THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON CLIMATE CHANGE

New York, 30 June 2015
Co-Chairs,
Members,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you on today’s important topic for discussion. It is a particularly timely meeting in view of yesterday’s GA thematic debate on climate change.

This is not the first time the Security Council has addressed climate change. But much has changed since the first debate in 2007.

First, the threat to international peace and security from climate change impacts has grown considerably. We see this with our own eyes around the world. And we hear what science tells us in a great number of studies and reports.

Second, we now have a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of this threat, not least the complex ways in which climate change interacts with other drivers of instability.
And third, we now have a clear timeline for decisive action if we are to effectively deal with this global threat. As we all know, Governments, and many others, are working hard towards a new climate change agreement in Paris at the end of this year. 2015 must be a turning point in mobilizing development and climate action at the level and scale we so strongly need.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretary-General has rightly called climate change the defining issue of our time.

Practically all aspects of modern societies would be adversely affected by runaway climate change. It is a serious threat to development, to growth, to infrastructure, to the resource base, to agriculture, to health and, not least, to the stability that all nations need to flourish.

If left unaddressed, climate change will increasingly threaten the capacity of governments to meet the basic needs of their people. This would contribute to the emergence, spread and longevity of conflicts and humanitarian disasters.
The latest Assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change established a clear connection between climate change, food and water scarcity and conflict. The report states that “climate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflicts in the form of civil war and inter-group violence by amplifying well documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks.”

For some countries, such as the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), climate change threatens their territorial integrity and, indeed, their very survival. I am gratified that Minister de Brum of Marshall Islands is here today to give the Security Council his serious eyewitness testimony, a testimony which is of global significance.

Almost all countries, rich and poor, are facing more frequent and more vehement weather events. Such extreme weather events often hit the poorest members of a society the hardest. This can endanger already fragile livelihoods and reinforce inequalities to the detriment of the strength and cohesion of these societies.
For many countries, climate change is contributing to land and water scarcity, particularly in regions prone to droughts. This can increase competition and tensions among communities and countries around these vital resources.

In November 2011, the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that “climate change and environmental degradation pose serious threats to stability in many Central African States”. This report highlighted the situation in the Lake Chad basin area, which faces desertification, land degradation and shrinking water levels. It also pointed to the movement of large numbers of people from at least six countries who depend on the resources of the lake, noting this could dangerously heighten intercommunal tensions.

The United Nations Environment Programme has similarly reported on the exacerbating influence of climate change. UNEP reports have, for example, highlighted changing dynamics between livelihood groups in the Sahel, leading to greater competition, tensions and conflict, as well as permanent southward migration to cities and the coastal regions. These movements were seen to be partly driven by changes in climate.
Generally speaking, we are in today’s world faced with a crucial challenge to ensure that scarce resources, not least water, will lead to sharing and cooperation rather than to competition and conflict.

Excellencies, 
Ladies and Gentlemen, 

Climate change is a threat multiplier.

Positive climate action, on the other hand, can help mitigate risks and strengthen prospects for peace.

We all know what we have to do to address climate change: we need a global agreement in Paris this year in which all countries commit to curb their emissions and strengthen resilience in line with nationally determined targets.

Beyond an agreement in Paris, we need immediate climate action from all sectors of society. This goes not only for steps to reduce carbon emissions. We must also take concrete steps to adapt to the impacts of climate change and fundamentally increase our societies’ resilience.
Preventive diplomacy and mediation around issues related to the consequences of climate change – such as competition over fresh water resources – will become increasingly important tools to mitigate security threats. This opens up challenges in the area of water diplomacy, or with a relatively new term “hydro-diplomacy”.

We must transform these new threats into opportunities for cooperation. This Council can play an important role in anticipating the perils posed by climate change and how they may affect the overall security situation of Member States and regions.

We have the knowledge and tools to stave off the worst impacts. But we must do more to mobilise the necessary political will. The most fragile and vulnerable countries have a special claim on our solidarity.
As global momentum for climate action builds, it is fitting that this Council should again consider climate issues of relevance to international peace and security. Your discussion today will contribute to a greater awareness of the linkages between climate change impacts and peace and security issues.

In the face of this ‘defining issue of our time’, we must recognise that no one person, nation or body can do everything – but everyone can do something.

I wish you a productive discussion.

Thank you.