

His Excellency Heiko Mass, German Federal Minister for  
Foreign Affairs  
Excellencies  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

Allow me to begin by thanking His Excellency Minister Heiko Mass for his kind invitation to this critical Conference and the Government of Germany for their sterling leadership on the very important issue of climate change and security. I would also like to recognize Adelphi and Potsdam Institute for their work organizing this event.

A little over ten years ago, the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum agreed that addressing the security implications of climate change was a top concern and should be pursued in all relevant international fora. Even then, the writing was on the wall. Previous multilateral efforts had failed to mobilize climate action at the necessary scale, and some dangerous impacts were probably inevitable. For some of our members, climate change presented an existential threat.

We concluded that a more robust UN response was needed.

Our initial outreach was not always well received. We likened sea level rise and the associated loss of territory to an occupying force. Some of us compared existing agreements to a death warrant, a suicide pact. It is not an exaggeration to say that some countries laughed us out of the room when the Pacific brought the issue to the General Assembly in 2008.

“Does the Pacific expect UN peacekeepers to invade countries and shut down their coal plants?”

-----

A lot has happened since then, and the tenor of the debate has shifted significantly. The Pacific succeeded in passing a General Assembly resolution that recognizes the security implications of climate change. This was followed by a similar Presidential Statement of the Security Council under Germany’s tenure. It is probably safe to say that nearly every country now recognizes the serious threat to international peace and security posed by the impacts of climate change. We also have a new climate treaty...

-----

And yet, our greenhouse gas emissions are higher than they have ever been in human history.

The threat to Pacific Islands has only grown more serious in the intervening years. Is it time to start sending in UN peacekeepers to shut down coal plants? Perhaps...

But we also understand that some things are outside the realm of political possibility, no matter how urgent the situation. The Pacific had to swallow bitter compromises in Paris, which greatly increased the risks to our countries. This also makes us more reliant on the rest of the UN system to help manage those risks to the extent possible.

So please allow me to clarify the perspective of one Pacific Island Government on the front lines regarding the security implications of climate change.

We are already seeing dangerous impacts in our countries and communities, with the most vulnerable among us bearing the greatest burden. Scientists are finding the finger prints of climate change all over many recent extreme events. In the Pacific, Nauru and our Micronesian neighbors have been hit with historic droughts, which are projected to worsen in the future. Others have experienced record-shattering cyclones. Climate change is not going away. There will be no return to a “normal” climate in our lifetimes. In fact, the situation will continue to deteriorate for many decades even if we achieve our global goals under the Paris Agreement.

It is this point that seems to be lost on most policy-makers from less vulnerable nations. We are up against a progressively worsening baseline. Extreme events will continue to occur at a frequency and magnitude well outside human experience. *It will get worse*, and therefore, past experience is a poor guide for dealing with future impacts.

We must also take seriously the potential for abrupt climate change – a rapid and irreversible change in our biophysical environment caused by crossing climate tipping points. The spectacular collapse of Arctic sea ice over the past decade is one of the more dramatic and alarming examples of this phenomenon. What will be the next ecosystem to tip? The Amazon or boreal forests? Permafrost in the Canadian and Russian tundra? Tropical coral reef systems? Phytoplankton in the oceans?

There is strong scientific evidence that climate change is throwing our natural systems increasingly out of balance. That alone should be enough to terrify even the most ardent climate change denier.

Even more alarming is that we really do not know how our human systems will react to these new, and unprecedented changes.

The food crisis of 2007 and 2008 provoked social unrest in countries around the world and prompted some to declare states of emergency. Nauru saw the price of food staples rise to four times the global average. Food was simply unaffordable for many in the Pacific.

There were many causes of the crisis, but they included climatic factors in key food producing regions of the world. The crisis occurred even though – on paper – the world was still producing enough food to feed everyone. It was primarily a distributional challenge.

Scientists are projecting agricultural yields to fall significantly in a hotter world, while the population may grow by another two or three billion human beings. We face a future in which there simply may not be enough food to go around. How might societies react? Could social unrest be contained? And what steps can we take to prevent such a scenario?

Indeed, some of the greatest threats posed by climate change may not be the actual biophysical impacts, but rather the deficiencies in our response to them. Greater scarcity of

resources, destruction of critical infrastructure, interruption of public services, and displacement of communities – all of these things will test the resilience of our public and private institutions and governance structures.

Think our systems and institutions are resilient? Let us not forget that over-priced vacation homes in Miami and Las Vegas brought the global financial system to its knees.

Modern society depends on the orderly functioning of complex and inter-connected systems. These systems often function outside the control of any one nation, and therefore can only be reformed through multilateral cooperation. And these systems have yet to be tested in a world that is one-point-five, two, or three degrees hotter.

The Government of Nauru believes that the United Nations has a central role to play in understanding and addressing the security implications of climate change. The response should not be overly focused on the Security Council, but rather integrate the whole of the UN system. It should be universal in approach, rather than focusing narrowly on just “climate vulnerable” countries or “fragile states.” It should seek to prevent crisis by addressing the root causes of human insecurity and instability. The UN response needs to be systems-oriented, and examine vulnerabilities across society and across sectors of the global economy. The UN must also be ready to explore and facilitate the implementation of transformational changes when conventional approaches are demonstrated to be inadequate. And lastly, the development of any UN response must fully include the countries most affected by the changes.

Integrated, Universal, Preventative, Systems-oriented, Transformational, and Inclusive: These are some of the principles that have guided Nauru's vision in this area.

Several countries, including Nauru, have proposed specific functions that the UN could perform, in order to address existing gaps. I would like to highlight some of them:

**One:** Integrated country and regional risk assessments, along with the development of standardized methodologies.

**Two:** Preventative diplomacy in situations where climate change impacts may destabilized the situation.

**Three:** Facilitation of cross-border and regional cooperation to address shared climate change vulnerabilities.

**Four:** Monitoring of climate/security tipping points – for example, degradation of critical watersheds, food producing regions, and ecosystems, disruption of vulnerable supply chains, and stress testing financial systems.

**And Five:** Targeted support in post-conflict situations where climate change creates significant vulnerabilities.

These are concrete ideas that have been proposed in the Chamber of the Security Council and I hope they receive some attention at this conference. The Pacific has made it clear that

we think these functions are best coordinated by a new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Climate Security.

However, there are still very large differences regarding the appropriate role of the United Nations system in the context of the security implications of climate change. The Pacific continues to be the strongest voice for a robust UN response, but some powerful countries are prepared to play hard-ball to preserve the status quo. To our great disappointment, climate change and security was dropped from the programme for the Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in September, because the issue was considered too divisive.

It is important to consider some of the counter-arguments. Some countries do not support any expansion of the Security Council's mandate. Nauru is sympathetic to this concern, as the Security Council is not a representative body. That is why the Pacific has proposed the appointment of a Special Representative, which would not affect the mandate of the Security Council. Instead, the Special Rep serves the Secretary-General, as the title implies.

That being said, the Council needs better climate-related security risk information, analysis, and early-warning mechanisms to be able to make informed decisions. Sound analysis of current and future security risks are key for the Council to carry out its main functions – preventing conflict and sustaining peace. UN capabilities with respect to climate-related security risks need to be further developed to support the Secretary-General's reporting and risk assessments, which is entirely consistent with the intent of the 2011 Presidential

Statement and recent Security Council resolutions on the Lake Chad Basin, West Africa, the Sahel, and Somalia.

Some countries have also expressed concerns about the securitization of climate change, fearing that it will lead to greater militarization of the issue. This is precisely the dynamic that we think a robust UN response can help us avoid. If we do not proactively address the security implications of climate change, then the onset of climate-driven crisis will make it more likely that some will opt for military responses – not less.

The military branches of many governments with global reach have been analyzing this issue for more than a decade – mostly behind closed doors. Bringing the issue before the United Nations would provide the opportunity for all to engage in this critical discussion.

The last and most concerning source of opposition comes from a few powerful countries that have long sought to limit the reach of multilateral institutions like the United Nations and to avoid any constraints on their ability to act unilaterally. It could be argued that this logic is at the heart of the Paris Agreement, and I fear that it is not compatible with a world in which most Pacific Islands are viable. I harbor no illusions that the fate of my country concerns them in the slightest, but I am also not prepared to give up pursuing a way forward.

In any event, the debate at the United Nations continues to move forward as climate change continues to impact every aspect of its work. In response to recent Security Council resolutions, the UN has taken its first steps toward integrating resilience planning into the work of peacekeeping operation.

This seems like a positive development with the potential to bring a more durable peace and security to the people living in fragile situations. I would especially like to see clear mechanisms developed to ensure that the people from the affected countries are driving the conversation. Also encouraging is the establishment of a mini-mechanism within the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, which will help build UN competence on this issue.

However, if the UN restricts its inquiry into the security implications of climate change to only the most desperate situations, then we will constantly be caught off guard when a climate-driven crisis emerges.

As a parting thought, I would like to recognize the efforts already underway to fundamentally restructure the way we organize human society, led primarily by Youth movements around the world. Our children and grandchildren have taken to heart the conclusions of scientists that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require substantial societal transformation, and they are calling for nothing less. They have demonstrated an impressive understanding, not only of the science of climate change, but also the social and economic drivers that have given rise to the crisis. Connecting these dots, they recognize that the project of creating a more environmentally sustainable society must go hand in hand with creating a more just society.

Some of those same systems I have alluded to earlier are the source of other forms of social discord and instability, such as poverty, inequality, and racial disparities in life opportunities and outcomes. They needed fundamental reform even before

climate change. Now their reform has become a planetary imperative.

The UN is one of the bastions of conventional wisdom, so I know it will be difficult, but we need to be bold in our efforts. We must be developing new, climate-resilient systems, or we risk further entrenching the broken systems of old.

Looking ahead, the most unpredictable system is likely our *political system*. Will cooperation prevail, or should we expect a scramble for the world's remaining resources? Will the coming era be defined by social solidarity or warring sectarian extremes? Fortunately, human beings have a choice in this matter, and I believe the United Nations can help us make the right ones. For me, this is what the climate and security discussion is ultimately about.

Thank you.