

2nd Committee Special Event Panel on “Climate Change and Security”

On April 2007, the United Kingdom convened a day-long Security Council debate on the impact of climate change on security. At the time, many delegates from developing countries questioned whether the Council was the proper forum to discuss the issue and saw climate change as a development matter to be dealt with by the more widely representative General Assembly.

On June 3, 2009, the UN General Assembly passed by consensus a draft resolution put forward by Pacific Small Island Developing States on follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit entitled “Climate change and its possible security implications” (GA A/63/281). By its adoption of this resolution, the United Nations membership made a first important step towards considering and addressing security risks related to climate change. The resolution states that the 192-member General Assembly was "deeply concerned that the adverse impacts of climate change, including sea-level rise, could have possible security implications." It called on the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly in its sixty-fourth session a comprehensive report on the possible security implications of climate change, based on the views of Member States and regional and international organizations.

The Secretary-General’s report is now available¹ and provides a platform for consideration of the issue in the General Assembly’s sixty-fourth session. Based on the submissions made by Member States and regional and international organizations, the SG’s report identified five channels through which climate change can have security implications: impacts on human well-being of vulnerable individuals and communities; retardation of economic development; uncoordinated coping through population migration and/or conflict over scarce water, land or other resources; displacement of whole populations through sea-level rise and consequent statelessness; changes in availability of or access to internationally shared resources, e.g., transboundary waters. In most cases, climate change acts as a “threat multiplier”, compounding underlying stresses. The Report focuses in the first instance on measures which governments and the international community can take to prevent climate change’s becoming a security threat – so-called “threat minimizers”. These include strong action on climate change mitigation and adaptation, support to sustainable development, and strengthening governance institutions, in particular, those for conflict resolution. Where impacts nevertheless appear likely, the international community needs to be prepared to address the possible implications for security. Areas identified include: strengthening the international legal framework governing loss of sovereign territory and population relocation; the possibility of large-scale climate-induced migration; the need to strength cooperative agreements on shared water and other resources to withstand added stresses posed by climate change.

The panelists will share their extensive knowledge and experiences with a view to generating thought provoking discussion and dialogue amongst members of the General Assembly, recognizing that the nature and full degree of the security implications of climate change are still largely untested.

¹ http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/ga-64/SGReport_on_climate_change_and_security.pdf