea-level rise are frequently compounded by land subsidence due to lower sediment loads and changes to the river's flow regime as a consequence of upstream dam-building.

11. Beyond such impacts on livelihoods and food security, the effects of climate change are likely to increase the occurrence of diseases. In the Dominican Republic, malaria cases had increased in the wake of past disasters, and more dengue cases and epidemics are expected.<sup>9</sup> Additional negative effects on health can occur as an indirect consequence of climate change, because increases in the number of disasters undermine the effectiveness of governance. In August 2018, a cholera outbreak was registered in the border area between Haiti and the Dominican Republic,<sup>10</sup> and the Dominican Republic reports an upward trend in malaria cases since 2009 that can be traced back to Haiti.<sup>11</sup>

### **Mitigating climate-related disaster impacts could benefit global stability and conflict prevention**

12. As these mechanisms make clear, climate change and its attendant disaster risks have differentiated yet global security implications, beyond our nations and regions. They threaten international peace and security by undermining human security and both national and transnational stability, especially in the protracted emergencies that form the core of the Security Council's agenda. Mitigating such climate-related impacts could help alleviate those crises and reduce the threats to international peace and security.

13. The prospect of reducing those threats should galvanize the international community in its quest to find appropriate responses to climate-fragility risks. Whereas the United Nations system as a whole will need to rise to the task, there is a need to debate the role that the Security Council could play in order to fulfil its responsibilities. In seeking to systematically incorporate the security dimension of climate-related impacts in its deliberations on country-specific situations, the Council should ensure access to reliable data to support the elaboration of risk assessments and management strategies. Efforts to mitigate climate-related impacts should be addressed as a part of a collective response to addressing current and future security risks related to climate change.

### **Key questions**

14. The following key questions will be discussed:

<sup>9</sup> Dominican Republic, "Third national communication from the Dominican Republic to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" (2017). Available from <https://unfccc.int/documents/39777>.

<sup>10</sup> ReliefWeb, "Dominican Republic/Haiti: Cholera Outbreak", August 2018. Available from <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/ep-2018-000145-dom>.

<sup>11</sup> Dominican Republic, "Third national communication".

(a) What climate-related disaster impacts, including humanitarian impacts relevant to international peace and security, are other Member States experiencing? How can we arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the risks and vulnerabilities associated with climate-related disasters?

(b) What measures are Member States undertaking in response to those risks? What can the United Nations do to help to address them better? How can it support regional organizations in this task?

(c) What role can the Security Council play in responding early and adequately to such disasters? In particular, what can the Council do to help ensure that the consequences of disasters do not contribute to threats to international peace and security? How can the Security Council make the best use of available extreme weather forecasts, early warnings and climate and disaster information from the specialized agencies such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and WMO, as well as from the other entities in the United Nations family, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to inform early warning and risk reduction measures?

(d) How can the missions deployed by the Council, notably its peace support operations and special political missions, be harnessed to prevent and better manage crises resulting from such disasters, for example through the proactive collection of local knowledge, including from women and young people?

(e) What support should the Council request from other parts of the United Nations family in seeking to prevent and contain security risks associated with climate-related disasters? What options might there be for harmonized policymaking and financing that integrate the climate, disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding agendas?

(f) What early warning capabilities does the Council need to be able to respond early, and what institutional measures could help to improve its existing capacity?

(g) How are Member States engaging young people and anticipating the needs of future generations, not only given the challenges at hand, but also with regard to planning ahead on the basis of today's knowledge and projections?

#### **Format and briefers**

15. The open debate will be held on 25 January 2019, in the Security Council Chamber, at the ministerial level. It will be chaired by the President of the Dominican Republic, Danilo Medina Sánchez.

16. Considering the large number of Member States that are expected to participate in the open debate, speakers are requested to limit their interventions in the Chamber to three minutes. Member States will be able to upload a longer version of their statements for the record.

17. The following speakers will brief the Security Council:

The Under-Secretary-General and Administrator of UNDP, via videoconference  
(to be confirmed)

The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs (to be confirmed)

The chief scientist and research director of WMO, Pavel Kabat

A research assistant with the Environmental Security programme of the Stimson Center, Lindsay Getschel

**Expected outcome**

18. A Chair's summary will be provided after the meeting.
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