

Speech: Climate change as a security risk

Mr. President, first of all may I join the thanks in thanking you for scheduling this debate today and indeed, giving this Council the opportunity to further consider the threat posed to international peace and security by climate change. Dominican Republic's own experience has encouraged you to be a powerful advocate for this issue and a leader in this field. And I'm sure I speak for all that we look forward to your remarks later in the debate.

I also wish to thank all the briefers. But I was particularly struck by the contribution of Lindsay Getschel- by drawing attention to the challenge of climate change, by the importance of consideration of the youth. All countries should not just acknowledge that we should engage youth, we should involve youth in finding the solutions. And certainly Lindsay, from my government's perspective and I'm sure I speak for many in this room and beyond, I certainly give that commitment because it is important we work together to find common solutions and the youth have an important role to play.

This is also an incredibly important issue for the United Kingdom. Indeed we were the first country to raise this issue on the Council back in 2007. We are particularly concerned for Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, including almost 60% of our fellow Commonwealth members which face an existential threat from climate change and associated natural disasters.

Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo mentioned the devastation of Hurricane Irma in 2017. I too visited the Caribbean in the wake of Hurricane Irma where both the devastation but more importantly the determination of the people left a deep and lasting impression on me.

Our Prime Minister Mrs May has said there is a clear moral imperative for developed economies to help those who stand to lose most from the consequences of man-made climate change Through our International Climate Finance Fund, we are supporting cleaner economic growth and have helped over 21 million people prepare for the risk of increased droughts and floods. Between 2016 and 2020, we pledged to provide at least 7 billion dollars of funding to the fund and we aim for a balance in our adaptation and mitigation spend.

We have also sought to strengthen our work within the Caribbean region to build resilience through bringing together resources, capabilities, assets and expertise to show a collaborative and strengthened response to the challenge posed by extreme weather events.

Mr President, we all acknowledge climate change is not an abstract theoretical risk. It is real. it is happening now. Severe weather events that used to happen "once in a century" now occur two or three times a decade.

Sometimes more often. They impact on essential resources, and drive people from their homes. They threaten sustainable development, including our ability to meet the SDGs, and trade. And they exacerbate conflict and instability.

Indeed the situation is much graver than previously thought. Research by the UK's Independent Climate Change Committee in collaboration with the China Expert Panel on Climate recently concluded that we have significantly underestimated the social and indeed the economic risk from climate change.

And of course this risk threatens us all. So it's important we must all contribute to the solution including through discussions such as the important one we are having now.

In Paris in 2015 the international community rallied together to find a shared solution to this shared problem. As the British Prime Minister has said, the Paris Agreement is a vital pillar of the rules-based international system. Now we must accelerate global action to meet the commitments we have made. And we must heed the IPCC's call to increase our ambition. This includes through our existing partnerships. For example last April, the Commonwealth Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to the Paris Agreement and pursuing efforts to limit the increase in global average temperatures to 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels and I to pay tribute to Poland's leadership at the COP 24.

In that vein, we commend strongly the Secretary General's efforts to refocus the United Nations on the urgent need to address climate change. In our view the UN needs to enhance its approach to climate security in three important ways.

First, on information sharing: we must make better use of the climate-risk data available in the private sector and indeed importantly, in civil society; and we must integrate that data into decision making, right across the UN system.

Secondly, we need to consider all risks, and that includes climate-related risks and in a holistic way and when planning and implementing solutions to peace and security issues.

And as mentioned by the Foreign Minister of Germany Heiko Maas, the Council has started to reflect on this in recent resolutions, particularly. I agree with him on the issue of Lake Chad, Somalia, the Sahel, Mali and Darfur.

Of course, the task now is to have effective implementation and integration into our development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian work. The UK welcomes the piloting of a mini-mechanism to ensure information is available to UN reporting, but it should explore ways to go further for example by improving the coordination and integration of UN Agencies and Missions that manage climate-related security risks on the ground.

Finally Mr President, we must invest in resilience. The UK will lead efforts on resilience ahead of the Secretary-General's Climate Summit this year,

collaborating with a range of actors, to launch what we hope to be genuinely transformational actions.

And again Lindsey I say to you, your suggestions I'm sure have caused us all to reflect. And again from a Commonwealth perspective, I have the opportunity to host Youth Ambassadors from the Commonwealth in London next week and I will certainly be reflecting very strongly on your suggestions and recommendations.

Mr President, in economic terms alone this makes sense. Investing in preparedness to respond will on average halve, yes that's halve, the cost of deploying humanitarian aid in the wake of a disaster. And it can also speed up crisis response by up to two weeks.

Resilience also presents a huge opportunity to support employment, spread prosperity which of course accelerates development and ultimately, enhances security.

Through the UK -led Centre for Global Disaster Protection. We are working with developing countries to increase their preparedness and indeed resilience to climate change and natural disasters.

Mr President in conclusion, there is no doubt that climate-related security challenges are real. They are here. They are now. We must work together to ensure the United Nations system is able to holistically consider climate risks in decision making and most importantly, integrate them into mission planning and ultimately, into implementation.

Thank you.