



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Georgetown University Centennial Event Series
Hosted by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace & Security
Washington DC, 28 February 2017**

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by first thanking my dear friend Ambassador Verveer for the warm introduction and the invitation to speak at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.

The opportunity to speak here is special, as it allows me to share with you some reflections on the UN climate change process, the challenges we face and the opportunities it offers to societies and progress achieved to date.

This is also an opportunity to highlight the role women have to play in the larger peace and security narrative and their role in the transformation we require to address climate change effectively. So I thank Ambassador Verveer and her team for all their hard work organizing this event.

Climate change plays a huge role in determining whether or not we achieve security and global peace, and if we can truly improve the lives of billions of women. Two weeks ago at the Munich Security Conference, we heard this from both Bill Gates and UN Secretary-General António Guterres. In fact, I raised this very point in a panel on human security and climate security.

I asked the security community to talk about climate change as a security story. Because it is a security story. Climate change affects human security, food security, water security, energy security and personal security. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change, and they also hold the key to some of our most promising actions to counter its impacts.

So where does the climate security story start? It starts in places like the Sahel.

The Sahel, south of the Sahara Desert, is hot and arid. Many people in the Sahel are subsistence farmers who rely on the land for their livelihood. Climate change is making it harder and harder to grow reliable crops, find enough water, find work and raise a family. One heat wave, the rainy season coming too late or not at all, or drought pull more and more families into poverty traps.

This poverty trap is a downward spiral, often starting with crop failure and food and income shortfalls. Then, children are pulled out of school to help provide for the family. If food becomes scarce, women are often the first to sacrifice their meals so others in the family get enough calories. Sometimes men and boys migrate away in search of food and jobs so they can buy food to send home. At home, women shoulder the triple responsibility of caring for the elderly, children, and gardens and farms while hoping and waiting for food, rain, and relief.

Often, those searching for food and jobs go to the nearest big city. They go to the next country over. Some manage the perilous trip across the Sahara and some even cross the Mediterranean bound for Europe. The newspapers in Europe this week report hundreds of people arriving daily.

If we could ask them about their stories, I am certain many would tell us about problems with water, rainfall and erratic weather. I wonder how many would tell us about the families that are waiting for them to send help.

The effects of climate change impacts in one part of the world are not just felt there. That impact ripples outward and is felt continents away. We are all connected.

And the human cost of these climate impacts are tremendous. Children go hungry. Families are torn apart. Economic opportunity evaporates. Criminal enterprises take root and grow from the soil of vulnerability. Climate risks, vulnerabilities and impacts change the global security landscape and our political conversations.

When vulnerable families become desperate because of that extra climate impact, it can contribute to humanitarian crisis. Consider what the UN Refugee Agency says:

- Between 2008 and 2015 more than 200 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 displacement of people.

So we must look at this equation – reducing risk and building resilience will affect peace and security outcomes. Reducing risk and building resilience protects lives and livelihoods in vulnerable communities. The potential for negative impacts to ripple outward declines. That is the connection that makes climate change a security story.

Climate change is a vulnerability multiplier, and addressing climate change now reduces the likelihood of issues in the future.

According to the UN Development Program, 60 percent of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people are women who are dependent on their natural environment to earn a living and feed their families. Reducing risk and building resilience through climate and sustainability action makes a real and tangible difference in the lives of women, which in turn benefits children and entire communities.

The international community has come together around two global agreements that promise to reduce risk and build resilience. These are the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

The Paris Agreement unites all nations in a common goal – to achieve climate neutrality in the second half of the century by limiting global average temperature rise to as close to 1.5 degrees Celsius as possible. Restoring this balance between human development and the natural world is accomplished by reducing emissions and by building resilience to impacts.

This complements the 17 aspirational Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, which are designed to ensure human needs are met, economic opportunity is open to all and the natural world we rely on is protected.

Climate action is one of the SDGs. The SDGs also aspire to end poverty, end hunger, ensure good health, ensure education, increase equality for women and girls and make sure people have the water, energy and economic opportunity they need.

So when you look at the equation again, you see that climate action in places like the Sahel is not only a way to reduce potential humanitarian crises and security concerns, it is a way to deliver a secure, stable and sustainable future to vulnerable communities.

You also see that the women in vulnerable communities are some of the most capable in terms of developing locally appropriate adaptive strategies. These women are crucial to overcome the challenge of our changing environmental reality. And they could do more with more resources – truly becoming agents of transformational change.

This is not just true for the Sahel. It is true for all of Africa, for the small island States and for the entire developing world.

This is why support must flow to the developing world. Support – along with commitments to act from every country and buy-in from business, investors, cities and state governments – is part of the Paris Agreement, which entered into force last November, just before the UN Climate Change Conference in Marrakech.

COP 22 in Marrakech was a major milestone. We had the first meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement and countries started to work on the rulebook for the Agreement. They also pledged finance and technology support, and they agreed to an inclusive work plan to bring businesses and civil society into the discussion on how to make climate action equitable for women.

And in Marrakech, what happened outside of the negotiations was also promising.

We saw the 40 most vulnerable nations commit to bold climate action, showing they will do everything they can to be on the solution side of the climate equation.

We also saw the club of subnational governments committed to deep emission cuts of 80 percent grow to cover 1 in 7 people on the planet.

The number of companies making climate commitments through the We Mean Business coalition has more than doubled since the Paris Agreement was adopted, and the companies taking action are now worth eight trillion US dollars in market capitalization.

So as we kick off implementation of the Paris Agreement, we are in a great position to transform growth and development, achieve the goals nations have laid out in their contributions and write a positive ending to the climate-security story.

Friends, we cannot take this position for granted. The momentum we have seen to this point is simply not enough. We are still on course to see significant displacement of people and disruption of the economy if we don't act urgently. Nations must now internalize their commitments and put in place policies to achieve their contributions to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

In this moment, as policy is being pursued, governments of the world have the opportunity to write inclusive policy that moves the world closer to the stable climate needed for healthy social and economic development.

I believe that everyone here can help seize this opportunity by doing three things.

First, connect the dots. When policymakers and the public understand that action on climate change and on the SDGs will deliver a more secure, more stable future, we will see support for urgent action to accomplish our climate and development goals. Without this connection, the value of climate action is not accurately conveyed.

Second, build bridges. Climate change is a complex challenge, and different groups are working on the issue in different ways. By building relationships, we can each reinforce each other's work and increase the potential for positive outcomes. This is why I am building bridges across the UN system and with other multilateral agencies – to see how we can work together to accomplish our compatible goals.

Third, take steps locally to reduce global risk. Many of you will be – or already are – working on initiatives that help people around the world, or doing research with a climate link or building resilient societies. The government leaders who have joined us may be working on new policies that consider climate. The private sector may be updating their business models or seeking reforms that green the global financial architecture and increase access.

As you work on the many facets of climate change, peace and security, I implore you to do so with the women in the Sahel and other vulnerable places in mind. Gender equality in international policy, in national policy, in finance and in all academic and corporate and governance work unleashes positive potential in the developing world. That also ripples outward and positively affects the entire world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am confident that together we can solve the climate change and security equation. And we can do so while lifting up women and girls.

We can cut emissions and reduce risk. We can build resilience and improve the well-being of people. We can write policy that promotes a just transformation of the global economy for everyone, including women, children and vulnerable communities.

We can tell the climate story as a security story. And we can work towards the Paris Agreement and SDGs with an end goal of a stable and secure world with peace and prosperity for all.

Let's do it together. And let's do it now.

Thank you everyone and I look forward to our discussion.

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