



Intervention de Monsieur Philippe KRIDELKA,
Ambassadeur, Représentant permanent

au Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies

**Humanitarian effects of environmental degradation
and peace and security**

New York, le 17 septembre 2020

Monsieur le Président,

Je remercie le Niger d'avoir organisé ce débat à l'occasion de sa présidence et je remercie les invités pour leur intervention.

The massive ongoing flooding in Niger is a dramatic demonstration that climate change is intensely affecting the Sahel. These floods have now caused more deaths than COVID-19 in the country.

Some may think that the UNSC is not the best forum to have a meeting on climate change. But Belgium believes it is appropriate that we meet to discuss its consequences on conflict and humanitarian needs. The Lake Chad region is a symbolic case, a terrible but convincing example, where the interaction of climate change and armed conflict is undermining sustainable development. This creates a long term humanitarian catastrophe and nurturing extremist movements that capitalise on weak governance. The links between climate and conflict are already today an appalling reality for these populations.

Mr. President,

Vulnerability to climate change is not always the highest where environmental degradation and climate change are having the most severe effects. This vulnerability to climate change is mostly defined by the capacity

of communities to adapt and prevent climate risks. Where these are low, people are most vulnerable as in situations of fragility. Belgium therefore calls for deeper analysis of the humanitarian challenges of interaction between the environment and conflict and reflection on the ways humanitarian and other responses can strengthen resilience. We hope a virtual ministerial meeting organized jointly with the Niger, the EU, and the International Committee of the Red Cross on September 25th can start the reflection on these overlapping vulnerabilities.

Mr. President,

Let me share with you some of our observations in advance of our meeting on September 25th:

- 1) Firstly, many conflict and post-conflict countries receive very little climate funding, whereas they might be those that need it most. In addition, overall a big part of ODA in fragile countries and half of the aid to extremely fragile countries is of humanitarian nature. As such it acts as a "fire extinguisher", but it does not add to the prevention of conflict. It is extremely challenging to align aid to the multidimensional and long term needs of fragile contexts of which climate change is a part. Trying to address this challenge, the Belgian humanitarian department launched a 4-year-project aimed at youth resilience in the Lake Chad region. The programme is executed by Plan International and our partners at Oxfam. Its experience teaches that aid efforts in fragile contexts need to be adaptable, flexible, innovative and executed in close coordination with local authorities and the academic world's understanding of how climate change impacts specific situations. After all, it does not really help to teach young men and women how to fish when there is no Lake left to fish in or when access to the Lake has been rendered impossible by security measures.

- 2) Secondly, Mr. President, the Security Council needs to act. During our term on the Council, one of Belgium's priorities has been to mainstream climate-related security risks into relevant Council mandates. We are pleased with progress made so far and we vow to continue pressing on this at the occasion of the next mandate renewals. But let us also look at the broader picture. A climate and security angle should be incorporated throughout the entire cycle of conflict: from prevention initiatives, through mediation strategies, to peacebuilding plans and peace talks. This includes engaging in negotiations on the sharing of natural resources, anticipating future climate risks and making the local population more resilient. For this all to be successful it is crucial that climate-risk assessments are also available, also to the UNSC, and included in more general conflict and fragility assessments. I cannot but underscore the role of the Climate Security Mechanism and the wider academic world in this matter.

- 3) And lastly, Mr. President, essential civilian infrastructure is regularly targeted during conflicts. This destroys livelihoods of communities and increases their exposure to climate change. Allow me to note that International Humanitarian Law does indeed include the protection of the natural environment.

I thank you.