



Conference on the Security Implications of Climate Change

**Hosted by the Permanent Mission of Germany and the Permanent Mission of Portugal at
the German Mission to the United Nations**

**Statement by H.E. Honorable John Silk
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on behalf of the**

Pacific Small Island Developing States

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I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, namely Fiji, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, Vanuatu, and my own country, the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

For the Pacific islands, the security implications of climate change are real, they are serious, and they are affecting us now. In addition, they pose serious long-term risks that will likely increase over time. The challenge of climate change has been succinctly described as “avoiding the unmanageable, and managing the unavoidable.” For most of the past two decades, the international effort to address climate change has been primarily focused on avoiding the unmanageable. Recognition that we must rapidly reduce global greenhouse gas emissions led to the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which has the ultimate objective of preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The Pacific supports a more specific measure of success – *we must ensure the survival of all small island states*.

To our great dismay, global efforts to reduce emissions have been grossly inadequate, and the range of unavoidable impacts continues to grow. We now inhabit a very different world, and we can no longer afford to ignore threats to our security. The 2009 Secretary-General's report clearly described these undeniable threats – including food insecurity, water resource scarcity, intensified storms, unprecedented threats of potential statelessness coupled with uncertainty over territorial definition, and large-scale population displacement.

Managing the unavoidable is becoming increasingly important. The Pacific is highly vulnerable to such threats, which ultimately culminate in conflict risks.

Adaptation is one strategy that is critical to small islands, and is prominently featured in the Bali Action Plan. But what would be done to address a scenario in which conflict risks and related security threats exceed adaptation efforts? Accordingly, we must address such security threats with a unique set of tools.

Sea level rise presents for many small islands the most dire threat. Some islands are at risk of total inundation and physical disappearance, but even now the impacts are being felt. Sea level

rise causes salt-water intrusion into our agricultural land and freshwater lenses, severely undermining our food and water security, and such resource scarcity is an invitation to open conflict.

Sea level rise is also stealing our land. For the Pacific small island nations, already scarce land is at a premium, and is central to personal and cultural identity. Displacement, including in nations with traditional customary land tenure (such as the Marshall Islands), is simply not possible without creating conflict and tearing apart our very social fabric.

It goes without saying that we should make every effort to avoid a catastrophic rise in global temperature, but what if we fail? What if the political will materializes too late? What if, despite our best efforts, we fail to achieve our stabilization targets and pass a critical tipping point? These projections and risks have clear implications for security planning and analysis.

Addressing the security implications of climate change is not about the militarization of environmental policy. It is not about the Security Council sending in peacekeepers to shut down coal plants. The United Nations cannot continue to hide its head in the sand and pretend these impacts are not happening or that serious risks are not projected. We can either grapple with the security implications of climate change now, or be continually caught unprepared later.

Some might argue that these specific outcomes are far from certain, and they would be right. But this has not stopped the international community from addressing security risks with far less information. For example, uncertainty has not prevented the world from mobilizing enormous resources to address nuclear proliferation, a topic in which Marshallese have a unique perspective.

In this context, the Pacific SIDS warmly welcome Germany's initiative in holding an open debate in the Security Council on the security implications of climate change, under their Presidency, in July 2011.

The Pacific SIDS are making specific proposals for Security Council action on the security implications on climate change. First, the Security Council should clearly recognize the threat of climate change to international peace and security. This link was recognized in the 2009 UNGA Resolution and clearly established in the Secretary General's 2009 report on climate change and its possible security implications, among other key sources.

Secondly, the Council has a moral and legal duty to respond to current and projected threats with appropriate corresponding action. In this regard, the Council should request the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative for Climate and Security Response, with appropriate support, to report to the Security Council every six months on threats to international peace and security resulting from the current and projected adverse impacts of climate change. These threats should be mapped and identified.

Thirdly, the Security Council should request the Secretary General to evaluate and report on the capacity of the United Nations specialized agencies to respond to the security impacts of climate change, as well as to offer recommendations on how to enhance the UN's capacity and improve its response to meet the security challenges.

It goes without saying that the Security Council must remain actively seized of the matter, and we feel these proposals would lay the foundation for sustained and effective action.

The Security Council has primary responsibility under the UN Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security. Climate change presents a threat no less serious than nuclear weapons or terrorism. The issues are complex and solutions will not reveal themselves overnight. The Security Council must turn its attention to the issue or those most vulnerable will pay the consequences.

A final word – there is a troubling reluctance by some member states to talk openly – let alone to accept – the security implications of climate change. This appears to be confined only to the limited confines of our isolated bubble in New York, a place with many competing agendas. Many other fora, and even military officials, have already made the connection. It is time that the United Nations shows the courage to catch up to the rest of the world.

Thank you.