



**Joint Meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and
the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)**

**Linkages between Climate Change and Challenges to Peacebuilding
and Sustaining Peace in the Sahel**

Tuesday, 13 November 2018

Informal Summary

The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), H.E. Mr. Ion Jinga, co-chaired a joint meeting of ECOSOC and PBC on "Linkages between climate change and challenges to peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Sahel". Member States from both intergovernmental bodies as well as from the Sahel region and civil society attended the joint meeting. The gathering was timely as it followed the Annual Session of the PBC on the Sahel held on 12 November 2018. This event built on previous joint ECOSOC-PBC meetings on the 2030 Agenda (2016) and the situation in the Sahel. (2017), as well as on relevant Security Council meetings. The joint meeting also responded to the increased interest among Member States to support peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts in the Sahel. To this end, the meeting raised awareness of the possible adverse effects of climate change on the stability in the Sahel; showcased mitigation and addressed adaptation measures to the linkages between climate change and the challenges to peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Sahel; and deliberated on ways to enhance coherence, cooperation and coordination in strengthening Sahelian countries' resilience to climate change.

Effects of climate change

In her opening remarks, the President of ECOSOC outlined the complex and multidimensional challenges facing the agriculture-dependent Sahel region, aggravated by the adverse effects of climate change. The Chair of the PBC affirmed the opportunities available for ECOSOC and PBC to support effective mitigation and adaptation measures to meet the challenges and help address the impact of climate change on development and stability in the Sahel.

In his keynote address, the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Sahel, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, underscored that climate change was a threat multiplier, putting additional stress on current political, social and economic pressure points that contributed to the problem. He highlighted that the Sahel was the region with the most significant number of people disproportionately affected by global warming, having suffered from severe episodes of droughts and desertification in the past fifty years. Related studies had also clearly demonstrated a direct correlation between years of drought and a significant economic downturn in a region largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture and extensive pastoralism. Climate change and the related shrinking of natural

resources, including land and water, had a disproportionate effect on those vulnerable as the struggle for livelihoods and growing food insecurity led to population displacements, migration, as well as inter-communal violence, including between farmers and pastoralists. He also noted that with the changing demographics, coupled with a scarcity of resources due to climate change, more conflicts in the region could be expected due to a growing competition over access to land and water, fueling further internal and international migration. The weak institutional capacities in the Sahel region to prevent or settle these conflicts increased the severe risks of escalation to ethnic or even religious conflicts.

A number of delegations echoed the view that, in the Sahel, climate change could exacerbate tensions and potentially lead to social unrest and conflicts. Some speakers disagreed and were of the opinion that associating climate change with the dependency between sustainable development and peace could give way to a wrong assumption that environmental distress naturally led to conflict. A number of Member States called for stronger analytical work to better understand how climate change interacted with security risks and to identify eventual effective response strategies and actions. Member States noted that the Sahel was the world's region where the links between climate change, peace, security and development were most apparent, and needed the support of the international community. Several Speakers highlighted the high conflict risks generated by declining economic activities, lack of employment opportunities particularly among the youth, persistent humanitarian crises and displacement. They further said that the erosion of resilience and social values were also making young people easy prey for terrorism and extremism. Youth and women who constituted a large part of the agricultural labour force in the Sahel carried the most onerous burden of the adverse effects of climate change and related challenges. In the discussion, the humanitarian costs of the situation were also highlighted with ECOSOC President noting that 24 million people required humanitarian assistance throughout the region.

The Sahel as a land of opportunity

Member States stressed that the Sahel was as much as a land of challenges as of opportunities. Special Advisor Thiaw presented his vision for the operationalization of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the Support Plan for the Sahel to address the challenges posed by climate change. This vision included upscaling Climate-Resilient Agriculture and Renewable Energy for Development Initiatives by harnessing the abundant renewable sources of energy in the Sahel to achieve relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ambition of the Support Plan was to leverage technological and financial support to bring electric power to the rural economy; reduce food loss; promote processing and transformation of local products; create value chains and jobs, thus reducing irregular migration and its negative results. The Plan stressed the need to place, farmers' cooperatives, women's and youth entrepreneurs at the heart of these efforts to address food insecurity, socio-economic decline and reduce vulnerability in the region. Special Advisor Thiaw stressed that no economic progress was achievable in the Sahel without energy. Renewable energy would also be essential to reduce food loss, promote the processing and transformation of local products and create new job opportunities in the region. The importance of technology transfer was highlighted as essential for the Sahel region to accelerate access to its vast renewable energy resources. The proposed climate-resilient agriculture initiatives would support ways to leverage technologies for prospective farmers in the region, including women and young people, to access agricultural inputs, knowledge and resources.

To understand the situation on the ground, Mr. Ahmed Aziz Diallo, the Mayor of Dori, outlined the challenges that climate change posed to livelihoods in northeastern Burkina Faso. The Mayor acknowledged the importance of UNISS and the Support Plan as a valid response strategy to strengthen the resilience of local communities in Burkina Faso and through cross-border initiatives with communities in Niger and Mali. The Mayor described how local authorities were facilitating community investment in resilience projects such as dam rehabilitation, canal digging, water management and storage, and animal fodder production. These projects had supported communities to improve the settlement of local conflicts associated with climate change-induced transhumance and to generate better prospects for youth in vulnerable situations.

Member States discussed how complex and multi-dimensional challenges in the Sahel presented opportunities to reverse the region's socioeconomic decline, falling agricultural productivity, forced migration, displacement, and insecurity. Many delegations welcomed the proposed initiatives to combat the adverse impact of climate change and promote sustainable development, including the UNISS proposals outlined by Special Adviser Thiaw. Member States highlighted the commendable work of local authorities on adaptation and mitigation measures that needed international support. Adaptation of approaches was considered necessary to protect lives and livelihoods, eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. Some speakers mentioned the importance of enhancing the resilience of communities and societies, including women and youth, by building their dispute resolution capacities. Delegates also shared their own experiences on climate-resilient agriculture that could apply to the Sahel situation. Some delegates called for innovative adaptation of technological solutions to local conditions in the region.

Strengthening cooperation and coordination at all levels

Member States welcomed the recalibrated UNISS as a valuable tool to encourage better regional cooperation, foster more coherent and coordinated UN responses, to accelerate progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the 2063 African Union Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The UNISS and the Support Plan offer an opportunity to enhance coherence among the multiple strategies existing in the region. Many speakers echoed the Special Adviser's sentiment on a joint vision and response plan, noting that strong cooperation and coordination required at national, regional and international levels. Delegations consistently called for stronger partnerships and better coordination among all stakeholders operating in the Sahel to maximize the use of resources and impact of actions. A leading role of the UN together with the AU and subregional organisations in coordinating these efforts could be further strengthened. Some speakers pointed out that progress was possible only by complementing peace and security efforts, including the implementation of the "Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali," with measures to achieve sustainable development.

Underscoring the inefficiencies of working through a silos approach, many Member States saw the Sahel strategy as a test case on the repositioning of the reformed United Nations development system in the Sahel region to ensure well-coordinated UN country teams action on needs and risk assessments, planning, joint programming, targeted and pooled funding, and monitoring and evaluation. In this regard, the capacity of the United Nations country team, including empowered UN Resident Coordinators, required improvement. Delegates also called on the UN to facilitate better analysis and data collection on how climate change interacted with identified human risk factors. They noted the scarcity of development resources in the region and called for greater efforts to mobilize new financial sources for the region. In this regard, increasing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and support of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) for the

Sahel was seen as essential. Member States also called for direct international financial assistance to local authorities to help them respond to the needs of their communities. Speakers underscored the roles that ECOSOC and the PBC could play in mobilizing national, regional and international actors for enhanced engagement in the Sahel. Some Member States called for raising awareness and resources for the Sahel at the upcoming High-level Global Summits, including the UN 2019 Climate Summit.

In conclusion, the Chair of the PBC underscored how complementary ECOSOC and PBC efforts could provide expert guidance and support to promote national ownership and leadership on resilience initiatives in the Sahel. The ECOSOC President stressed the importance of ECOSOC and the PBC to adopt a long-term approach to strengthen integrated strategies and further expressed commitment to sustain international attention on the Sahel region.

Recommendations

- ECOSOC and the PBC could continue their engagement on the Sahel region to help address climate change, promote sustainable development and support peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts, in line with their respective mandates. ECOSOC should use its coordination and oversight role of the United Nations development system to promote coordinated and coherent UN responses. The PBC, in turn, could continue to enhance its engagement with all countries and relevant peacebuilding actors and stakeholders in the Sahel region.
- Accelerated efforts, including adequate and predictable resources, are required to implement local, national, cross-border, sub-regional and regional initiatives to address climate change effects in the Sahel, taking into account national ownership and leadership of the States in the region. UNISS and the Support Plan for the Sahel should provide the implementation framework to maximize impact and coherence.
- Local communities and civil society, particularly women and youth could be engaged in efforts to address climate change, sustainable development, and peacebuilding and sustaining peace.
- Priority consideration and support is needed to build national capacities to address climate change and sustaining peace issues, including through technology transfer to enhance longer term recovery and resilience building.

Well-coordinated and strengthened United Nations country teams action is required, including on joint assessments and analysis, planning, programming, targeted and pooled funding, and monitoring and evaluation.