In 2017, a number of extreme events related to rising temperatures and depletion of natural resources, triggered by rising temperatures and climate change, have threatened the security of millions of people, from the devastating and deadly hurricanes in the US and several Caribbean islands to the deathly famines in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, all areas affected by conflict. Rising sea levels in the Pacific are posing a direct threat to islands and their populations.

As the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, argued during his speech at NYU last May, “Climate change is a direct threat in itself and a multiplier of many other threats - from poverty to displacement to conflict. The effects of climate change are already being felt around the world. They are dangerous and accelerating”.

2017 marks the tenth anniversary of first Security Council ministerial-level open debate on the relationship between energy, security and climate, which was convened by the UK and included a briefing by then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Since then, climate-induced security threats have become more pressing and there is an urgent need to bring climate change also to the Security Council’s agenda.

An important milestone was the adoption of Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) last March, in which the Security Council clearly recognized the adverse effects of climate change on stability in the Lake Chad region.
The Security Council also emphasized the need for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies with regards to these effects. As such, there is a growing demand for early warning mechanisms addressing climate related security risks.

Climate-related disasters have increased in number and magnitude. Over the past decade, more than 700,000 people lost their lives, over 1.4 million were injured, and approximately 23 million are homeless as a result of natural disasters. Notoriously the regions most affected by climate change are the Arctic, Africa, the Americas, the Mediterranean region, which is considered by the scientific community an “hotspot” of climate change. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as well as densely populated Asian and African mega deltas. Eight of the world’s 10 largest cities are near a coast and 40% of the world’s population live in relatively high-population-density coastal areas. Also, people living in fragile mountainous ecosystems in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change and food insecurity. Climate change induced migration increasingly challenges social systems and regional stability. Environmental migrants and refugees will increasingly shape the human geography of the planet.

The impact of rising temperatures is already affecting every country to various extents and it will continue to disrupt economies and deprive the livelihoods of billions of people due to changing weather patterns, rising sea levels, loss of land, and more extreme weather events. Droughts, floods or water scarcity can generate humanitarian crises, unrest and conflict. Such instances have become increasingly common and more devastating, resulting in the reversal of development gains even in countries with significant levels of socio-economic progress. And as the effects of climate change become more severe, they become a multiplier of various crises. 197 parties have recognized the climate threat and have committed to address it by signing the Paris Agreement and taking action to limit global warming. And to date 170 countries have already ratified it, allowing for its early entry into force. In parallel to these commitments to mitigate emissions and adapt to climate change, we have to sustain peace and invest in well-informed conflict prevention that limits the threats to security posed by climate change.

On 30 October 2017, in a briefing to the Security Council, the Secretary-General described how poverty and climate change have contributed to humanitarian and security crises in the Sahel, and how the weak institutions, exclusion and marginalization of some groups are exploited by extremists and terrorists.

The international community has an increasing responsibility to prepare and develop capabilities to better foresee, understand and respond to climate-related security risks.

Applying the principle of ‘climate proofing’ would entail mainstreaming, integrating, institutionalizing and comprehensively raising awareness about climate and security issues. With Presidential Statement S/PRST/2011/15, the Security Council requested that the Secretary-General ensure that his reporting to the Council contain contextual information on possible security implications of climate change, when it becomes a driver of conflict or represent a challenge to the implementation of Council mandates or endanger the process of consolidation of peace. However, at present, there is no institutional home for addressing climate-related security risks in the UN system.

**Guiding Questions**

How could the task deriving from the 2011 Presidential Statement of the Security Council be promoted and reinforced within the UN system and beyond?

How can the Security Council, benefiting the United Nations System at large, become more consistent and effective in the assessment of new security risks generated by climate change?

How can we better prepare to avoid destabilizing phenomena with potentially global implications (e.g., sea level rise, droughts, floods, natural disasters), and mitigate the effects of such phenomena (e.g., climate induced migration, food insecurity, economic loss, increased social and economic stress caused by urbanization, fight over scarce resources) that will trigger or further aggravate political strife, unrest and conflict?

How can the Security Council use its unique role within the UN system to prevent climate change-induced conflicts?

**Briefings**

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She is also Co-Chair of the Climate and Security Advisory Group. She leads the Center’s policy development, analysis and research programs, and facilitates the primary forum for climate and security dialogue in the U.S. national security community. She has written and published extensively on the security implications of climate change, water stress and natural resource mismanagement in Syria and North Africa, including in the seminal report “The Arab Spring and Climate Change,” and in the SAIS Review of International Affairs, as well as the potential for new technologies like additive manufacturing for addressing climate risks. Her primary research interests include climate change, water policy and international security. She has spent over a decade investigating the intersection of security, natural resources, conflict and cooperation. Caitlin has experience in international and domestic climate and water policy, including as co-founder of the MAP Institute for Water & Climate, a Senior Associate at AD Partners, and as Director of International Programs at EDN. Caitlin has written for the SAIS Review of International Affairs, Angle Journal, Defense News, the Reuters Foundation, the National Journal, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Climate Progress and e-International Relations, and has been cited by the New York Times, the Washington Post, the New Republic, USA Today, CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, the Christian Science Monitor, Slate, the Toronto Star and the Atlantic, among others. She holds a master’s degree from the University of Oxford, where she focused on transboundary water issues, concluding with a field study on water conflict and cooperation in Cyprus. Caitlin also holds a BA in Environmental Politics from Mount Holyoke College. Caitlin also serves on the advisory board of the Nuclear Security Working Group and the Planetary Security Initiative.