

U.S. issues warning on climate change

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Washington, February 25 (RHC)-- The United States has warned inaction by world powers on climate change is tantamount to a "mutual suicide pact" after countries such as China, India, and Russia expressed skepticism on the global security threat it posed.

John Kerry, the U.S. special presidential envoy for climate, told the UN Security Council on Tuesday that the Pentagon has described the climate crisis as "a threat multiplier."

"But even though climate change has been repeatedly called 'an existential threat', we honestly have yet as a world to respond with the urgency required," said Kerry. He called the climate situation "indisputably a Security Council issue" after some nations said it had no place for discussion at the UN body. "In fact, it is among the most complex and compelling security issues that I think we've ever faced."

Failing to address climate change is “marching forward to what is almost tantamount to a mutual suicide pact”, said Kerry. “We bury our heads in the sand at our own peril. It’s urgent to treat the climate crisis as the urgent security threat that it is.”

The stance by the administration of President Joe Biden comes in stark contrast to that of former US leader Donald Trump, who pulled out of the landmark 2015 Paris climate agreement and ignored climate policy during his four years in power.

Experts believe the world must reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050 or sooner to ensure long-term warming is held to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (34.7 degrees Fahrenheit) and avoid triggering catastrophic climate tipping points.

The world has already warmed 1.2C (2.2F) since the mid-19th century and the goal now is to prevent an additional 0.3C (0.5F) of warming. Russia, India and China said climate change should be tackled in other global forums, not at the UN’s main grouping on imminent world threats.

Russia was particularly vocal in its opposition to the discussions. “We agree that climate change issues can exacerbate conflict. But are they really the root cause of these conflicts? There are serious doubts about this,” said Moscow’s ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia.

“The connection between the climate and conflicts can be looked at with regard to only certain countries and regions, talking about this in general terms and in a global context has no justification,” he added. While Russia was committed to action against climate change, “this should be done within the framework of the mechanisms where it is dealt with by professionals”.

China’s special climate envoy Xie Zhenhua acknowledged climate change was linked to insecurity but overall issued a similar line to Russia. “International climate cooperation should be advanced with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,” he said, in a long speech that touted China’s recent commitments, including its aim to achieve its carbon emissions peak before 2030 and achieve neutrality by 2060.

India’s environment minister, Prakash Javdekar, dismissed the idea of climate change as a driver of conflict.

However, the planet’s warming temperatures were deemed inextricably linked to global security by most countries, including the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged fellow leaders to take immediate action on the climate crisis or face worsening global instability. “Whether you like it or not it is a matter of when, not if, your country and your people will have to deal with the security impacts of climate change,” said Johnson.

“I know that there are people around the world who will say that this is ... green stuff from a bunch of tree-hugging tofu munchers and not suited to international diplomacy and international politics. I couldn’t disagree more profoundly.”

Johnson pointed to the 16 million people displaced by weather-related disasters each year, some becoming easy prey to armed groups, farmers losing another wheat harvest because of drought and switching to growing opium poppies, and girls forced to drop out of school to search for water becoming prey to human traffickers. He also cited the impacts of changing sea levels and wildfires.

Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta stressed the effect of climate and security on Africa, which he lamented “unfortunately will suffer the worst consequences of climate change despite being the least responsible for global greenhouse gases.”

He said the drought-stricken Horn of Africa, drying of the Lake Chad basin, shrinking of the Sahel and savannah grasslands “and worsening economic vulnerabilities have set in motion political, demographic, migratory dynamics that increase the threat of insurgency and violent extremism”.

The UK has committed into law a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and will host the COP26 climate summit in November in the Scottish city of Glasgow.

Kerry called the Glasgow conference “literally our last best hope to get on track and get this right.”

The United States is hosting its own summit on April 22 where it is expected to announce its renewed carbon-reduction commitments after years of disengagement under Trump.

French President Emmanuel Macron, meanwhile, pleaded for “effective multilateralism” in the effort to limit warming, and voiced support for a German idea of appointing a special UN envoy for climate security.

Germany’s Foreign Minister Heiko Maas also called for regular reporting by the UN secretary-general on the security implications of climate change.

Renowned British broadcaster and naturalist David Attenborough, in a video message played before the UNSC meeting, warned “if we continue on our current path, we will face the collapse of everything that bring us our security including food, water, habitable temperatures”.

“We have left the stable and secure climatic period that gave birth to our civilization,” he said. “There is no going back.”

But Attenborough added: “If we act fast enough we can reach a new stable state,” and the UN conference in November “may be our last opportunity to make this step change.”

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