Joint Meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

Linkages between Climate Change and Challenges to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in the Sahel

Tuesday, 13 November 2018
10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 2

Introduction

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing our world. It is altering weather patterns and increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts. Climate change undermines development gains and, by exacerbating well documented drivers of conflicts, such as unequal access to resources and economic shocks (e.g. a food price shock, collapse of exchange rate, debt crisis, etc.) and the impacts of these dynamics on women and youth, can raise the risk of conflict and undermine efforts to build and sustain peace. While differences remain, the interlinkages between climate change and conflict are considered by many to be increasingly evident in many parts of the world, including in Africa’s Sahel region, one of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable regions.

Climate change is at the top of the United Nations agenda. In 2015, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change brought together all nations around a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development similarly recognizes the need to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact, offering the opportunity to pave the way for a more sustainable world. At the General Assembly’s 73rd Session, the Secretary-General, António Guterres, once more registered concern about the direct existential threat of climate change, with growing risk of runaway climate change that now demands greater ambition and a sense of urgency from the community of world leaders.

Addressing the drivers and root causes of violent conflicts to build and sustain peace requires coherent and comprehensive action involving the entire UN system, including peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, as well as humanitarian activities, and taking into account gender and age considerations. This is in line with the resolutions on the 2015 review of the peacebuilding architecture and the ongoing United Nations reforms under the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General’s leadership towards a more integrated way of working across the UN system. The Secretary-General’s Climate Summit in 2019 represents another opportunity for the United Nations system to make progress on these issues. Furthermore, in 2019, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) will review Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 10 (inequality), 13 (climate change) and 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies and robust institutions) – all relevant in efforts aimed at promoting sustainable development and peace.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) play an important role in highlighting the mutually reinforcing linkages between development and peace, including through joint meetings on themes of common interest. On 24 June 2016, a joint ECOSOC-
PBC meeting was held on the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace,”, followed, on 28 June 2017, by a joint meeting on the situation in the Sahel region. Building on these two meetings, a joint meeting of ECOSOC and PBC will be convened on 13 November 2018 on the linkage between climate change and the challenges to peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a focus on Africa’s Sahel region.

Background
The Secretary-General has highlighted the urgency of addressing climate change, noting that the world risks crossing “the point of no return” with disastrous consequences for people across the planet and the natural system that sustains them.1 The adverse effects of climate change have been widely documented and are considered to “amplify existing risks and create new risks for natural and human systems.”2 The Security Council has, under various presidencies in 2007, 2011 and 2018, considered aspects of peace and security related to climate. Discussions in the Council have highlighted the ways in which climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security, and recognized the adverse effects of climate and ecological changes on stability in country-specific and regional contexts, e.g. the Lake Chad region (S/RES/2349), Somalia (S/RES/2408), West Africa and the Sahel (S/PRST/2018/3), Mali (S/RES/2423) and Darfur (S/RES/2429).

While the impact of climate change does not automatically result in conflict, there is evidence that more extreme climate variability and change may well influence the dynamics of interaction (including violent contention) among societal actors, in conjunction with other prevalent conflict drivers that are shaped by the specific context. Climate change is increasingly described as a “threat multiplier,” aggravating existing stressors, such as environmental degradation, inequalities, social tensions and political instability, conditions that can lead to social disruption and violence that in turn may spur forced or proactive migration, including across borders. The United Nations-World Bank study, “Pathways for Peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict”,3 emphasizes that while climate change does not automatically cause violent conflict, it has a disproportionate impact on poor and vulnerable countries and communities, creating major stress, especially in fragile situations with limited government capacity for adaptation. There is also increasing evidence that climate change has a differential impact on women and men, with women being particularly burdened given that they constitute the majority of the world’s poor.

The situation in Africa’s Sahel region is a source of concern. With temperature increases projected to be 1.5 times higher than in the rest of the world, and with 90 per cent of its economy reliant on agriculture and pastoralism, recurrent droughts in the region have devastating impacts on people who have little resilience and few coping strategies. Climate change has the potential to further contribute to land degradation and desertification, which leads to land disputes especially between farming and pastoralist communities competing for access to increasingly scarce resources. In the Sahel, the effects of climate change are compounded by persistent governance and security challenges that further contribute to the Sahel’s dire humanitarian situation. For example, in the Lake Chad Basin area, which has been affected by extreme climatic conditions, 4 million people in 2018 have faced food insecurity with ongoing conflict and security issues a contributory factor. The continued shrinking of Lake Chad has decreased the resilience and adaptive ability of populations to cope with humanitarian shocks (e.g. droughts, floods, population displacements, etc.) and increased competition

1 Secretary-General’s statement on climate change delivered on 10 September 2018, https://unfccc.int/news/un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-calls-for-climate-leadership-outlines-expectations-for-next
2 UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report, 2014, p. 13
3 https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337
over scant resources. Shortages of land, pasture and water have led to the forced migration of pastoralist communities in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, putting 2.5 million people at risk of a livelihood crisis in 2018 in the affected areas. The number of displaced persons across the Lake Chad basin region was 2.3 million, including 1.7 million internally displaced persons in north-east Nigeria, where food insecurity and malnutrition remained high.4

The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was adopted in 2013 to bring collective action to bear on the multifaceted challenges facing the Sahel region in an inclusive manner, including the impact of climate change. The strategy aims to support the governments and people of the region in their efforts to address the causes of instability within a sustainable and long-term perspective, and builds on the understanding that the multi-dimensional challenges facing the countries of the Sahel, and the environmental and economic shocks that give rise to humanitarian crises all have regional ramifications. Effective mitigation and adaptation measures are needed to meet the challenges created by climate change in ways that build and sustain peace in the Sahel region, taking into account the socio-economic, environmental, political and other variables that could contribute to violent conflict. The aim would be for decision makers and planners to address current vulnerabilities and development priorities while, at the same time, building comprehensive resilience against the impact of climate change, aiming to achieve long-term sustainable development and peace.

Objectives of the Joint ECOSOC and the PBC meeting

The 2018 joint ECOSOC and the PBC meeting aims to use discussion on the linkages between climate change and challenges to sustaining peace in the Sahel region to:

- Raise awareness of the possible implications of climate change on the drivers of conflict;
- Showcase country examples of successful conflict-sensitive mitigation and adaptation measures to address climate change and sustain peace;
- Explore ways to enhance national, regional, sub-regional and cross-border cooperation to address climate change, build and sustain peace;
- Explore ways to enhance the coherence of the United Nations system’s support to the countries in Africa’s Sahel region to strengthen their resilience to climate change; and
- Provide inputs to subsequent meetings addressing climate change, including the 2019 High Level Political Forum and the Climate Change Summit that will be convened by the Secretary-General in September 2019.

Format of the Meeting

The meeting will be co-convened by the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission for a three-hour duration. An opening segment with welcoming remarks will be followed by keynote addresses and an interactive panel on the interlinkages between climate change and sustaining peace and country-specific examples with discussion among representatives of Member States, the United Nations system and civil society.

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the meeting will be a joint summary by the ECOSOC President and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission which could be further considered by the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.

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4 Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the UN Office for West African and the Sahel (S/2018/649).