



TEXT OF PRESENTATION BY DAN SMITH, 24 February 2020

Mr President, Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the effect of climate-related impacts on peace operations in Somalia. This is a glimpse into the world of tomorrow, in which peace operations will be undertaken in security environments that are increasingly influenced by climate and vulnerable to its vagaries.

The Mandate Renewals in 2018 and 2019 for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) referred to the impact of climate change. Against that background, my institute, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has explored the evidence of climate impact, assessed the risks it poses, and identified responses. We released our report in late 2019 and my presentation today summarises the findings.

In brief, floods and droughts in Somalia exacerbate conflict and displacement; thereby UNSOM's efforts and the work of the Federal Government of Somalia in building peace risk being undermined. The pressure of weather events is part of what challenges the current power-sharing agreement, providing recruitment opportunities for the al-Shabab terrorist organisation among others.

Turning that round so responding to climate variability creates opportunities for peacebuilding is perhaps the essence of the challenge facing the Federal Government of Somalia and UNSOM. Addressing the negative impact of environmental change on peace operations could offer an opportunity to build a positive relationship between environmental resilience and sustainable peace.

I do not need to explain to the Council the contours of conflict in Somalia. Conflicts persist among competing clans and ideological and political groups. There are both national and local conflicts, feeding each other. The local conflicts are often closely linked with access to natural resources, especially land, fisheries and water. The ownership of resources is closely linked to livelihoods and ways of life and thus to markers of communal identity. This makes conflict particularly hard to resolve or even manage, and embeds the influence of climate deep within the factors that shape the prospects of security and insecurity, peace or conflict in Somalia.

So let us turn to the country's climate.

Mr President,

Our report does not argue that climate defines everything in Somalia or elsewhere. But the evidence is that if your analysis leaves out nature including climate, then the analysis is incomplete.

Somalia experiences some of the world's highest mean annual temperatures and has long been prone to extreme weather conditions. In the six decades since 1960 the country has experienced a gradual and continuous increase in mean annual temperatures. While the conflicts have made data collection and tracking difficult, in 2007 the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) projected a temperature increase of between 3.2°C and 4.3°C by the end of the 21st century – far exceeding tolerable levels.

Meanwhile, rainfall is erratic and varies widely between the seasons and from year to year. In 2014, the IPCC projected more rain for Somalia in the coming decades, with the rain falling more intensely, thus generating a high growing risk of flooding and soil erosion.

Consequently, seasons and weather are increasingly hard to predict. This uncertainty has a direct impact on everyday life in a population that is highly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. It intensifies competition for natural resources and generates conflicts because, as herders shift away from traditional grazing routes due to unexpectedly changed conditions, so farmers find themselves having to defend their land and crops against extra pressure.

Herders are more inclined to sell livestock in times of extreme weather. This depresses local prices, weakening an already weak market, which closes options for a dignified livelihood for young men. It thus encourages criminality and creates opportunities for recruitment by armed factions.

In short, local climate realities feed al-Shabab with a pool of potential recruits. And of course, the influx of small arms into the region offers armed factions additional opportunities for building their strength.

Further, local conflicts can quickly escalate to national level. Disagreements on natural resources are absorbed into Somalia's larger political dynamics and have led to some of its deadliest violence.

And worryingly, at the same time as resource-based conflicts have both deepened and escalated, migration to the cities and internal displacement have had the effect of weakening traditional means of managing and resolving disputes and conflicts.

Mr President,

The evidence is clear that climate-related shocks and stresses can destabilise Somalia's prospects for peace. Extreme weather events create water and food insecurity that give Al-Shabab the opportunity to act as service providers. This allows their political narrative to gain support and decreases trust in the peacebuilding efforts of the Federal Government of Somalia and the UN.

UNSOM and the UN Country Team have responded to the increasing pressure and recurrence of extreme weather events and their knock-on effects. Learning from the 2011 drought and its catastrophic consequences, initiatives were developed that curbed the potentially severe famine in 2016 and 2017.

The key was timely information and effective inter-agency cooperation across Somalia. This is the basis for forming the Disaster Operation Coordination Centre, working with a comprehensive Recovery and Resilience Framework for Somalia. It is also important that the role of an Environmental Security Adviser was created, so as to address the need for coordination.

Thus, UNSOM is taking steps to address climate-related risks. Together with the UN Country Team, what more can it do?

One, it can focus on improving coordination between the government, and humanitarian and security actors, both Somali and international. To be sure, care must be taken not to undermine humanitarian neutrality, but assistance in a humanitarian emergency can be accepted from different quarters. Preparation for this will reduce the impact of future shocks and can be done without compromising humanitarian principles.

Two, it can remain alert to the need to adapt its response structures to evolving conditions. Part of its long-term strategy and part of the Recovery and Resilience Framework for Somalia should be to build the capacity to receive, process, disseminate and act upon information that reflects the changing on-the-ground realities, in the dual context of a changing climate and protracted conflicts.

Three, climate and climate change cross national boundaries and so does the impact. Broader regional responses are required. Through the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, appropriate inter-state frameworks exist, with which UNSOM can cooperate.

Mr President,

If I may, our report also contains relevant input for similar United Nations missions in vulnerable areas.

Four, the case of UNSOM in Somalia exemplifies what we have also identified in other operations in the Sahel, in the Middle East and in Asia – the imperative of preparing now for climate impacts. The first step is to increase capacity to assess climate-related security risks. A good starting point is to step up the dialogue on this among UN agencies working in-country. It is – or should be – a central plank of the Sustaining Peace and Conflict Prevention agenda.

Five, by increasing information exchange between missions, knowledge about what works and what does not will be brought together and can be more widely shared.

And six, dare we say it, dare to try new responses. Some tried and tested measures are still relevant but, all other things being equal, a changing world requires some new responses. Knowing what does not work means it is time to find something new, even experimentally.

Finally, Mr President, there are implications for the wider UN system:

To synthesize climate risk assessment capacity. Risk assessment information should be made available to those that need it via the Climate Security Mechanism.

To ensure the training of peacebuilding personnel includes a specific focus on climate sensitivity.

And lastly, to carry out the systems adjustments needed so that funding streams can support integrated responses to climate-related security risks and prioritise programmes that promote climate resilience.

In sum, Mr President, Excellencies, the case of Somalia shows us the future of peacebuilding. There are practical steps decision-makers can take to address the negative impact of today's environmental crises, to improve tomorrow's prospects for peace and security. UNSOM and the Federal Government of Somalia have both made important steps in this direction; there is room for more.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you and thank you for your attention.