

### Climate change and its possible security implications

With General Assembly resolution 63/281 the subject of climate change and its possible security implications was for the first time specifically placed on the General Assembly's agenda. Its adoption by consensus shows that the relationship between climate change and security has begun to command serious attention among the international community. In the follow-up, much will depend on the suggestions made by the Secretary-General in his report, as called for in the resolution.

While the comprehensive application of the term "security" in the resolution text may have facilitated its wide acceptance, it is a legitimate question whether a more discriminating use of the concept would help focus the responses of states on the kinds of results the international community may be able to achieve. At the same time, any steps taken to further elaborate on the concept of "security" in relation to climate change may risk the unraveling of the delicate balance of interests that sustain the resolution in its current form.

As has been well documented over the past few years, the impacts of climate change are not geographically uniform and affect the various regions of the world differently. The same applies to the link between climate change and security, in its extra-conventional dimensions; human, economic and ecological.

For the Arctic region, the impacts of climate change were set out in detail in the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) of 2004. Valuable insights concerning the relationship between climate change and human development in the circumpolar region were also provided in the Arctic Human Development Report of the same year.

The changes observed in the Arctic provide an early indication of the environmental and social significance of global warming. They include the widespread melting of glaciers and sea ice, as well as rising permafrost temperatures, affecting the living conditions of Arctic residents in a variety of ways. On the negative side, there could be serious implications for human health and food security, especially for indigenous peoples. Coastal erosion could threaten many communities and industrial facilities, while receding permafrost has begun to destabilize infrastructure in many places. On the positive side, more fertile lands and fisheries could become available to Arctic residents, there could be easier access to other resources and new shipping routes along the Northern periphery might take hold.

In the area around Iceland, particular attention is being paid to the interaction between changes in the climate and the marine ecosystem. Changes in the abundance of various fish stocks respond to changes in ocean temperature, chemical pollution, current shifts and increased influx of freshwater and silt, as a result of increased precipitation and the melting of sea ice and glaciers. Therefore, regional changes in climate patterns can affect the range, distribution and recruitment of commercially important fish stocks, with repercussions for the economic security of a people overwhelmingly dependent on the living resources of the ocean.

Although many regions in the world are confronted with similar or more serious problems, the issue of climate change and security takes on particular urgency with respect to many developing countries, including small island developing states (SIDS). Many of these foresee a significant loss of territory and arable land due to sea-level rise, threatening not only their livelihood but also their statehood. Therefore, Iceland remains fully supportive of the efforts of the states concerned to attract the attention of the international community to their cause.

Effective measures to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change must be seen as essential components of a strategy to contain possible threats to the human, economic and ecological security of all United Nations member states. In this connection, it will be particularly important to ensure the success of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen in December. Other fora, including the Commission on Sustainable Development and United Nations specialized agencies and programs, can also contribute to the process.

In certain instances, climate change may also give rise to security threats in the conventional sense. The Security Council should remain alert to tensions that may arise from forced migration, the competition for land or access to other natural resources. Also, the United Nations, including the General Assembly, Funds and Programs, and its member states need to be prepared to provide humanitarian assistance in case climate change-related emergencies arise.

For resolution 63/281 to be implemented, the different parts of the United Nations system will need to work together in a coordinated and transparent fashion, making the best use of the existing institutions and mandates.