

The Climate Crisis: An Important Factor for consideration in Successful Peace Building



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A crisis is a crucial or decisive point or situation that could lead to a tipping point.¹ The Earth's climate is changing rapidly and the global climate is projected to continue to change over this century and beyond.² This means that our planet's temperatures, rainfall pattern and frequency of extreme events like drought and floods will change largely as a result of human activity. According to a group of international scientists including Prof Paul Ehrlich from

¹Mukheibir, Pierre, et al. "Climate Crisis – What's It Good For?" *The Fifth Estate*, 30 Sept, 2019, thefifthestate.com.au/urbanism/climate-change-news/climate-crisis-what's-it-good-for/.

² "World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal." *Climate Change Knowledge Portal*, climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/overview#:~:text=Climate%20change%20is%20the%20significant,change%20from%20natural%20weather%20variability. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

Stanford university, the planet is facing a ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction³. What all this means is if nothing is done, our world as we know it could become uninhabitable. The climate crisis is a factor we simply cannot afford to ignore any more. This article explains why attention to the climate crisis is important for successful peacebuilding.

The effects of climate change are already being felt with growing frequency of floods, drought and fire outbreaks. At a 9345th meeting of the UN Security Council,⁴ it was noted that security risks have multiplied as a result of climate change and that climate exacerbates threats to human security in numerous ways. Access to water along with drought, desertification and recurrent flooding for instance is causing the economic and social fabric of the horn of Africa and the Sahel region to fray⁵.

Lake Chad's shrinking on the other hand is reducing the ability of local populations to implement survival and resilience strategies to climate shocks and fuelling illicit activity cycles, while also increasing organized crime and activities of armed groups⁶.

Mariam Bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, Minister for Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates at the UN security council meeting stated that in the Middle East which is home to 14 of the 33 most water-stressed countries globally, climate

³ Weston, Phoebe. "Top Scientists Warn of 'ghastly Future of Mass Extinction' and Climate Disruption." *The Guardian*, 13 Jan. 2021, www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/13/top-scientists-warn-of-ghastly-future-of-mass-extinction-and-climate-disruption-aoe.

⁴ 9345th Meeting of the UN Security Council, With Climate Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate | Un Press." *United Nations*, press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

⁵ Statement from Hermann Immongault, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon at the 9345th Meeting of the UN Security Council, With Climate Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate | Un Press." *United Nations*, press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

change is escalating tensions within and across national borders. She also noted that in Somalia, the terrorist group al-Shabaab is capitalizing on the persistent drought in the Horn of Africa, to recruit from displaced communities and impose taxes on desperate farmers and herders⁷.

In addition to creating tensions in communities, it is also creating tension among states. Some countries have a larger carbon footprint than others. At the security council meeting the representative for Marshall Islands Amatlain Elizabeth Kabua stated that,⁸ while the Pacific Island countries are the smallest contributors to global climate change, their way of life faces extinction. Zhang Jun representing China stated that some developed countries reversed their energy policies in 2022 and yet their carbon emissions only increased.⁹ He further pointed out that if climate change is deemed a potential threat, a negative regressive behaviour in the emissions reduction fulfilment including unilateral withdrawal from the Paris Agreement should also constitute a threat to international peace and security.

These are just a few examples of the negative impact climate change is having on peace and security in the world. It is a contributing factor or as president Juan Manuel Santos Calderon¹⁰ described it, an “exacerbating factor”. Taken in the context of the climate crisis, it

⁷ Statement from Mariam Bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, Minister for Climate Change and Environment of United Arab Emirates at the 9345th Meeting of the UN Security Council, With Climate Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate| Un Press.” *United Nations*, press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

⁸ Statement of the representative of the Marshall Islands, Amatlain Elizabeth Kabua at the 9345th Meeting of the UN Security Council, With Climate Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate| Un Press.” *United Nations*, press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

⁹ Statement of Zhang Jun, representative of China at the 9345th Meeting of the UN Security Council, With Climate Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate| Un Press.” *United Nations*, press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

¹⁰ Statement of Juan Manuel Santos Calderon, President of Columbia and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate at the 9345th Meeting of the UN Security Council, With Climate Generating Growing Threats to Global Peace, Security Council Must Ramp Up Efforts, Lessen Risk of Conflicts, Speakers Stress in Open Debate| Un Press.” *United Nations*, press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

simply means these events will occur more frequently and if not addressed become a permanent problem. It is therefore vital that climate be taken as one of the urgent factors to be addressed in every peacebuilding project. To ignore the climate crisis would be to risk setbacks and recurring conflict.

There is also a positive aspect to the climate crisis when it comes to peace building. Whereas climate change has caused a lot of stress to countries around the world it has also shone light on the unique possibilities for dialogue and unity that exist as a result of the crisis that we are now facing.

After six years of negotiations, Colombia ended 50 years of war with the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) The Colombian peace agreement includes a gender chapter, an ethnicity chapter and a focus on victim and rights. Recognizing that nature was also a victim of the war, the protection of the environment is present in all sections of the agreement and repairing nature is one of the sanctions specifically mentioned for those most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In many places, former combatants and communities have come together to preserve the forests and rivers and to promote ecotourism.¹¹

In Niger,¹² acacia gum tree has become a strong tool for environmental peace building. Gum Arabic production is valuable for conflict mitigation because it helps tackle the root causes of violent conflict. Environmental stress contributes to food insecurity, poverty and forced

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kalilou, Ousseyni. "Climate Change and Conflict in the Sahel: The Acacia Gum Tree as a Tool for Environmental Peacebuilding." *Academic.oup.com*, 1 Jan. 2021, academic.oup.com/ia/article/97/1/201/6041468. Also see Krampe, Florian, et al. "Why Addressing the Climate Crisis Can Help Build More Sustainable Peace." *New Security Beat*, www.newsecuritybeat.org/2021/08/addressing-climate-crisis-build-sustainable-peace/. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023. See also Afghanistan, Timor-Leste and Myanmar

migration which in turn contribute to violent conflict in the Sahel region. Community stakeholders have used the tree to promote afforestation for climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience. Resin from the tree is also a rising commodity and promising source of revenue for local inhabitants. The tree has helped improve social cohesion and cooperation amongst locals as well as between communities and government agencies, NGOs, international partners and businesses.

Columbia and Niger are powerful examples that illustrate why providing for the climate crisis in peacebuilding projects is necessary for their success. Somalia, Chad and the Pacific Island countries all show how climate change contributes to conflict and why the climate crisis can no-longer be ignored. It is imperative that peace projects take into account the environment. It is what is now being referred to as Environmental Peacebuilding¹³.

In order to create sustainable peace and strong community bonds it's important to identify a uniting factor. Something that brings people together, something people can work together to achieve and something that helps communities recognize the similarities they possess. It is also important to identify something that people can always agree on. Taking the environment in to account in peacebuilding projects accomplishes this. The climate crisis though a danger to our planet is a strong uniting factor and a long term one. It is a reminder that we are all human beings and that we are facing the very real possibility of extinction¹⁴. There can be no stronger incentive for peace than this.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ This resonates with what Joseph R. Biden, President of the United States of America said, "This is a moral imperative, a moment of peril but also a moment of extraordinary possibilities." - Quoted in: "Climate Crisis – United States Department of State." *U.S. Department of State*, 2 Nov. 2022, www.state.gov/policy-issues/climate-crisis/.

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