Security Council

Letter dated 11 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the summary of the Arria formula meeting on climate and security risks, held on Wednesday 22 April 2020 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nicolas **de Rivière**

Annex to the letter dated 11 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

[Original: English]

Arria formula meeting on climate and security risks: the latest data

What can the United Nations do to prevent climate-related conflicts and how can we climate-proof United Nations in-country activities?

22 April 2020

Chair's summary

Introduction

On 22 April 2020, France, Germany, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Belgium, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Niger, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam co-organized an Arria formula meeting on the theme of "Climate and security risks: the latest data. What can the United Nations do to prevent climate-related conflicts and how can we climate-proof United Nations in-country activities?"

Twenty-five countries participated (some of them on behalf of regional groups) and five countries submitted written contributions.

Given the exceptional context of COVID-19, this Arria formula meeting was the first-ever organized virtually and broadcast live by the French Mission.[1]

The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, the Director of the International Crisis Group, Robert Malley, and the Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Dan Smith, briefed the participants.

This Arria formula meeting focused on how climate-related security risks could be addressed by the United Nations and its Member States, and the Security Council's role in this regard. It aimed to improve the Council's shared understanding of how to prevent climate-related conflicts and how to ensure the United Nations in-country activities are climate-sensitive.

The impacts of climate change on peace and security are becoming a growing concern, with consequences such as displacement, limited access to health, housing and food security.

In this context, the work of the United Nations system in countries vulnerable to the effects of climate change must be climate-proofed, especially as those countries highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change often suffer violent conflict and are less able to adapt. Concrete responses must be provided to transform the current discussions into operational actions on the ground.

The objectives of the Arria formula meeting were to:

• Provide a better understanding of the challenges, opportunities and interlinkages between instability, conflict and climate risks

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[1] See https://fr-fr.facebook.com/franceonu.

- Propose the best tools and policies for a comprehensive approach to climate-related conflict prevention

- Empower the whole United Nations system to encourage its institutions to integrate climate fragility risks into their policies and operations.

This was the fifth Arria formula meeting to be convened on the relationship between climate change and security. Previous meetings included: "The security dimensions of climate change" (15 February 2013); "Climate change as a threat multiplier for global security" (30 June 2015); "Security implications of climate change: sea level rise" (10 April 2017); and "Climate change: preparing for security implications of rising temperatures" (14 December 2017).

This Chair's summary presents the ideas and arguments expressed by the participants in the debate.

It is neither an official record nor does it represent an endorsement of these statements by any Member State or participant. It will be circulated to all members of the Security Council as well as all delegations that participated in the debate.

Briefings

In the first briefing, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, recalled that climate-related security risks already form part of the reality for millions of people around the world. Scientists warn that without decisive action, climate change would further accelerate and compound the driver of insecurity and undermine our collective objectives of conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

Referring to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, she underlined that it was no coincidence that, of the 20 countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, 10 were also dealing with violent conflicts. She stressed that while climate change was rarely the main driver of conflict, it multiplied existing risks and exacerbated factors that could lead to insecurity. But in each case, the manifestation of these linkages was highly context-specific. As such, it was essential to understand how climate change affects the mandates of the United Nations and to work with partners to find innovative solutions.

In order to address climate-related security risks, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs had undertaken a series of measures, among them:

– Strengthening their capacity for integrated risk analysis with the climate security mechanism

– Integrating a climate lens into the efforts at mediation and preventive diplomacy in order to ensure that peacemaking and mediation strategies take these effects into account in close partnership with national and regional actors

– Investing in peacebuilding programmes to help strengthen the resilience of States and communities to cope with climate-related security risks

– Working with partners, in particular regional organizations.

In the second briefing, Robert Malley, Director of the International Crisis Group, said that climate change was already shaping and would continue to shape the future of conflicts. For years, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had documented trends that could instigate or exacerbate violence. Climate change was an existential challenge that put vulnerable populations at increasing risk and required robust actions. Still, the nature of the relationship between climate and deadly conflict should be neither understated nor overstated. According to the International Crisis

Group, the most important part was to understand the precise relationship, because only from that understanding could we put forward efficient policy recommendations.

This relationship between climate and conflict was complex, nuanced and context-specific. What mattered most in each case was how authorities dealt with the problems induced or exacerbated by climate change: how equitably and effectively they allocated and distributed resources; how inclusive and accountable they were; and whether there were good intercommunity mediation mechanisms or not.

The International Crisis Group proposed two steps to make our collective policy response more effective: first, the timeline used to assess climate risks should be shortened; and second, geographies where climate risks intersect with fragile politics should be prioritized.

In the third and final briefing, Dan Smith, Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, underlined that the urgency of responding adequately to the challenge posed by climate and security were illustrated by the fact that 8 out of the 10 countries hosting the largest multilateral peace operations were located in areas highly exposed to the impact of climate change.

As the other briefers had, Dan Smith indicated that if climate change was never the only factor in a conflict, the evidence repeatedly confirmed it a multiplying factor and, as such, it should be part of the analysis. As the others had, he pointed out that each situation is different and that problems must addressed, therefore, specifically.

In that context, Dan Smith outlined three categories of response:

– To promote climate risk awareness within the United Nations;

– To develop a systemic approach to managing climate-related security risk;

– To embed climate issues in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Debate on how the United Nations can prevent climate-related conflicts and climate-proof in-country activities

Twenty-three countries participated in the Arria formula meeting, some on behalf of regional groups(France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, the United States of America, Indonesia, South Africa, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Belgium, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Niger, Tunisia, Viet Nam, Canada for Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Norway for the Nordic countries, Fiji for the Pacific small island developing States, Poland, Spain, Mali, Algeria, Switzerland and Ireland) as well as the European Union and the African Union.

Five countries submitted written comments (Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Republic of Korea and Malta). Their views are reflected in this summary.

The majority of delegations said that the security implications of climate change posed a serious challenge to our collective peace and security. Indeed, in many parts of the world, the reality of the impacts of climate change on peace and security was clearly visible. West Africa and the Sahel were the most cited examples – 57 per cent of the countries facing the highest double exposure to climate and the risk of political fragility were in sub-Saharan Africa – as well as small island developing countries.

Effects of climate change are leading to tensions and conflicts within and between countries and communities and are causing the displacement of people, underlining how climate change poses an increasing threat to international security.

Some delegations insisted on the fact that, to face this challenge, it was imperative to respect international commitments to primarily address climate change itself, including through financial commitments. They urged the international

community to continue to tackle climate change through strengthening cooperation and coordination within a multilateral framework (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). A few delegations highlighted the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Most countries recognized that climate should be threaded into the development and humanitarian work of the United Nations, but its peace and security dimension also into the security pillar of its work.

In this challenging context, we need the United Nations more than ever. The United Nations has both the legitimacy and the experience to act and focus its efforts on addressing climate-related security risks.

Member States also recalled the important role of the Security Council in addressing the security implications of the effects of climate change. Those should be fully part of the work of the Council and be taken into account in United Nations operations, conflict prevention and resolution strategies and peacebuilding plans in order to address climate-related security risks.

In this regard, the 2011 presidential statement, resolution 2349 (2017) on the Lake Chad Basin and subsequent initiatives demonstrated real progress in discussions on climate-related security risks at the Security Council. Currently, a total of 10 thematic and country-specific Council resolutions include a focus on climate-related security risks. However, many States made the point that the Council still lacked the tools for analysis, early warning and prevention of climate-related conflicts and there is room for further strengthening the Security Council in addressing the security implications of the effects of climate change.

To prevent conflicts related to climate risks, it was a necessary first step to further strengthen capacities and data analysis within the United Nations system with relevant scientific data and knowledge.

Most States welcomed the establishment of the climate security mechanism, which serves as focal point for climate risk assessments to the Security Council, illustrating progress made towards a more comprehensive response to climate security. But to face the challenges, they added that it needs to be strengthened.

Although the vast majority of delegations supported Security Council engagement on the issue of the impacts of climate-related risks on international peace and security, individual delegations also voiced disagreement or discomfort with debating climate change in the Council. They encouraged a more cautious approach when making a link between the effects of climate change and threats to international peace and security and pointed out that these are challenges that should be dealt primarily with development tools.

While being sensitive to the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable countries and considering ways through which development issues can be better integrated into peace efforts, these countries indicated that taking steps that could lead to what was characterized as "securitization" of the climate change agenda should be avoided.

As such, they underlined that it could be an overstatement to characterize climate change as "a major risk factor for international peace and security". The Security Council was, in their view, not the place to deal with the issue; it was taking time and resources at the expense of the ongoing conflicts.

They also maintained that the work of the United Nations development system should not be duplicated and the division of labour among the different bodies of the

United Nations system respected, seeking synergies and complementarities, while retaining their respective mandates and competencies.

Policy recommendations

Many delegations underscored the need to broaden and strengthen the expertise of the United Nations on climate-related security risks. The following policy recommendations were formulated by Member States:

  – The presentation of a periodic report by the Secretary-General on the assessment of the risks of conflicts linked to the climate effects which will provide the Security Council and the General Assembly with better information and an in-depth analysis of current and future risks, and action-oriented recommendations to enable it to carry out its main peacekeeping and conflict prevention mandates;

  – Systematic integration of climate security risks into relevant country- and region-specific resolutions. In order to ensure effective conflict prevention, the Security Council must have a global approach to new challenges. It is therefore also essential to include climate security risks in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts and, where appropriate, to take them into account in the mandates of peace operations;

  – Appointment of a special envoy for climate security, who will strengthen coordination between relevant United Nations entities to address climate-related security risks. Many States also called for a stronger climate security mechanism.

  – Finally, strengthening of regional cooperation with regional organizations to improve early warning, analysis and response capacities.

Conclusions

Briefers and Member States recalled that, according to science, even with decisive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the pace and intensity of climate change is going to increase in the future. This will have direct and indirect negative consequences in many fields, including political stability, peace and security.

While the first response of the international community is to fully implement international commitments such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, addressing the security impacts of the effects of climate change should also be part of the conflict prevention agenda.

Most participants acknowledged that to address the problem, it was essential to understand it and analyse it in each situation.

By building its analytical capacities through a periodic report of the Secretary-General and embedding climate action into peacebuilding measures, the United Nations will make a direct contribution to prevent conflicts.

Almost all countries welcomed the creation of the climate security mechanism, consisting of six staff from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme. Many Member States acknowledged that it needed to be strengthened so that it could meet the demand for analytical support that is already there and will inevitably grow from the field and from other actors such as the regional organizations.

Member States also pointed out that the different agencies of the United Nations system could be better coordinated, notably by the appointment of a special envoy on climate and security. This would strengthen response and effectiveness on the ground.

Finally, these substantial discussions indicating converging views among a large majority of those participating and demonstrate the progress the Security Council is making on the issue, while some delegations still saw the need for further discussion.

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