Climate, Peace and Security: The Time for Action

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini today hosted an unprecedented high level event - Climate, Peace and Security: The Time for Action - which drove home both the urgency and importance of tackling the risks that climate change poses to security and peace. Ministers from around the world, top United Nations officials, and leading experts testified to the many real and potential security threats deriving from climate change.
"Here in Europe, experience tells us that peace and security are not only about peace treaties and defence budgets. Peace has to be sustainable in time. And sustainable peace requires good jobs, decent access to natural resources, and sustainable development. Sustainable peace needs climate action...So let us keep this in mind: when we invest in the fight against climate change, we invest in our own security."

Participants highlighted a set of clear challenges, from tensions over increasingly scarce resources to the forced movement of people in search of usable land and water. They provided compelling evidence that the world is witnessing relentless increases in extreme weather events, accelerated desertification and the steady depletion of resources upon which millions of livelihoods depend. All of these trends multiply the risk of instability and conflict if left unchecked.
David Paul, Environment Minister, Republic of the Marshall Islands

“Climate security is not some abstract concept for us, climate change is already the greatest threat to our island nation...without global action to increase the ambition of our climate targets by 2020, we are barreling towards a massive new global security crisis of our own making. It is time we move from words to action. This means making our multilateral system fit for purpose [including by] heeding the Pacific’s call for a new Special Representative for Climate Security, and establishing a dedicated unit within UN Headquarters. The EU has a big opportunity to continue to lead in addressing the greatest threat to global security.”

Through keynote presentations and panel debate, participants in ‘Climate, Peace and Security: The Time for Action’ also identified how best to manage the security threats posed by climate change. They looked at ways to reduce vulnerability, by strengthening the resilience of communities and states so that they can anticipate and manage climate risks before they become critical.

Many called for enhanced multilateral cooperation to deal with climate and security. The breakthrough Paris Agreement on Climate and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are key achievements, but work is needed for them to deliver on their promise. Aligning the implementation of both, on the ground, is vital in order to accelerate progress.
"The Paris Agreement is a milestone, and all parties should take concrete actions and fulfil their commitments. China will further accelerate ecological civilization construction and green low-carbon transition. Meanwhile, China will work with all the others to address climate change, promote sustainable development, and protect the Planet Earth, the only home of human beings."

Participants also recognized a shared "responsibility to prepare" for climate impacts on security. Some of those impacts are already known, even felt, others less predictable; some are gradual and others sudden. What is certain is that the world faces increasing climate risks, but that if we pool our resources effectively, we also have unprecedented capacity for foresight and early warning.
"In order to protect lives and properties from increasing risks of climate change especially on natural disasters, all stakeholders such as national and local governments, business and civil society so as to avoid and minimize the damage through adequate adaptation measures." said Ms Naomi Tokashiki, State Minister of Environment of Japan.

In the discussion on integrating action on climate, security and development, participants highlighted that the key to sustainable development is not the sum of traditional development, security and climate policies. It is about combining the policies and responses to ensure the best possible impact, tailored to different geographical situations, and delivered on multiple levels. No matter how much states, donors and development partners invest in promoting economic and social development as a means to prevent conflict and sustain peace and security, if climate risks are left out of the equation, much of that effort may be in vain.
“There is a clear link between the impacts of climate change and global security,” said Mr Ovais Sarmad, UNFCCC Deputy Executive Secretary. “Climate change acts a threat multiplier, making many of the biggest challenges humanity faces even worse. The way forward is for the world to deliver on the promises contained in both the Paris Agreement and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.”

Throughout the discussion, participants highlighted a series of points for further action, to make the fight against climate change a means of sustaining peace, averting conflict and reducing the risk of deadly climate-related natural disasters.
Erik SOLHEIM, executive director, UN Environment

Erik Solheim, Head of UN Environment, proposed three actions to address the climate-security nexus: “First, we need to address water issues. Water management and diplomacy can help us relieve water stress and sea level rise,” he said. “We should further create a Marshall plan on solar energy. The Sahel holds an enormous opportunity for solar energy, which can help green and uplift the area. And finally, we need to assist Africa in getting urbanization right - to be sustainable and relieve stress on resources like land, food, and natural resources.”
"The international community must understand the security threats associated with climate change. Floods and droughts force people to flee, they affect food security and livelihoods. Island populations’ entire habitats are disappearing. We must develop our tools and invest in climate action. The UN must step up and lead global efforts together with regional partners such as the EU", said Ms Margot Wallstrom, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

Six points for further action:

Elevate climate-security nexus to highest political level in national, regional and multilateral fora
Today's institutions and processes must be adapted for tomorrow's battles, equipped to take up all the challenges of climate change. Reform can deliver with leadership from the top – by the UN, by regional organisations, by heads of state and government. Incorporating climate-security factors into strategic-level policy frameworks and practical guidance at national, regional and multilateral levels is a first step. Expanding diplomatic efforts can remove or alleviate factors of conflict among countries that share climate sensitive resources, such as water and agricultural land, or that have to manage spill-over effects of security implications of climate change, including forced displacement.

**Deploy maximum political and diplomatic efforts to support Paris Agreement implementation**

As the challenge of addressing and living with climate change unfolds, we need to better use and adapt our powerful economic, political and diplomatic tools. The Paris Agreement is the first line of defence against security threats from climate change and it is thus important to harness and strengthen the Paris Agreement to address the causes and manifestations of climate security. It is about strengthening Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris agreement and making them more conflict-sensitive. Mobilizing and reorienting international and domestic resources as well as greening the economic and financial system are necessary steps to address the challenges of climate change and climate security risks.

**Mobilise and improve reporting and early warning systems - focusing on most exposed countries and regions**

Development prospects are increasingly shaped by the converging drivers of climate and conflict. By 2030, more than 60 % of the world’s poor will live in fragile and crisis contexts. Assessing and anticipating climate risks in the most fragile situations should be our priority, which risk being caught in a spiral of conflict and climate disaster. Thorough and timely reporting, directly from the ground, and enhanced existing early warning systems, will allow us to identify changes in natural processes, such as droughts and floods, and anticipate potential knock on impacts on socio-economic stability.

**Put the premium on prevention: building state and societal resilience**

Prevention is always better and more cost effective. As exemplified by the commitment by the UN-World Bank framework to build resilience and sustain peace in conflict areas and by the EU Global Strategy's focus on resilience, it is all about addressing the root causes of conflicts at the same time as their symptoms. To realize this, a premium needs to be put on prevention in domestic policies and international cooperation, rooted in sustainable livelihoods and equitable use of natural resources, informed by early warning systems. Integrated assessments, stronger information sharing and multi-stakeholder involvement in prevention, resilience building and adaptation serve as cross cutting priorities in addressing peacebuilding and climate risks.
Promote the role of women as agents of social, economic and political change

Women are too often disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As key providers of daily livelihood, as farmers and educators, women's voices and influence can accelerate lasting transformational solutions for sustainable development, shaping equitable policies and resource allocation. Empowering women as one of the drivers of economic growth strengthens societal resilience. By harnessing women's roles as agents of change, the adoption of lower carbon lifestyles and passing on “green values” to the next generation can be accelerated. Enhancing the socio-economic rights and status of women not only rectifies their disproportionate vulnerability to climate change impacts, but also gives them a greater say in shaping policies and prioritising how climate finance is used.

Make action on the ground a source of sustainability, strength and peace

The impacts of climate change are cross-cutting and no policy – be it preventive, humanitarian or post-conflict – can be successful without addressing the development, climate and security dimensions at the same time. This is the essence of the integrated approach. Through development actions domestically and through international cooperation, it is possible to harness the capacity of cooperating over shared resources or common challenges to bring peace dividends. Making optimal use of early warning capabilities is therefore crucial to inform timely decision-making on the most effective integrated actions through socio-economic development programmes which enhance both ecological and societal resilience.

See also

Mogherini at the high-level event "Climate, peace and security: the time for action"
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