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CLIMATE-FRAGILITY BRIEFER

HOW CAN UN ORGANS RESPOND TO CLIMATE-SECURITY RISKS?

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Why is climate change a UN Security Council concern?

The impact of climate change on peace and conflict is a critical foreign policy challenge. Climate change compounds existing security risks, creating new and stronger pressures on communities and governments, making peace harder to maintain, achieve and sustain.

The traditional perception that climate change falls under the exclusive responsibility of UN organs charged with matters of sustainable development is no longer tenable, as its impacts on and risks for international peace and security have become increasingly evident. Adequate responses to these challenges will **involve the entire UN system** and incorporate action from multiple organs **throughout the conflict cycle** - long before the outbreak of open violence, in reconstruction efforts as well as peacebuilding.

The **infographic** accompanying this text displays some of the potential actions the General Assembly, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council can and should take in order to address climate-security risks. While UN organs shape large parts of the UN system's response, other bodies also have a role to play. They can implement many of the tools discussed below and significantly contribute to improved responses. The inclusion of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change reflects its critical role in mitigating climate change and thereby climate-security risks. The graphic links these actions to the different phases of a conflict cycle and identifies those phases during which the interventions are most likely to achieve their desired outcomes.

This brief **outlines the different sets of tools** available to the organs in more detail and offers the rationale for implementing these actions in the future.

Tools to improve preventive action

UN action, which addresses the core drivers of climate-related threats to peace and contributes to preventing the outbreak of conflict, is certainly the most impactful approach. **Sustainable development** as well as improved **action on climate change** are the most assured ways to realise preventive approaches and ambitions.

As climate change interacts with a range of pressures on livelihoods and communities, and compounds already existing risks, sustainable development can effectively **address the root causes** of climate-security risks. Addressing food security or political exclusion for example, reduces the impact of price shocks and lowers grievances against governments, **relieving the pressures** climate change is putting on existing conflict risks. Ensuring sustainable development is an especially important tool in preventive action.

Mitigating climate change is a highly effective way of reducing climate-security risks. Responses to these risks can be a co-benefit of increased ambition vis à vis climate change more broadly, reducing the overall impacts of global warming. Additionally, increasing **climate change adaptation** is an important step to ensure that people are less at risk, by lowering the effect of climate change impacts. More adaptation projects should be implemented, especially in conflict-affected contexts, while global financial provisions for adaptation need to be increased as well. **Implementing global agreements** to counter climate change and to protect populations in vulnerable and highly exposed regions is crucial for reducing the likelihood of conflict outbreak or relapse.

Tools to ensure climate and conflict sensitivity

When conflict cannot be prevented or when the UN system is tasked with responding to ongoing situations of fragility, (post-)conflict responses can be rethought to better take account of the specific challenges of securing and sustaining peace in a changing climate. One important step is for **peacekeeping, stabilisation, reconstruction, and peacebuilding** to be conducted in a climate-sensitive manner. For example, ex-combatant reintegration programmes might take care to retrain people into alternative (off-farm) livelihoods, which will be sustainable in the face of increasingly volatile rainfall patterns.

Considering the interplay of climatic factors with other interventions can avoid unforeseen - potentially negative - consequences. The recognition that climate change interacts with a broad range of regionally specific conflict risks highlights the need to design interventions with these linkages in mind, ensuring that responses are effective and **do no harm**. Additionally, this allows for **shared benefits**, as, for example, reconstruction and adaptation can be conducted together. Such approaches will not only build back better, but also do so in a way that takes the future and present impacts of climate change into account. This reduces populations' vulnerability and increases adaptive capacities.

Integrating work on climate change and traditional conflict responses - and vice versa - while ensuring adequate funding, is relevant in all conflict affected contexts and throughout the conflict cycle. **Mediation** and negotiations between conflict parties profit from an **improved awareness of environmental conflict drivers**. Conflict mediation efforts in a resource-based conflict should for example take account of climate impacts on future resource sharing arrangements. Finally, peacebuilding should focus on **promoting social cohesion**, which has been shown to build resilience and reduce the climatic vulnerabilities of communities. Together, these steps improve and localise post-conflict responses.

Tools to improve conflict assessment and response capacities

Awareness of and knowledge about climate-security risks still needs to increase outside of and within the UN system. **Increasing institutional capacity** and **improving monitoring and assessment** capabilities can be two parts of a larger effort to improve evidence-based responses to climate-related threats to peace and security.

Given the complex relation of climatic changes to existing conflict risks, **context specific analyses and risk assessments** are needed to address risks adequately. Reporting and early warning mechanisms of various UN bodies and organs can better take account of the emerging climatic pressures on security. Beyond integrating climate change into existing reporting, a further option is the appointment of a **Special Representative on Climate and Security**, taking a substantial step towards better analysis and evidence-based responses to climate-security linkages across the UN system.

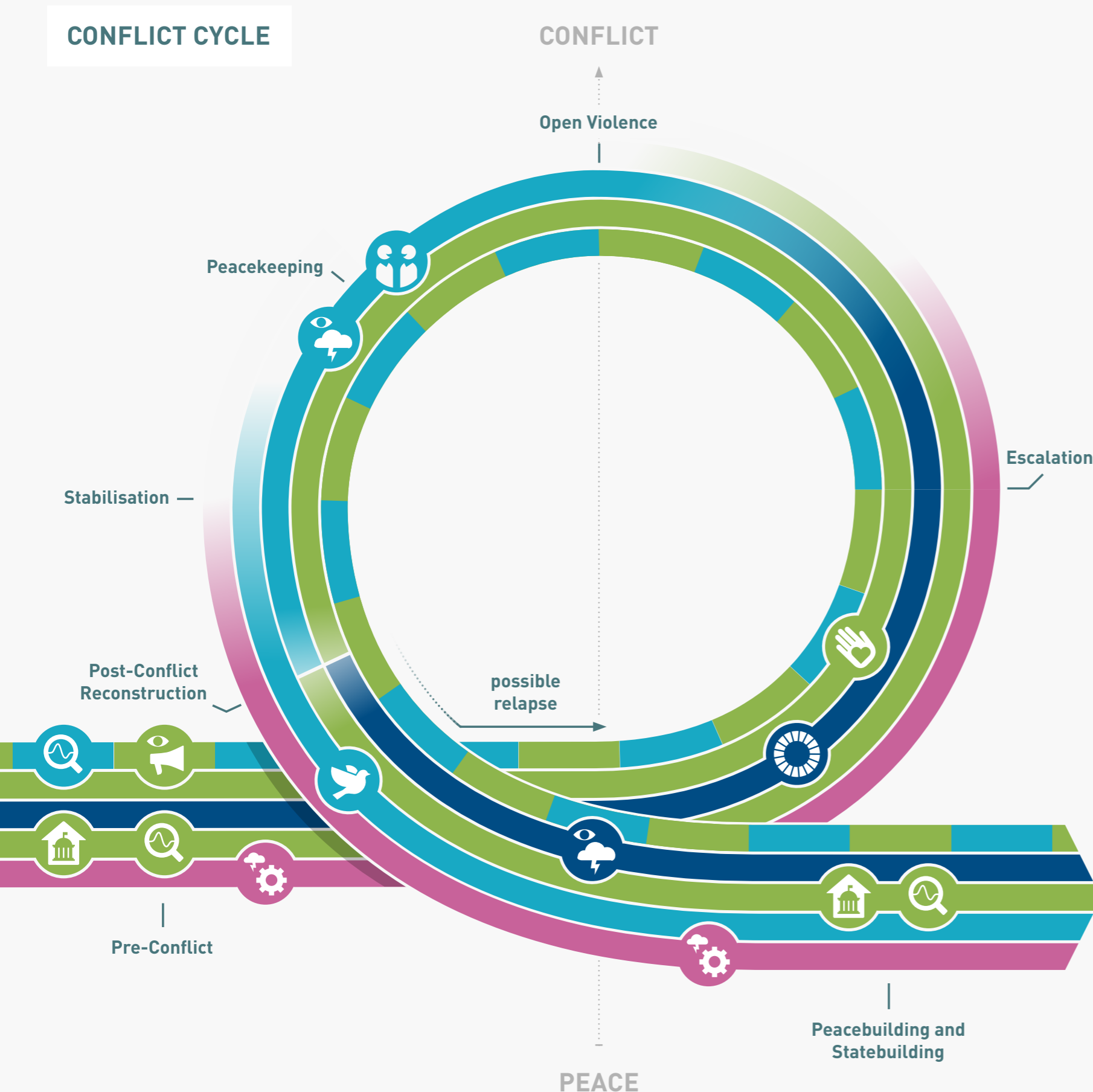
Furthermore, the UN organs can improve the integration of climate-security into their systems by **building institutional capacity**. Supporting the Climate Security Mechanism and ensuring sufficient funding for the **integration of climate-security into existing work** is necessary to harness the UN system's capabilities in this matter. This is especially true for disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action: Given the domains' frequent intersection and interaction with extreme weather events and conflict, practitioners and policy makers will profit from the focussed consideration of climate-security impacts in these work areas. Improving assessment and institutional capacities also strengthens preventive work on climate-security risks.

Combining different tools

The toolsets highlighted here **should be implemented in combined and coherent ways across different agencies**. This would enable significant co-benefits. Ensuring climate-sensitivity will heavily profit from an increased knowledge base and regional climate-risk assessments, while improving adaptation to climate change will broaden the range of options available to peacebuilding actors integrating multiple areas of work.

Thinking about climate-security risks and responses holistically, **across different frameworks, across the UN system**, is the best way of addressing emerging challenges throughout the conflict cycle.

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The entry points and corresponding phases displayed here are intended as indicative only.

General Assembly



Raise Awareness and Recognise New Threats

- Build on the precedent of resolution 63/281 and insist on adequate reporting on climate-security in the UN. Call on other organs to address relevant aspects of risk reduction and management within their respective mandates.
- Initiate working groups to consider how to improve the durability of peace, or call on subsidiary bodies to do so.



Monitor Relevant Situations

Mandate the Secretary General to appoint a Special Representative on Climate and Security and to integrate climate-security risks into regular reporting.



Increase Institutional Capacity

Strengthen the UN's capabilities to respond to climate-security risks, by supporting the Climate Security Mechanism, ensuring adequate funding, and integrating the consideration of climate-security across bodies and regional offices.



Reduce Disaster Risk and Improve Humanitarian Responses

Prevent new and emerging conflicts by supporting work on disaster risk reduction. When humanitarian action is necessary, ensure that interventions do no harm and are climate-sensitive.

UNFCCC



Improve Mitigation and Adaptation

- Prevent further negative impacts from climate change by implementing the Paris Agreement, ensuring effective climate change mitigation.
- Increase adaptation efforts in conflict affected contexts.

Security Council



Monitor Relevant Situations

Integrate climate-security risks into risk assessments, early warning systems, reporting, and similar work.



Ensure Climate- and Conflict-Sensitivity

Ensure climate-sensitivity in peace-keeping missions and add climate-security risks to their mandate.



Improve Mediation

Include climate impacts on security in mediation and peace negotiations and utilise climate impacts as an entry point for mediation, where appropriate.

Peacebuilding Commission and Fund



Climate-proof Peacebuilding

Include climate-security in peacebuilding strategies and advisory work, ensuring adequate funding for related projects.

Economic and Social Council



Sustainable Development

Focus on preventive action, by responding to the underlying drivers of climate-security risks through sustainable development. Use the focus on Small Island Developing States (resolution 68/1) to consider loss of territory through climate change.



Ensure Climate- and Conflict-Sensitivity

Use the Humanitarian Affairs Segment and mandate on sustainable development to ensure that emergency responses, reconstruction, development and other interventions do no harm.

PROVIDED BY

The **Climate Security Expert Network**, which comprises some 30 international experts, supports the **Group of Friends on Climate and Security** and the **Climate Security Mechanism** of the UN system. It does so by synthesising scientific knowledge and expertise, by advising on entry points for building resilience to climate-security risks, and by helping to strengthen a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities of addressing climate-related security risks.

www.climate-security-expert-network.org

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