

**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** The impact of climate change on international peace and security

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## Introduction

It is a widely known fact that climate change is one of the biggest threats humanity is currently facing. Having been warned about its dire effects by scientists since the early 20th century, the efforts to redirect this potential catastrophe are now of the utmost urgency.

Aside from melting glaciers, meteorological changes and severe threats to biodiversity, climate change is also considered to be one of the biggest threats to global peace and security.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, said in a speech he made in December 2020 that: “The fallout of the assault on our planet is impeding our efforts to eliminate poverty and imperilling food security. And it is making our work for peace even more difficult, as the disruptions drive instability, displacement and conflict (...)”<sup>1</sup>.

Though these issues may seem unrelated, climate change affects especially vulnerable regions. It is also relevant to note that the countries most vulnerable to climate change-related natural disasters are also those with more fragile political institutions, this is the case of several Sub-Saharan African and South-East Asian countries.

Similarly, this vulnerability extends to certain groups of the population such as people living below the poverty line, particularly children. Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, has said that: “The adverse impact of climate change is not the sole cause of conflict but can significantly aggravate fragilities and exacerbate conflict dynamics. I am very concerned

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<sup>1</sup> Guterres A. The State of the Planet. Speech presented at; 2020; Columbia University, New York, USA. Available from: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-12-02/address-columbia-university-the-state-of-the-planet>

about the consequences of such dynamics for conflict-affected children, who are already the most vulnerable group in times of crisis, (...)”<sup>2</sup>.

All in all, the profound effects that the climate crisis will have will have severe repercussions on the global economy and also play an important role in hindering efforts to obtain world peace and security. This conclusion has been supported by the Working Group II’s contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report, which assesses the impacts of climate change, through the lens of ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities at both global and regional levels. It also reviews vulnerabilities and the capacities and limits of the natural world and human societies to adapt to climate change.

In conclusion, this is an issue of the utmost importance to the global community which requires an urgent solution because of its relevance to international peace and security.

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<sup>2</sup> OSRSG Children and Armed Conflict. COP26: Impact of climate emergency on peace and security exacerbates the vulnerabilities of those most affected by conflict: Children [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/cop26-impact-climate-emergency-peace-and-security-exacerbates-vulnerabilities-those>

## **Term Definitions**

### **Climate change**

Significant and long-lasting change in the Earth's climate and weather patterns related to global warming.

### **Global warming or greenhouse effect**

An increase in the Earth's atmospheric and oceanic temperatures widely predicted to occur due to an increase in the greenhouse effect resulting especially from pollution.

### **Human rights**

Rights (such as freedom from unlawful imprisonment, torture, and execution) regarded as belonging fundamentally to all persons.

### **Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)**

Chemical compound which is the primary greenhouse gas and driver of climate change. It is produced by the natural activities of the Earth (e.g. animal respiration) and industrial processes.

### **Greenhouse gas emissions**

Any of various gaseous compounds (such as carbon dioxide or methane) that absorb infrared radiation, trap heat in the atmosphere, and are emitted to the atmosphere, contributing to the greenhouse effect.

### **Food insecurity**

The fact or an instance of being unable to consistently access or afford adequate food.

### **Sea-level rise**

The augmentation of the level of the surface of the sea especially at its mean position midway between mean high and low water.

## **Global average temperature**

A long-term look at the Earth's temperature, usually over the course of 30 years, on land and sea.

## **Renewable energy**

Energy sources capable of being replaced by natural ecological cycles or sound management practices.

## Background Information

In order to properly understand the effect of climate change on international peace and security, we must examine the different areas that it affects.

### Politically and economically fragile countries

Politically and economically fragile countries make up nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. In fact, out of the countries most susceptible to these types of risks, nearly half host a UN peacekeeping mission.

Though armed conflict is neither the cause or direct consequence of climate change, it is more likely to happen in affected countries as global warming can amplify risks to peace and development. For instance, severe droughts can make access to clean water even more difficult and also deeply affect the region's agriculture. These types of consequences often affect mostly people living below the poverty line or people directly involved in conflict, this is because their coping capacity is severely reduced by the lack of access to resources<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, the extreme weather conditions and meteorological cycle changes often devastate countries as they are unprepared for these unpredictable tragedies. For example, the aggravation of hurricanes in Puerto Rico means that they are now reaching regions that are unprepared for such weather events. This means that governments have to redirect funds and resources to these causes rather than tending to the social and economic hardships their country is facing<sup>4</sup>.

The Global Report on Internal Displacement published in 2021 states that 30 million people were forced to uproot their lives because of climate-related disasters. When

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<sup>3</sup> Hubbard K. Global Warming Risks Increase in Conflicts [Internet]. US News and World Report. 2021. Available from: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-10-29/how-climate-change-may-increase-global-conflicts>

<sup>4</sup> Scott M. Hurricane Maria's devastation of Puerto Rico [Internet]. climate.gov. 2018. Available from: <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/hurricane-marias-devastation-puerto-rico>

people are displaced they are more at risk of food insecurity and living in poverty<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, the World Bank published a report where they claimed that around 216 million people would be displaced by slow-onset climate change by 2050<sup>6</sup>.

## Children and Women

Research done by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has found that women and children are the groups that suffer most from weather-related disasters as, for several different social, economic and cultural reasons they are more vulnerable.

In developing countries, women make up most of the small-holder farmers. Since their livelihoods depend on weather conditions, the effect of climate change directly affects their income and food sources. Rising sea levels, higher temperatures and the acidification of the sea directly affects the agricultural sector as fish catching and processing is a very prominent source of income for small farmers in developing countries. Furthermore, the impact of decreasing food sources is worse for women and children as, specifically during pregnancy and lactation, their nutritional needs are higher.

Similarly, given that women and girls are more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, they are more prone to suffering from the loss of sexual and reproductive health assistance.

According to UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index, nearly half of all children (1 billion) are at 'extremely high risk' of the impacts of climate change. It is important to note that children bear the greatest burden of global warming. Given their increased vulnerability to extreme weather conditions and other climate-change consequences compared to adults, they are more at risk of their human rights being undermined<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 [Internet]. Part 1. Available from: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/>

<sup>6</sup> Clement V, Rigaud K, de Sherbinin A, Jones B. Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration. World Bank [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36248>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The climate crisis is a child rights crisis [Internet]. 2022 p. 84-90. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

Given that these two groups of people are generally more vulnerable to social and economic hardships, it is clear that they are also at the most risk regarding climate change.

## Minority Groups

Indigenous and minority groups risk losing their cultural identity due to climate change, given that they are mostly reliant on agriculture, the loss of biodiversity in their ecosystems can severely impact their socio-economic model and livelihoods<sup>8</sup>.

The issue is that climate change exacerbates the pre-existing problems indigenous communities were already experiencing: marginalisation, loss of land and resources, discrimination among other human rights violations. This is particularly unfair given that they contribute little to greenhouse gas emissions on a global scale. Their simple, mostly agricultural-based economies, make it difficult for them to adequately prepare and protect themselves from climate change related disasters. Similarly, mitigation is also complicated for these communities as they do not possess neither the technological nor the financial resources to put these measures into action<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Tsosie R. Indigenous people and environmental justice: the impact of climate change. U. Colo. L. Rev.. 2007; p. 78-1625. Available from:

[https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/ucollr78&div=53&g\\_sent=1&casa\\_token=&collection=journals](https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/ucollr78&div=53&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals)

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Climate change and indigenous peoples [Internet]. 2010. Available from: [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/backgrounder%20climate%20change\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/backgrounder%20climate%20change_FINAL.pdf)

## Countries and Organisations Involved

### IPCC

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. It was created to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options.

### DPPA

The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) plays a central role in United Nations efforts to prevent and resolve deadly conflict around the world. It monitors and assesses global political developments with an eye to detecting potential crises before they erupt and devising effective responses.

In its Strategic Plan for 2020-2022, the DPPA stated that responding to climate-related global security risks is a high priority for the department and that it is making targeted efforts to integrate climate action and take climate change into account when carrying out their peacebuilding strategies<sup>10</sup>.

### COP

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is a yearly international climate conference where nations assess progress and determine next steps for action through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) treaty. The most recent conference was COP26 which was held in November 2021 in Glasgow. The goal was to find more efficient ways of achieving the goals set forth in the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC.

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<sup>10</sup> Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Peace and Security | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs [Internet]. Dppa.un.org. 2022. Available from: <https://dppa.un.org/en/climate-peace-security>

## INDC

Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) are the plans that countries present outlining the actions they intend to take to combat climate change nationally. These are used during climate conferences in order to devise a global climate agreement toward a more sustainable future.

## USA

Since the USA is the second largest emitter of greenhouse gases, its climate change policy has major impacts on global action.

Historically, the US has had a very volatile position on this issue as it is heavily politicised. There have been efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions since 1993 when the Clinton administration passed its biodiversity treaty. Despite signing on to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Bush administration pulled out in 2001 claiming prioritising economic growth was more important than combating climate change.

With the Obama administration the USA ratified the Paris Agreement and put several climate policies into place. Nevertheless, president Trump withdrew from the agreement and rolled back many of Obama's initiatives. Most recently, the Biden administration has rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement and voiced their intention to combat global warming<sup>11</sup>.

## EU

The European Union and its member states have spearheaded very innovative measures to combat climate change. Its climate policy involves both regional and national governments in the mitigation of the effects of climate change. Despite being a region not affected by the most severe weather-disasters, the policies put forward include a commitment to a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030

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<sup>11</sup> Shouse K. U.S. Climate Change Policy [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46947>

(compared to the emissions from 1990). The EU's role in funding climate measures in LEDCs has also been very influential<sup>12</sup>.

## China

Being the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, accounting for nearly a third of all global emissions. Its participation in the Paris Climate Agreement is instrumental to it achieving its objective. Despite what many believe, China has a significant set of climate policies and has always reached its targets and been reliable when it comes to fulfilling its pledges to the international community. The problem is that it pledges very little and the actions they take, though in the right direction, are not quick or ambitious enough<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Ruitenbergh B. European Climate Foundation [Internet]. European Climate Foundation. 2022. Available from: <https://europeanclimate.org>

<sup>13</sup> Stalley P. China's climate change record: Beijing tends to meet its targets, but sets the bar too low [Internet]. The Conversation. 2021. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/chinas-climate-change-record-beijing-tends-to-meet-its-targets-but-sets-the-bar-too-low-172138>

## Timeline of Events

- 6th of December 1988** UN General Assembly Resolution 43/53 establishes alongside the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to provide a scientific view of climate change and its political and economic impacts.
- December 1990** The IPCC publishes its first report (FAR) which highlights the relevance of climate change and details the challenges it poses to the global community. This report is used as justification to create the UNFCCC.
- 12th of June 1992** 154 nations sign the UNFCCC, a treaty which upon ratification commits signatories' governments to reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases with the goal of "preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with Earth's climate system".
- 11th of December 1997** The Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty which extended the 1992 UNFCCC, commits state parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, based on the scientific consensus that global warming is occurring and that human-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are driving it (Second IPCC Report in 1995).
- 12th of October 2007** The IPCC and U.S. Vice-President Al Gore are jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change".
- 12th of December 2015** The Paris Climate Agreement is signed by 197 countries pledging to set targets for their own greenhouse gas cuts and to report their progress. The backbone of the agreement was a declaration to prevent a global temperature rise of 2°C.
- August 2018** Swedish teenager and climate activist Greta Thunberg begins protesting in front of the Swedish Parliament with a sign: "School Strike for Climate." Her activism inspires youths all around the world to start protesting for immediate climate action from governments.

**August 2019**

The United Nations Climate Summit is held in New York City and diplomats from nearly 200 countries strike a major agreement aimed at intensifying efforts to fight climate change.

**31st October 2021**

The 26th United Nations Climate Change conference is held in Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom, from 31 October to 13 November 2021. There, countries revisited climate pledges made under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

## Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions

### SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals are a list of 17 objectives that the world must achieve by 2030 in order to ensure a better and more sustainable future. The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and replaced the Millennium Development Goals<sup>14</sup>.

The goals most relevant to the topic of climate change are:

- **Goal 7:** Affordable and clean energy
- **Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- **Goal 15:** Life on land
- **Goal 16:** Peace, justice and strong institutions

### Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was an international treaty which extended the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by committing signatories to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the First Assessment Report by the IPCC. There was an established consensus that global warming was a true threat to the planet and that the main cause of it was human CO<sub>2</sub> emissions<sup>15</sup>.

The protocol was signed by 38 countries, however Canada later withdrew and the USA finally did not go through with the commitment. Of the 36 countries that kept their pledge, all complied with the protocol's indication of reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 4%. It is important to note that Austria, Denmark, Iceland, Japan, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain and Switzerland had to request more

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<sup>14</sup> THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development [Internet]. Sdgs.un.org. 2022. Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>15</sup> What is the Kyoto Protocol? [Internet]. Unfccc.int. 2022. Available from: [https://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol](https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol)

flexibility as they did not fully achieve the or-established reduction despite being on target for it.

## Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is an international treaty on climate change which was adopted by 196 states at COP21 held in Paris, on the 12th of December 2015. Its objective is to prevent the augmentation of the global average temperature to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels<sup>16</sup>.

To achieve this long-term temperature goal, countries pledged to put in place serious economic and social measures to ensure that climate action is a priority.

This agreement was a landmark in global climate action because, for the first time, there was a common pledge to undertake ambitious efforts to combat global warming.

Regardless of the impact the agreement intended to have on climate action, according to the scientific community this action is not enough and the lack of a specific reduction creates a loop-hole that allows countries to circumvent the restrictions set in place. Additionally, with many countries favouring rapid economic growth over sustainable development and some, like the USA, pulling out of the agreement, global commitment to the cause is waning significantly.

## UNFCCC

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a climate treaty created in 1992 based on the First Assessment Report by the IPCC. Its goal was to create a framework by which to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent the greenhouse gas effect from further damaging our ecosystem. It is within this convention that INDCs are presented and studied and the convention is the direct predecessor of the COP.

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<sup>16</sup> What is the Paris Climate Agreement? [Internet]. Unfccc.int. 2022. Available from: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

## **General Assembly Resolution 43/53 of 6 December 1988**

This resolution acknowledged that “climate change is a common concern of mankind that should be confronted within a global framework”, it was the first to consider the scientific research carried out by the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme. The fact that it urged governments and non-governmental institutions to make tackling climate change a priority.

## Previous Attempts to Solve Issue

Previous climate policy has generally centred around a reduction of coal consumption and dependency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. More recently, since coal dependency is no longer at the forefront of the issue, policies have focused on renewable energy and how to implement it state-wide.

Targeting global peace and security has only recently begun being considered in climate policy as it is only recently that the effects of extreme weather disturbances has affected communities.

In the Security Council meeting held in December 2021, a draft resolution first circulated by Ireland and Niger was ultimately defeated. It would have defined climate change as a threat to international peace and security for the first time in history. The resolution itself was based on another rejected draft resolution from 2020 and it would have been instrumental in increasing the UN's capacity to dedicate time and resources towards addressing climate-related issues and conflicts. Despite having 113 votes in favour, Russia and India opposed and China abstained meaning that it did not pass<sup>17</sup>.

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has acknowledged that climate change has a huge effect on human rights and, since its mechanisms allow for policies to address this issue, this institution presents itself as a good candidate to propose solutions to the issue. In its resolution 18/22 passed in September of 2011 the UNHRC affirmed that "human rights obligations, standards, and principles have the potential to inform and strengthen international and national policy-making in the area of climate change, promoting policy coherence, legitimacy, and sustainable outcomes"<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Burke J. Climate change, a threat to international peace and security? [Internet]. Universal Rights Group. 2022. Available from: <https://www.universal-rights.org/blog/climate-change-a-threat-to-international-peace-and-security/>

<sup>18</sup> McInerney-Lankford S. Climate Change and Human Rights: an introduction to legal Issues. Harv. Envtl. L. Rev.. 2009;33:431. Available from: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/helr33&div=17&id=&page=>

## Possible Solutions

Considering the ineffectiveness of previous attempts to combat climate change, it is clear that looking to the future the measures proposed must be more specific and ambitious.

The need for a new climate agreement is imperative as the way to ensure that national changes make a difference must be done within the framework of a global partnership. This new agreement must set forth specific measures and take into account the most recent scientific reports put out by the IPCC as well as other institutions.

Though rigidity may be a significant factor that countries consider when deciding whether to ratify the agreement or not, it is imperative to find a way to ensure the mistakes of the Paris Agreement are not repeated. An approach more similar to that of the Kyoto Protocol or the measures put forth by the European Union seem more effective than general guidelines.

In order to specifically target global peace and security it is vital to consider the possible mitigation factors such as disaster preparation and protective measures that can be taken to shelter the most vulnerable groups from the worst effects of climate change. Allocation of resources and disaster-relief funds could help particularly fragile countries from the brunt of these climate disasters. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that these funds and resources must be monitored by specific agencies, whether it be pre-existing ones like the DPPA or new ones.

Creative ways to tackle pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are necessary to prevent global warming from accelerating. Taking into account the past years' efforts to reduce them and the various social and economic effects of the policies used by each country, there has to be a solution where applicable domestic policies directly contribute to climate action.

In general, this issue is one that particularly interests young people and that is a tool that can be used to incentivise individuals to change their habits and reduce their

carbon footprint. That notwithstanding, regulating the biggest contributors to climate change, i.e. companies, is imperative.

In conclusion, any solution proposed must take into account the different groups most affected by climate change, from there we must find ways to protect peace and security and prevent people from being forced into displacement, poverty and food insecurity. The possible actions the UN Security Council can take should always respect member states' national sovereignty while striving for a common goal.

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