Climate Security and Violent Extremism:
From Research to Climate-Based Risk Assessments and Programming

A Side-Event on the Margins of the Third United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week

21 June 2023 | 1:00 - 2:30 pm EDT | Hybrid | Conference Room 9, UN Headquarters, NY

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) | unicri United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute | IEP Institute for Economics & Peace | PERMANENT MISSION OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS | MISSION PERMANENTE DU CANADA AUPRÈS DES NATIONS UNIES | | Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations New York

Background and Context

The impact of climate change on global security has long been explored, with the first report (A/64/350) presented in 2009 to the General Assembly by the then Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon. Across the globe, climate change has undermined security and triggered violent conflict, with climate insecurity being leveraged by terrorists to pursue their aims. In March 2017, while discussing the activities of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) recognized the consequences of climate change as one of the factors affecting the stability of the region, "through water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity." Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) also recognized that in view of the "changing global context of peace and security," including inter alia, violent extremism and climate change, considerations of women, peace and security need to be cross-cutting. Furthermore, in their Regional Strategy report (2018), the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union Commission explained how Lake Chad has diminished drastically because of climate change-related desertification, which resulted "in the loss of traditional livelihoods and a propensity for populations to explore alternative livelihoods, including violent extremism." This sentiment was echoed in research carried out by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) in 2020, where "unfair distribution or unequal access to natural resources" and "access to natural resources compromised due to climate change" were two of the main grievances reported by the local communities in the region through its initiative on "Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism in the Regions of Sahel and Maghreb" carried out between 2015-2020.

Building upon this, in partnership with SWISSAID, in 2022 UNICRI published the report Perceptions of climate change and violent extremism: Listening to local communities in Chad. According to the findings of this report, which were based on more than 130 interviews with community members, and traditional authorities, the main productive activities in three target areas in Chad—farming, herding, and fishing—are suffering from the effects of climate change, subsequently increasing economic and survival pressure in communities. At the same time, competition for ever-shrinking resources has led to increased conflict within and between communities, causing a breakdown in social

cohesion. These effects of climate change have been instrumentalized by terrorist groups for recruitment and propaganda purposes. The report identifies key guiding principles that should form the basis of future interventions focused on preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) in the Sahel and take into consideration cross-cutting and context-specific climate-related challenges and security risks. In particular, the report stressed the necessity to improve the understanding of specific gender vulnerabilities and invest in strategies and policies aimed at women's inclusion, empowerment, and access to decision-making processes.

This research took place in the context of wider efforts within the United Nations system to understand better the impact of climate change on peace, security, and violent extremism. This also includes the 2022 report by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) outlining key climate change impacts on peace and security, and a regional conference organized by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) on climate change, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel in Dakar in April 2022. The participants at the conference adopted a call to action urging more inclusive and evidence-based analysis and policymaking, integrated partnerships and scaled-up conflict-sensitive climate finance. In particular, it called for UNOWAS to continue coordinating with UN Country Teams and the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM), conduct climate security risk assessments, and implement risk management strategies addressing the adverse effects of climate change. Pilot climate security risk assessments have already been conducted in Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal, with ten more planned.

Thereby, knowledge around climate change on peace and security is growing, but there is still limited empirical research, and even less so on possible linkages with violent extremism and terrorism. The Secretary-General, in his report on the activities of the United Nations System in implementing the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, has acknowledged that many of the countries most affected by terrorist activities are among those most vulnerable to climate change. The report also notes that further evidence-based and context-specific research and analysis on the nexus between climate change and terrorism, as well as its programming implications, are required, including on the varied impact of climate-induced changes on women and men and their pathways to violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), through its Global PCVE Programme has sought to better understand this relationship from the perspective of Member States who have highlighted the need for additional research, opportunities for dialogue, and practical tools to inform policy approaches and programming. UNOCT, as well as UNICRI, will continue to prioritize this as an area of focus, to apply insights from evidence-based research as a foundation for programme interventions that can enhance knowledge and capacity to address the strategic exploitation of climate change and its causes by terrorist groups.

Objectives

The outcome of the side-event is to a) raise-awareness amongst participants of the ongoing discourse around climate and security, in particular the impact of climate change and degradation of natural resources and how this can exacerbate local conflicts, and b) highlight the linkages between climate insecurity with radicalization and recruitment by terrorist groups. The event will include a mapping of terrorist and conflict activity, socioeconomic conditions and rainfall patterns in the Sahel up to 31 May 2023, and will present perspectives from farmers, herders, fishers, and youth from across the globe. It will also spotlight other innovative approaches and technological support systems that are helping to better understand and respond to climate insecurity, providing important context for the CT and PVE work being undertaken from within the United Nations system today.

Logistics

The event will be organized in a hybrid format to facilitate participation, with virtual participation taking place via WebEx. The meeting will be conducted in English.

To confirm your participation (online and in person), please click here to RSVP.

For any questions regarding this event, kindly contact Mr. Odhran McCarthy, UNICRI New York Liaison Officer and Programme Officer, odhran.mccarthy@un.org and Ms. Sian Hutchinson, UNOCT, Head of Global PCVE Programme, sian.hutchinson@un.org.

AGENDA	
21 June 2023, 1:00 - 2:30 pm EDT	
15 mins	**Opening Remarks** ▪ *Permanent Mission of Canada* ▪ *Permanent Mission of Mozambique* ▪ *Permanent Mission of Norway*
10 mins	**Mapping Changing Ecological Conditions Against Violent Extremism and Conflict, Locally and Worldwide** *Thom Morgan, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)*
10 mins	**Armed group recruitment and the climate change connection,** *UNIDIR/UNU-CPR, The Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative*
25 mins	**Insights from affected communities:** **Listening to farmers, herders, and fishers,** *by Manuela Brunero, UNICRI* **Listening to the youth,** *by UNOCT Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme*
10 mins	**Leveraging insights from new technologies: The Pastoral conflict reasoning engine,** *by Professor V.S Subrahmanian, Northwestern University*
15 mins	**Questions and Answers, moderated** *by UNICRI/UNOCT*
5 mins	**Closing remarks,** *by Mr. Raffi Gregorian, Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General, UNOCT / Mr. Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director, UNICRI*
Close of Side-Event	