



**Munich Security Conference  
Munich, 18 February 2017**

**Address by  
Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the Munich Security Conference Foundation for hosting this discussion on Human Security and Climate Security. I am very glad to have the opportunity to set the scene for this crucial topic.

Friends, the security community is well aware of the fact that climate change is a security issue. Our current refugee crisis, when seen through the lens of climate change, brings this into sharp focus. And the security community, which is renowned and revered for their ability to assess and address future threats, understands that our current crisis pales in comparison to what is coming if climate change is left unchecked.

Consider these facts from the UN Refugee Agency:

- Between 2008 and 2015 more than 203.4 million people were displaced by disasters.
- The likelihood of being displaced by disaster has doubled since the 1970s, with disasters costing the world more than 250 billion US dollars a year.
- And there is high agreement among scientists that climate change, in combination with other factors, will increase the displacement of people.

The “New Climate for Peace” Report that was done last year to guide G7 nations lays out climate change as a driving force behind the instability that causes displacement. Global pressures on food, water, energy and other resources are increasing. Climate change is the threat multiplier that worsens social, economic, and environmental pressures, leading to social upheaval and possibly even violent conflict.

These facts are widely accepted in the security community.

The US military understands that climate change presents a significant and direct risk to readiness, operations and strategy.

The Secretary General of NATO says climate change is a security threat because it can change the conditions where people live, create new crises and fuel new conflicts.

Our UN Secretary-General reaffirmed just this morning that devastating epidemics are a global megatrend that we must act on as part of building a culture of prevention with an end goal of lasting peace and prosperity.

And Secretary-General Guterres correctly points out that the Paris Climate Change Agreement, which was adopted in 2015 along with the global Sustainable Development Goals, provides a unique opportunity to act on this growing threat.

These assessments of climate change as a security risk come from experts who understand the complexity of systems and the implications of the actions we take, or fail to take. And these assessments come at a moment in history when we clearly see the effects of climate change – not just in record high temperatures year after year, but in the global conflict landscape as well.

With the impacts of climate change increasingly apparent, and with leading voices in the security community calling climate change a clear and present threat and with a framework for action in place that is agreed by all nations ... The question for the distinguished panel becomes – how can the security community help put nations of the world on a path to exceed commitments on climate change and sustainable development?

Such a path would reduce risk and increase stability. It is a path for national leaders to safeguard their countries and their citizens. It is a path that encourages attractive, productive and inclusive low-emission growth in the developing world, and especially in places like Africa where we know we are on the verge of rapid growth and urbanization. And it is a path that encourages cooperation by all nations to address global challenges that know no borders.

Key to getting on this path is framing climate change as a security story.

I believe that too often, climate change is presented by the media or politicians as an energy story... or a natural resource story, or a weather story. The public hears about solar and wind or other clean energy developments. Or we hear news about how climate change will impact the resources we rely on – water, food and healthy ecosystems. And we certainly hear when climate change is linked to deadly and costly extreme weather – supercharged storms, prolonged drought and devastating floods.

But, climate change presents a complex and multidimensional risk. This is the story that needs telling.

The narrative must go beyond climate change simply driving drought, supercharged storms or resource scarcity. This story must be carried forward to show that already vulnerable communities become more desperate, more vulnerable and more susceptible. People are displaced, in their country or to other countries. Add in conflict or predatory criminals or several concurrent crises and your humanitarian situation quickly escalates into a security risk.

This story, this narrative, this link between a stable climate and human development needed for security – this is the story that needs to be told. More people need to understand, because this story's ending is uncertain. It is currently being written.

In one ending, the community of nations works together, using the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals and the host of multilateral institutions to build resilience and curb the emissions that increase risk. We take real, meaningful action on climate change and the SDGs at the urgent speed science says is required. We foster a culture of prevention by building resilience and reducing emission-related risk today.

This is the ending that is playing out. The Paris Agreement has now been ratified by 131 countries. The Sustainable Development Goals clearly state that climate change is “the single biggest threat to development,” which brings it into economic development planning. The private sector is acting on thousands of climate commitments in areas like clean energy, sustainable supply chains and offsetting of unavoidable emissions. States and cities are acting on climate to benefit their citizens.

All this momentum forward, everything we have done, is not enough. We must do redouble our efforts or this story will have a dramatically different ending.

We cannot fail to meet the climate commitments negotiated in good faith, especially the commitment to increase ambition over time.

If we fail to reduce emissions and build our capacity to cope with impacts, over the long term, climate change will result in more disruption, more instability and more displacement as impacts intensify. The world will be less stable, less secure.

Here in Munich, we are in a great place to discuss how this story ends. This country has welcomed so many refugees. Right here, one of the first crucial chapters of the refugee

and climate change story is playing out. And, I think that Germany is setting an example of what needs to be done.

Germany is connecting the dots. The German government is working on initiatives such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement, a toolbox to prevent and prepare for displacement, as well as respond when displacement happens. This initiative places climate change squarely in the context of disaster risk. This link is made in the preamble of the Paris Agreement, and must be strengthened in people's minds. Climate action reduces risk and increases stability.

Germany is building bridges. The Platform on Disaster Displacement was created in partnership with France and Switzerland, as well as private partners. The German government hosted the G20 meeting this week and will host the UN climate change conference this November. These bridges engage nations in cooperative action on climate change and other critical issues.

And Germany is taking steps locally that reduce global risk. Incentivizing solar and wind, increasing energy efficiency, encouraging public transportation and recycling all curb emissions that drive risk. If we bend the emissions curve and keep temperature rise to as close to 1.5 degrees Celsius as possible, we keep risk as low as possible.

I applaud these steps and encourage all countries to take similar steps. I encourage the international community to tell climate change as a security story. Explicitly linking climate action today with a more secure tomorrow writes an ending to this story that is good for people and planet, peace and prosperity.

I am very interested to hear how the distinguished panelists gathered here think we can better tell this story. I am interested to hear how the security community can raise awareness and understanding of the human security and climate security link.

And I am interested to hear how the UN climate change secretariat can leverage our process to promote stability, prosperity and peace. Climate action shapes the narrative. It points development towards prevention and helps deliver the best outcomes for all. We are here to support governments in your work towards a stable, secure future.

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