



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
PERMANENT MISSION  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
NEW YORK



PERMANENT MISSION OF VIET NAM  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



Misión Permanente de Colombia  
ante la ONU en Nueva York



Global  
Challenges  
Foundation



Bahá'í  
International  
Community

## Advancing the Environment, Peace and Security Agenda at the Summit of the Future and Beyond

### EVENT SUMMARY

High-level side event to the Summit of the Future Action Days

***On September 26, 2024, the Governments of Colombia, Slovenia, and Viet Nam, in partnership with the IOM, the Baha'i International Community, the Global Challenges Foundation, and PAX, convened a hybrid side event entitled, "Advancing the Environment, Peace and Security Agenda at the Summit of the Future and Beyond."*** The event took place on the margins of the "once in a generation" opportunity to reconfigure the multilateral governance system to better suit the needs of our more industrialized, digitalized, and globalized world at the Summit of the Future (SotF) in New York. This event aimed to reflect on the current "state of play" for practitioners and policymakers, including within the UN system and throughout the negotiations at the SotF and beyond, identifying existing gaps in current prevention, mitigation, and response measures. Stakeholders explored opportunities for better mainstreaming and coordination across the UN system to deal with environmental impacts and climate risks in conflict-affected and at-risk settings.

The current global governance system and its myriad of underpinning international agreements has so far been unable to keep pace with the increasing scale, speed, and complexity of the global catastrophic risks facing humanity. This has been made painfully apparent not only by the failure of the international community to halt large-scale environmental degradation and climate change, but also through the continued direct and indirect destruction of the environment by States and non-state armed groups in conflicts around the world. International prevention, mitigation, and response measures to conflict-linked environmental harm and climate risks in conflict-affected and vulnerable countries are currently ad hoc, incoherent, and uncoordinated across an overburdened and slowly responding system. This event gathered high-level representatives of governments, international organizations, and civil society to discuss potential pathways for the establishment and operationalization of the Environment, Peace and Security (EPS) agenda within the UN system beyond Pact negotiations.

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**Ms. Rolien Sasse, Executive Director of PAX**, moderated the event. In opening, she noted PAX's ongoing efforts to document the environmental impacts of new and ongoing wars, and highlighted how PAX uses this evidence-based research to inform advocacy and policy at the international level to help build stronger global norms around the protection of the environment in armed conflict. She then argued that large-scale environmental degradation and climate change, exacerbated by conflict, remain major challenges that require international cooperation to address.

### Opening remarks:

**Ms. Linda Burenus, Head of Climate Sustainability and Communication, of the Global Challenges Foundation**, formally opened the event highlighting the need to reform the global governance system to respond effectively to the “complex and interlinked risks and challenges facing humanity,” including those stemming from the environment-climate-conflict nexus. She then noted the Foundation's mission to enhance global governance for better management of global risks like climate change, ecological collapse, and weapons of mass destruction. She supported the Pact of the Future as a pivotal moment to rethink the multilateral system, although she recognized and lamented the lack of concrete actions on climate, peace, and security. Despite these gaps, the adoption of the Pact is seen as a significant achievement for multilateralism, especially considering the geopolitical challenges faced during negotiations. Ms. Burenus emphasized the need to build on the Pact, using it as a foundation to improve the global governance system's capacities to address interconnected issues like climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict, and she highlighted the need to develop a systematic, responsive, and evidence-based approach to tackle these challenges.

### Panel One:

Next, **H.E. Ms. Adriana Mendoza, Director for Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia** underscored the need for a clear definition of the "environment-climate-conflict nexus" to better address its complexities. She outlined several facets of the nexus, including the deterioration of living conditions exacerbated by environmental events or natural disasters, the “use of nature as a weapon,” and the greenhouse gas emissions from military activities. Ambassador Mendoza noted that despite international agreements and treaties to limit the environmental impacts of war, parties to conflict need to be sensitized on their need for respect of nature alongside the humanitarian needs, highlighting that this topic will be addressed during the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in Colombia in October. She stressed the need for stronger multilateralism and adherence to international rules, expressing disappointment with some countries' reluctance to follow global standards. Using Colombia as an example, Ambassador Mendoza highlighted the country's commitment to a socio-ecological, just transition, decarbonization, and the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. She further advocated for the valuation of natural capital and biodiversity on national balance sheets to better reflect their financial and economic importance, which could help reduce debt and enhance economic opportunities.

**H.E. Ms. Božena Forštnarič Boroje, Director-General for Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia** began by highlighting the complexity of environment, peace and security, emphasizing that it extends beyond individual countries and affects global security. She acknowledged the significant environmental damage caused by conflicts and the need to address these issues across borders. Despite initial disappointment over the exclusion of the issue of climate, peace and security from the Pact of the Future, she recognized the importance of the Pact's adoption. Director-General Forštnarič Boroje brought attention to the UN's Climate Security Mechanism and the role of the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) in documenting environmental damage during conflicts, such as in Ukraine, stressing the importance of gathering evidence while conflicts are ongoing, as well as of the post-conflict assessments. She highlighted Slovenia's Presidency of the UN Security Council in September 2024 and illustrated the country's commitment to address the links between environmental challenges and opportunities for peace, including through convening a UNSC Arria formula meeting on this topic. Director-General Forštnarič Boroje expressed the concern over the impact of armed conflicts on water resources and water infrastructure in various conflicts, including in Ukraine, Gaza, and Yemen. She presented the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts, launched by Slovenia and partners, including PAX, earlier this year. Finally, Director-General Forštnarič Boroje emphasized the importance of capacity-building and training on environment, peace and security, including in the field of environmental peacebuilding.

**H.E. Mr. Dang Hoang Giang, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the UN, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam** started by underscoring Viet Nam's belief in the strong linkages between peace, security, and the environment, especially in post-conflict contexts. He discussed the lasting environmental impacts of the war in Viet Nam, such as the destruction of natural habitats and ecosystems “contaminated with landmines,” noting the difficulty it made for the country’s ability to cope with natural disasters and climate change in the aftermath. He emphasized the UN's vital role in assisting countries in reconstruction and rehabilitation, especially in building infrastructure, capacity-building, and policy advice. He also called for integrating climate resilience and disaster risk reduction into national planning, recognizing climate change as a new security risk for civilians. Furthermore, he emphasized the need for continued dialogue and strong partnerships among like-minded countries and international organizations, citing Viet Nam's collaborative efforts during its UN Security Council membership in promoting Resolution 2573 on the protection of objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population. He concluded by underscoring the importance of a people-centered approach to effectively address the nexus of climate change, peace, and security.

### **Panel Two:**

The second panel began with **Ms. Ugochi Daniels, Deputy Director General of the International Organization for Migration** emphasizing the interplay between the environment, climate change, and conflict, citing her home country of Nigeria that is struggling with these issues. She highlighted the unprecedented 76 million people globally who are currently displaced by climate and conflict - a number projected to triple by 2050 if no action is taken – and drew attention to the 3.6 billion who are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Ms. Daniels noted the increasing vulnerability of displaced populations and the alarming rise in smuggling and trafficking as a consequence of these crises. On the international policy level, she acknowledged existing frameworks and commitments but stressed the need for effective implementation. She criticized the narrative around migration, noting that while 85% of migration is regular and beneficial to the economy, only the 15% associated with conflict and crisis receive attention, demonstrating the threat of misinformation and disinformation. She urged participants to address the gaps in data and response frameworks within the UN system, advocating for integrated programming to respond to the impacts of climate change and conflict. Lastly, she underscored the importance of recognizing the contributions of migrants to sustainable development and called for collaboration among all stakeholders, including the private sector, to develop solutions to these pressing challenges.

**Ms. Shoko Noda, Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator, and Director of the Crisis Bureau of the UN Development Programme** stressed the urgent need for a holistic approach to address the interconnected challenges of climate change, conflict, and development, particularly as the world faces an increasing number of countries grappling with these issues. She underscored the significance of climate change, arguing that it disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations, exacerbating their struggles and making them more susceptible to conflicts fueled by resource scarcity. She drew on insights gained from visiting conflict-affected regions like South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine, noting the impact on young people facing dire circumstances. Ms. Noda highlighted UNDP's efforts to mobilize \$1 billion in climate adaptation financing for over 40 conflict-affected and fragile countries. The Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) was presented as a vital initiative involving multiple UN bodies, aimed at strengthening the UN's capacity to address the negative impacts of climate change on peace and security. She concluded by discussing the need for a unified approach that does not prioritize one issue over another but recognizes the need to address the intertwined agendas of climate and peace.

**Dr. Zinta Zommers, Head of Climate Science and Practice from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** highlighted the critical situation in South Sudan, highlighting the profound impact of climate change and conflict on the population, pointing out that, as of 18 September, over 735,000 people have been affected by flooding, with significant displacement

and damage to infrastructure, homes, and essential services like education and healthcare. She outlined OCHA's efforts to integrate environmental and humanitarian responses, particularly in collaboration with the OCHA/UNEP Joint Environment Unit. She noted there have been innovations in the humanitarian sector – for example through anticipatory action programs that deploy funding rapidly for environmental and climate related emergencies as quickly as 14 minutes after receiving a forecast. She also added that OCHA integrates environmental and climate considerations into humanitarian plans and uses tools such as flash environmental assessments to better understand environmental and climate impacts and risks. Despite these advances, Dr. Zommers acknowledged ongoing challenges, such as insufficient resources for environmental responses in conflict zones and a lack of understanding regarding the links between climate change and conflict, stressing the importance of including displaced populations in climate change adaptation planning. She concluded by announcing that OCHA has allocated 10 million USD for a “climate action envelope” linked to CERF’s 2024 second round Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) allocations. This envelope is the first of its kind and seeks to promote and support life-saving humanitarian action that also builds vulnerable communities’ adaptive capacity and resilience to climate-related shocks and stresses.

Finally, **Dr. Cordula Droege, Chief Legal Officer and Head of the Legal Division of the International Committee of the Red Cross** emphasized the significance of armed conflicts in environmental degradation, particularly if parties to conflict do not consider and integrate relevant preventive measures when conducting hostilities. Beyond damaging natural resources, protected areas, and biodiversity, the impacts are far reaching: disrupting life essentials like access to water, sanitation and electricity. She highlighted that the legal framework surrounding environmental protection during conflicts exists and is solid, referencing the UN International Law Commission’s Principles on the Protection of the Environment in relation to Armed Conflict published in 2022 and the complementing ICRC updated guidelines on the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict as a strong bases for armed forces to consider.. To ensure effective implementation of these legal frameworks - which is what is needed now – she called for national approaches to be accelerated, focusing on the prevention of environmental harm during conflict rather than just responding once damage has been inflicted. In 2023, the ICRC and Switzerland facilitated discussions among 120 countries to share best practices on the protection of the environment in conflict situations. She concluded the panel by offering three main recommendations: firstly, that states should accelerate the integration of international environmental protection laws in armed conflict into national laws (so-called “domestication” of international law); secondly, that investment in systemic measures to manage current and future risks and to promote adaptation of strengths and resilience must be made sooner rather than later; and lastly, that the international community must mainstream environmental considerations into the Protection of Civilians agenda. She encouraged States to make pledges on IHL and the environment during the upcoming 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

#### **Featured respondents:**

Following the panel presentations, esteemed participants were invited to take the floor with their own reflections on the discussion. In his remarks, **Mr. Adrian Hauri, Minister and Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations**, emphasized the critical relationship between environmental degradation, climate change, and conflict, especially from Switzerland’s perspective within the UN Security Council, noting the complexities within that environment. He highlighted the necessity of an evidence-based approach and gathering data to foster unity and support within the Council. He also stressed the importance of collaboration, and mentioned the example of the UN Climate Security Mechanism. He pointed out that multilateral development banks are significant providers of climate financing and urged better collaboration among all stakeholders. Additionally, he highlighted the need to strengthen decision-making and enhance the capacities of local and national actors, particularly regarding climate security risks. Ambassador Hauri suggested to better harness existing relevant frameworks, coordination mechanisms and platforms at all levels).

**Mr. Andrew Hyde, Director and Senior Fellow of the Multilateral Financial Diplomacy and Powering Peace programs, Stimson Center,** acknowledged the Pact for the Future “as a framing document” rather than an action-oriented one, noting its potential to create opportunities for realizing climate-related aspirations. Mr. Hyde emphasized the need to also consider how addressing climate impacts can aid in conflict prevention and resolution, highlighting the importance of clean energy transitions, especially in fragile settings, and how renewable energy can both support economic advancement and reduce conflict risks. He pointed out that reliance on fossil fuels can exacerbate conflict through vulnerable supply chains, whereas mobilizing financing for clean energy can create new opportunities that provide climate benefits and reduce conflict. He also stressed the practical role of the UN in developing best practices for energy use given its global efforts, particularly in peacekeeping missions, which are significant energy consumers. Transitioning to renewable energy in such contexts could lead to operational improvements and contribute to the broader mission of peacekeeping.

**Mr. Michael Collins, Executive Director of Americas, Institute of Economics and Peace** emphasized the evolving understanding of the link between environment, climate, and security, highlighting the importance of investing in activities that benefit all three. He pointed out agriculture's key role, being dependent on climate, central to ecology, and having a stabilizing effect, particularly in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, where underutilized land and high unemployment prevail. He noted agricultural investments and policies would be a net contributor to Action 3 of the Pact for the Future. He suggests additional investment in agricultural and irrigation, particularly “Sub-Saharan Africa stands to contribute to many of the current environmental, climate, and security aims,” citing successful such examples from Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland which are well positioned to advocate for this message.

**Ms. Angela, Rosales, CEO, SOS Childrens Villages International** emphasized the need for sustainable change by positioning children, young people, families, and communities as leaders in driving these agendas, not just as recipients. She highlighted that children are the most vulnerable to the effects of the triple nexus, and young people have innovative ideas to create a larger impact than what has been achieved so far.

**Closing remarks:**

**Ms. Liliane Nkuzimana, Representative to the UN, Baha'i International Community,** concluded the event by invoking that many speakers share a personal connection to the climate emergency. She noted that the climate crisis poses risks to both the environment and development prospects, as articulated in the recent Pact for the Future document and in the New Agenda for Peace, which outlined the interconnections between climate, peace, and security. Furthermore, she discussed the necessity of fostering community resilience through collaborative efforts and recognizing individual contributions. Ms. Nkuzimana pointed out that successful community building involves creating consultative spaces where all members feel empowered to participate in the process. She urged all stakeholders to embrace consultative approaches that encourage diverse perspectives. She concluded by emphasizing the ethical and moral responsibility of State actors to “raise resources efficiently to address pressing and future requirements with due consideration for the standards of justice capacity and responsibility” and for the furtherance of the well-being of humanity.