

# What Next for Climate and Security at the UN Security Council: IRELAND'S VIEW



-By Simon Coveney  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Ireland

Photo by Laura Danova on Unsplash.

Before Ireland assumed its seat as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council in January last year, I, together with colleagues and advisors, reflected on what our priorities would be. As a Minister with two portfolios, for Foreign Affairs and for Defence, it was clear that global security in this century cannot be contemplated without a climate lens.

Each year sees new record high temperatures. No country is immune to wildfires, droughts, and storms. The impact of a melting Arctic is global, not local or regional. The evidence is clear: climate change is exacerbating the impacts of fragility, undermining peace and security. My strong sense was, and remains, that if we fail to recognize these links and take appropriate action across all international platforms, we will need to deal with more acute issues in the near future.

The aim to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius emerged still alive from COP26, though any honest assessment must conclude that this remains a shaky ambition, dependent on driving down global emissions rapidly.<sup>[240]</sup> The next decade will be crucial.

Making good that ambition to reduce emissions requires political space. A deteriorating global fragility landscape is curtailing the space for resolute action in many countries, perhaps amplified by the effects of the pandemic. Challenging global politics are distracting leaders from the

climate challenge. We have more violence globally now than any time since the end of the Cold War, as well as the largest forced displacement crisis ever recorded.<sup>[241]</sup>

We are seeing in real time across the world how both slow-onset climate related impacts, such as droughts, as well as rapid-onset threats, particularly extreme weather events, are affecting stability.

In our reflections before coming onto the Security Council, it was notable that of the 21 countries most exposed to climate change globally, ten had — and have — ongoing UN Peace Operations.<sup>[242]</sup> It was evident that climate-related security impacts were felt most acutely by those already living in situations of poverty, marginalization, and conflict, people who lack the capacity and resources to build resilience. I am particularly conscious of the disproportionate effect of climate events and climate-related security situations on women and young people.

Around Lake Chad, for instance, conflict and climate dynamics combine to create a vicious self-reinforcing cycle. Climate change impacts such as reduced rainfall undermine livelihoods and contribute to tensions between farmers and herders, and subsequent conflict undermines communities' abilities to cope and adapt. This is creating an environment that non-state armed groups easily exploit for their own recruitment purposes.<sup>[243]</sup>

In South Sudan, half a million people were displaced in

2020 and 2021 due to flooding. The forced displacement of these populations has exacerbated conflict and triggered tensions over resources.

Faced with this compound challenge, it is clear to me that there needs to be an intensification of efforts to address interlocking climate-related security risks. Otherwise, we are jeopardizing peace and stability at every level, from the international right down to the local.

## CLIMATE AND SECURITY AT THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Fortunately, global and regional institutions are starting to respond to the risks of climate change to international peace and security. I am pleased to see the recent progress by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in this regard.<sup>[244]</sup> The European Union too has put Climate and Security at the heart of its global strategy on security in 2016, and since then, it has been weaved throughout its work.<sup>[245]</sup>

The African Union has also recognized these risks, highlighting how climate change can aggravate conflict, calling for an “informed Climate-Security-Development nexus for Africa.”<sup>[246]</sup>

The Pacific Islands Forum in its 2018 Boe Declaration characterized climate change as “the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.”<sup>[247]</sup>

Over the past 12 months of Ireland’s elected membership of the UN Security Council, I have seen first-hand the relevance of climate-related security risks to the Council’s work. Ireland has been using its voice and influence to ensure that the Council fulfils its role on this issue.

Encouragingly, the UN Security Council is increasingly addressing climate change within its mandate.<sup>[248]</sup> The progress so far is due to the tireless work of several member states over the last 15 years. As a result, there have been a number of significant developments which have enabled the Security Council and the broader UN system to be more active in addressing climate related risks.

First, climate has been mainstreamed in specific country and regional Council resolutions, beginning with Lake Chad Resolution 2349 in 2017 and subsequently a number of others including Mali, Somalia, Sudan, and West Africa. In 2021, the Council recognized Climate and Security risks outside Africa for the first time, mainstreaming climate change into mandates on Cyprus and Iraq. This ensures that these UN missions are tasked to analyze the impact of climate change on their work.

Second, the establishment by Germany during its presidency of the Council in 2020 of an Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security provides a space for Security Council members to receive in-depth analysis from experts on climate related security risks in particular countries and regions. Ireland, along with Niger, co-chaired

Each year sees new record high temperatures.

No country is immune to wildfires, droughts, and storms.



Micheál Martin, Taoiseach of Ireland and President of the Security Council for the month of September 2021, chairs the Security Council meeting on maintenance of international peace and security on the theme Climate and Security. UN Photo/Ariana Lindquist.

this group in 2021. Norway and Kenya are continuing this work in 2022.

Third, and related to this, the wider UN System has taken steps address climate-related security risks more systematically. The Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) was established in 2018 and draws on expertise across the UN in the areas of peacebuilding, sustainable development, and the environment, to integrate climate security analysis and action into its political and programmatic work. Ireland is pleased to support the CSM and to act as its co-chair in 2022, alongside Sweden.

Finally, the Group of Friends on Climate and Security of the UN General Assembly has steadily garnered support and membership from 60 countries representing all five UN regional groups. This group is chaired ably by Germany and Nauru.

Despite these positive developments, I am convinced that there is more that the Security Council can and must do to address climate-related security risks in order to fully realize its primary responsibility under the Charter to maintain international peace and security.

The lack of a thematic resolution on Climate and Security — such as we have for Women, Peace and Security — means that the Council is restricted in how it can deal with the security challenges arising from climate-related events and change. For example, a resolution could enable a coherent approach to identifying important challenges and developing solutions by putting in place new measures, such as requiring regular reporting by the UN Secretary General on climate-related risks.

There is significant support across the membership of the United Nations for such a thematic resolution. A draft Security Council Resolution tabled by Ireland and Niger in December 2021 was co-sponsored by 113 members

The lack of a thematic resolution on Climate and Security — such as we have for Women, Peace and Security — means that the Council is restricted in how it can deal with the security challenges arising from climate-related events and change.

of the General Assembly. This was the second- highest number of co-sponsors for a Security Council resolution in the history of the United Nations. This was a remarkable level of support that speaks to the readiness and willingness of the majority of countries in the world for the Council to systematically do more on climate and security. Unfortunately, despite this overwhelming support, the draft resolution did not carry as a result of Russia exercising its veto.

We have listened to the concerns expressed by Russia and India, which declined to support the resolution,

along with the views of China, which abstained. These concerns are partly based on fears that the Council will duplicate or set up a parallel workstream to that of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

However, this is not what is being proposed. The UN Security Council has a particular mandate and set of tools at its disposal. These include its mandate for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. I do not believe, in this day and age, that the Council can do its job in these areas without addressing the risks posed by climate change. Omitting climate change from this work risks undermining the peace that the Council is trying to achieve.

While I am disappointed with the outcome of December's vote, I retain the determination to advance this agenda along with our partners.

## PATHWAYS FORWARD

I would like to emphasize three areas of focus for Ireland that I believe will advance this agenda:

Firstly, current efforts to strengthen and disseminate the evidence base on climate-related security risks to



UN Photo/Manuel Elias



UN Photo/Ariana Lindquist

# Climate change is a risk to peace. Evidence-based responses will help weather the storm.

led by

POTSDAM INSTITUTE FOR  
CLIMATE IMPACT RESEARCH

inform efforts at the Security Council and elsewhere must be enhanced. This means building on conflict and climate expertise, including that of experts from the most affected countries and regions. This expertise needs to be accessible by decision-makers and should underpin responses at the appropriate scale. For example, multilateral programs such as the Weathering Risk Initiative, a multidisciplinary research project seeking to identify and respond to climate-related security risks, which Ireland and other countries support, can make tangible contributions to this agenda.

Secondly, enabling the UN Security Council to comprehend and deal with climate-related security risks will help ensure it discharges its mandate to maintain international peace and security. A resolution on Climate and Security would provide a framework for doing so, but, in the absence of this, UN Security Council members should strengthen the mainstreaming of climate change in relevant country and regional files based on the latest data and evidence. The UN Secretary General should also be called upon to produce a report on the risks that climate change presents to global peace and security, which can inform the wider work of the Council.

Thirdly, we need to tackle climate and peacebuilding challenges together. This requires a shift from only thinking about the risks that climate change poses for security to also recognizing that climate action can help build peace. It means that we simultaneously address climate change adaptation, increasing resilience, and improving natural resource governance while building peace. It also requires that we resource projects and capacity at the country level. For example, Ireland is supporting the UN Mission in South Sudan to put these principles into practice, including through funding a dedicated Climate Security Advisor.

Finally, we must do more to ensure that climate finance reaches the most vulnerable communities in fragile and conflict-affected states. A recent study has shown that of the USD 14 billion in climate finance implemented under the four major climate change vertical funds<sup>[249]</sup> in

146 countries, extremely fragile states averaged USD 2.1 per person compared to USD 10.8 per person in fragile states and USD 161.7 per person for non-fragile states.<sup>[250]</sup> At COP26, developed countries recommitted to the USD 100 billion climate finance goal. We need to ensure that this funding also makes its way to those who are furthest behind.

## CONCLUSION

As we look forward to the coming critical decade in our collective effort to tackle climate change, Ireland is determined to play its part. This includes our resolve to ensure that the impacts of climate change on our peace and security are addressed. We will continue to work with partners and in global and regional institutions on this critical task.

[240] *Glasgow Climate Pact*, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Decision 1/CP.26, November 2021, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26\\_auv\\_2f\\_cover\\_decision.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26_auv_2f_cover_decision.pdf).

[241] *World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020-2025* (English), World Bank Group, February 27, 2020, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/844591582815510521/world-bank-group-strategy-for-fragility-conflict-and-violence-2020-2025>.

[242] Florian Krampe, "Why the United Nations peace operations cannot ignore climate change," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounders/2021/why-united-nations-peace-operations-cannot-ignore-climate-change>.

[243] Janani Vivekananda, Martin Wall, Florence Sylvestre, and Chitra Nagarajan, "Sharing Up Stability: Addressing Climate and Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region," *Adelphi*, May 15, 2019, <https://shoring-up-stability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Shoring-up-Stability.pdf>.

[244] "Strengthening Co-operation to Address the Challenges Caused by Climate Change, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe," *Ministerial Council, Decision No. 3/21*, December 3, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/f/507050.pdf>.

[245] "Concept for an Integrated Approach on Climate Change and Security, European External Action Service," *EEAS(2021)770*, October 5, 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12537-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

[246] "Communique of the 1051th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) held on 26 November 2021 on the theme: Climate Change and Peace and Security: The need for an Informed Climate-Security-Development nexus for Africa," African Union, last updated December 13, 2021, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1051th-meeting-of-the-au-peace-and-security-council-psc-held-on-26-november-2021-on-the-theme-climate-change-and-peace-and-security-the-need-for-an-informed-climate-security-development-nexus-for-africa>.

[247] "Boe Declaration on Regional Security, Pacific Islands Forum," September 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>.

[248] "The UN Security Council and Climate Change," *Security Council Report*, June 21, 2021, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B665BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/climate\\_security\\_2021.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B665BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/climate_security_2021.pdf).

[249] The Adaptation Fund, the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

[250] "Climate Finance for Sustaining Peace: Making Climate Finance Work for Conflict-Affected and Fragile Contexts," *UN Development Programme*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.undp.org/library/climate-finance-sustaining-peace-making-climate-finance-work-conflict-affected-and-fragile>.