



ROYAL DANISH EMBASSY
Pretoria



Report on:

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PEACE OPERATIONS

28 MARCH 2025 • PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Roundtable Discussion on the Impact of Climate Change on Peace Operations, held on 28 March 2025 in Pretoria, South Africa, convened a diverse group of stakeholders from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the African Union's Political Affairs, Peace and Security (AU PAPS) Department, the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), the recently concluded Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), civil society, academia and diplomatic missions to examine the growing influence of climate change on peace operations in Africa. The discussion highlighted that climate change is a critical driver of instability, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities, intensifying resource-based conflicts and complicating the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping missions. Field experiences from Mozambique and South Sudan illustrated how floods, droughts and extreme weather events disrupt mission logistics, humanitarian access and community safety. Participants emphasised the urgent need for peace operations to transition from reactive, state-centric approaches to proactive, climate-informed and community-centred strategies. Key insights underscored the importance of integrating climate risk assessments into mission planning, improving inter-agency coordination and enhancing anticipatory and flexible operational responses. The roundtable also called for stronger institutional learning, increased financial investment and the reinforcement of African-led frameworks such as the Common African Position on Climate, Peace and Security (CAP-CPS). Recommendations included the institutionalisation of climate adaptation in peace operations, the strengthening of AU-UN and regional coordination, support for local resilience-building and cross-sectoral partnerships to deliver sustainable, long-term solutions to the climate-security nexus. The roundtable discussion marked a critical step toward reimagining peace operations to meet the realities of a changing climate and advancing resilient, inclusive and effective peacebuilding efforts on the continent.

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Climate change is increasingly acknowledged as a pressing issue for peace and security, given its wide-ranging effects on stability, conflict dynamics and population displacement. While it may not directly cause conflict, climate change intensifies existing vulnerabilities, fuels competition over scarce resources and heightens social and political tensions, especially in regions already grappling with fragility and conflict. These dynamics pose significant challenges for peace operations, which are often deployed in areas where climate-related stressors further complicate peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts.

The UN has recognised the critical role of climate factors in shaping peace and security agendas. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres has repeatedly emphasised the importance of addressing climate-driven security risks, advocating for stronger international cooperation, early warning systems and climate-responsive peacebuilding. In response, UN agencies such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) have launched targeted initiatives to reduce climate-related risks and bolster resilience in vulnerable areas. Together with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNDP and UNEP established the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) in 2018, which offers technical support to integrate climate considerations into peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategies. Today, most UN missions factor climate risks into their planning, with assessments helping adapt operations to environmental realities on the ground.

At the continental level, the AU has also stepped up efforts to address the security dimensions of climate change. In 2018, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) launched a study on the linkages between climate change and conflict in Africa. This led to endorsements by the AU Assembly in 2022 and 2024 for the creation of a CAP-CPS. The AU has since articulated 15 key messages on climate security, presented at COP27, underscoring the importance of prevention, adaptation and mitigation. A 2024 Member State Consultation contributed to shaping CAP-CPS by identifying core principles, including African leadership, multisectoral collaboration and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups. Further supporting this work, the Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment (ACRA), launched during COP28, provides evidence-based insights to inform CAP-CPS development. Notably, AU-UN consultations in October 2024 acknowledged the destabilising effects of climate change, land degradation and natural disasters on food systems and socioeconomic conditions, with direct consequences for regional peace.

At regional level, the SADC has similarly recognised the growing threat posed by climate change to regional stability and security. Southern Africa faces acute climate impacts such as cyclones, droughts, erratic rainfall and flooding, which deepen humanitarian crises and economic instability. These environmental pressures heighten competition over resources, fuel displacement and strain fragile communities. In response, SADC has adopted strategies such as the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030 and the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, which focus on climate adaptation and risk mitigation. Climate dimensions are also reflected in SADC's peace and disaster response efforts, as seen in the role of the SADC Standby Force in post-disaster recovery. Despite this progress, challenges persist in translating research into actionable policy and operational change, pointing to the need for stronger coordination and integration of climate and security strategies.

In this context, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Denmark in South Africa, in partnership with ACCORD, hosted a **Roundtable Discussion on the Impact of Climate Change on Peace Operations in Pretoria, South Africa on 28 March 2025**. The roundtable discussion focused on the impact of climate change on peace operations in Africa. The discussion explored both the risks and opportunities presented by climate change for UN-led, African and regional peace operations. It also highlighted the urgency of integrating climate, peace and security considerations into peacebuilding frameworks and encouraged stronger collaboration between peace practitioners, policymakers and environmental experts. Ultimately, the roundtable aimed to generate practical ideas and policy guidance to enhance the resilience and impact of peace operations across the continent.

2. DESIGN AND FACILITATION OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The roundtable discussion was a half-day event conducted in a hybrid format, designed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the intersection between climate change and peace operations in Africa, with particular emphasis on UN, AU, and SADC missions. It brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to exchange knowledge, share practical experiences and generate policy-relevant insights.

A total of twenty-nine (29) participants took part in the discussion, representing a broad spectrum of peace and security and climate actors. These included representatives from the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the AU Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) Department, the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), and the recently concluded SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Climate and environmental expertise was provided by representatives from the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), and academics from South African universities. Diplomatic representation included officials from the Embassies of the Kingdom of Norway and the Kingdom of Denmark in South Africa. ACCORD also participated as a key partner in the initiative.

The programme was structured around two thematic sessions.

- i. The first session focused on how climate change impacts peace operations at strategic, operational and tactical levels. Panellists included Professor Mpho Gregory Molomo, former Head of SAMIM, who shared reflections from Mozambique; Dr. Johnson Nkem, Senior Climate and Security Advisor at UNMISS, who brought perspectives from the UN's operations in South Sudan; and Ms. Giulia Caroli, a Climate, Peace and Security Specialist from CIAT. This session unpacked the challenges of mainstreaming climate considerations into peacekeeping missions and underscored the roles of regional and international institutions in mitigating climate-security risks.
- ii. The second session addressed strategies for managing climate-related risks within peace operations. The panel featured Colonel Sheku Sesay, Senior Political and Reporting Officer at the AU PAPS Department, and Professor Cedric de Coning, Senior Advisor at ACCORD and Research Professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Drawing on a range of mission experiences, they discussed innovative approaches to building climate resilience and enhancing operational effectiveness in climate-affected contexts.

Across both sessions, participants reflected on the importance of improving coordination between UN agencies, the AU, host governments, regional partners and other stakeholders to advance climate adaptation in peace operations. The roundtable was held under the Chatham House Rule, encouraging open and candid dialogue. Discussions were guided by thematic questions posed to panellists, followed by an interactive exchange that allowed participants to contribute reflections, ask questions and identify potential entry points for policy, research and operational action.

3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The following were the expected outcomes of the roundtable discussion:

- A deeper understanding of the intersection between climate change and African-led and UN peace operations, including key risks and challenges;
- Concrete recommendations for integrating climate security into peacekeeping strategies, mission planning, and conflict resolution processes;
- Strengthened collaboration between peace operations, climate experts, and policymakers, leading to a more coordinated approach to climate-related security risks;
- Identification of innovative, practical solutions for adapting peace operations to the changing climate landscape; and
- Policy recommendations for enhancing the resilience of peace operations in the face of climate-induced disruptions.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

4.1. Opening remarks

The roundtable discussion began with a formal opening by two distinguished speakers. Opening remarks were delivered by the Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Denmark in South Africa, Ms. Signe Dam. Ms Dam emphasised the significance and timeliness of the discussion, particularly as it was co-hosted by the Embassy of Denmark at a crucial moment which is Denmark's tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the 2025–2026 period. Ms. Dam highlighted that Denmark's position on the UNSC presents a unique opportunity to elevate the discussion on climate security at the highest level of global governance. She underscored Denmark's longstanding commitment to climate action, peacebuilding and multilateral cooperation, making it well-placed to advocate for stronger integration of climate considerations into peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts. Given Denmark's history of championing climate resilience and sustainable development, the country is well-positioned to push for policies that address the intersection of climate change and security, particularly in vulnerable regions.

ACCORD's Senior Political Advisor, Ambassador Welile Nhlapo, also delivered remarks on behalf of ACCORD. He reinforced the timeliness of the discussion, noting that rapidly shifting weather patterns are not only exacerbating existing conflicts but also challenging traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Drawing from examples across the continent, Ambassador Nhlapo illustrated how climate-related disruptions are increasingly intersecting with peace operations. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he noted, volcanic eruptions have posed significant mobility challenges for peacekeepers, while in Mozambique, recurrent cyclones and flooding events have disrupted peacekeeping activities and contributed to growing displacement. He also referenced the Horn of Africa, where rainy seasons often interfere with ceasefire agreements and humanitarian efforts, pointing to a broader lack of preparedness for climate-related contingencies. Moreover, he highlighted how the movement of displaced populations, such as those fleeing conflict in Sudan and moving through the Central African Republic into the DRC, further complicates peace operations. Ambassador Nhlapo stressed that while weather and climate events cannot be controlled, peacekeeping mandates and planning processes must evolve to account for these emerging risks in order to safeguard the integrity of peace agreements and the safety of mission personnel.

4.2. Session I: Understanding the Strategic and Operational Implications of Climate Change on Peace Operations

The first session focused on how climate change affects peace operations at strategic, operational and tactical levels. The panel featured Professor Mpho Gregory Molomo, Former Head of SAMIM; Dr. Johnson Nkem, Senior Climate and Security Advisor at UNMISS; and Ms. Giulia Caroli, Specialist on Climate, Peace and Security at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT.

4.2.1. Climate Security Lessons from SAMIM's Deployment in Mozambique

Professor Molomo opened the session with first hand insights from SAMIM, highlighting the significant operational challenges that climate change posed during the mission's deployment in Mozambique. He explained how the rainy season, particularly from November to February, disrupted logistics and mobility, with features such as the Ruvuma River and the expansive Katuba Forest (approximately 250km²) becoming strategic obstacles. The flooding river hindered troop movements, while the forest served as a rebel hideout that SAMIM forces could not penetrate due to unsuitable conventional equipment. Despite a mandate to support Mozambique with air and naval capabilities, the mission had none, and the lack of strategic airlift further limited reach, especially during cyclones and floods. This significantly hampered efforts to facilitate humanitarian access in Cabo Delgado, where large numbers of people had been internally displaced by the conflict. He stressed that fragile infrastructure, such as collapsed bridges and disrupted border points not only affect peace operations but also have wide-reaching consequences for regional economies.

At the strategic level, Professor Molomo reflected on the political and conceptual challenges of integrating climate concerns into peace and security. He acknowledged the perception that linking climate change to peace and security risks securitising climate issues, which can be contentious, especially in contexts where national interests dominate. However, he noted an encouraging shift among SADC Member States, spurred on by recent climate events, toward recognising the relevance of climate-security linkages. He underscored the importance of regional buy-in and ownership, referencing the momentum around UNSC Resolution 3719 and efforts to develop operational frameworks grounded in the principle of “African solutions to African problems.” For these frameworks to be meaningful, he stressed, regional and continental bodies like SADC must be adequately empowered to lead on climate-informed peace operations.

4.2.2. Climate Security in Practice: Lessons from UNMISS in South Sudan

Dr. Johnson Nkem, Senior Climate and Security Advisor at UNMISS, provided an in-depth overview of the operational realities facing peacekeeping missions in the context of climate change, drawing from experience in UNMISS. He emphasised that climate-induced shocks such as floods, droughts and heatwaves are increasingly disrupting peacekeeping efforts, expanding the scope of responsibilities of protection of civilians due to displacement and migration. These events not only drive people into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, putting pressure on already limited resources, but also compromise the mission’s mobility and infrastructure. Flooded roads and inaccessible helipads significantly hamper patrols and emergency response, reducing the mission’s reach and effectiveness during critical times. Dr. Nkem also pointed to the strong seasonality of conflict in South Sudan, where the dry season often sees increased violence. He stressed the importance of integrating climate data into the Joint Military Assessment Centre’s conflict analysis to better identify and prepare for emerging hotspots.

Beyond operational impacts, Dr. Nkem highlighted broader institutional and systemic challenges in responding to climate-related security risks. These include limited resources, high staff turnover in hardship duty stations and a shortage of integrated analytical capacity to connect climate data with conflict dynamics. He called for stronger regional and international cooperation to support technical assessments and enhance climate security expertise. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was noted as a critical partner providing technical analysis support which improves situational awareness and enables pre-planning. IGAD provides strategic documents such as the Transhumance framework, which helps to regulate migration of people across multiple countries. Furthermore, he advocated for leveraging international frameworks, particularly the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to advance the integration of climate security into global peace and security agendas. Dr. Nkem’s intervention underscored that addressing the compound risks of climate change and conflict requires both robust data and a political commitment to operationalise climate-informed peacekeeping.

4.2.3. Integrating Climate Sensitivity in Peace Operations

Ms. Giulia Caroli underscored how climate change is intensifying the complexity and cost of peace operations, particularly in fragile contexts like Mozambique and Somalia. Climate-induced displacement and resource scarcity are fuelling localised conflicts, increasing humanitarian needs and creating conditions where non-state actors can recruit from vulnerable populations. She emphasised that these dynamics complicate the work of peacekeepers and humanitarian actors alike, especially in environments already grappling with weak governance and institutional fragility. The strain on peace operations stems not only from immediate challenges like disrupted infrastructure and rising displacement but also from the longer-term erosion of governance capacity and public trust.

To address these challenges, Ms. Caroli advocated for making peace operations more climate-sensitive by training personnel on climate impacts and integrating climate adaptation and mitigation strategies into peacebuilding mandates. She pointed to the success of grassroots initiatives that use natural resource management as a platform for fostering dialogue, trust and peaceful coexistence. She stressed the need for better coordination between peacebuilding and development actors, as well as increased financial support to implement integrated and sustainable approaches. Ultimately, she called for a shift toward bottom-up models that build local resilience and recognise the essential role of community actors in managing climate-related risks and promoting lasting peace.

4.3. Session II: Strengthening Climate Adaptation Strategies in Peace Operations

The second session explored regional and multilateral responses to climate-related security risks in Africa, focusing on the AU's evolving strategies and frameworks. The panel featured Colonel Sheku Sesay from the AU PAPS department and Professor Cedric de Coning, Senior Advisor at ACCORD and Research Professor at NUPI. The discussion highlighted the importance of harmonising efforts between the AU, UN, regional bodies, and national governments to strengthen resilience and operational coherence in addressing the climate-security nexus.

4.3.1. AU Strategies on Climate, Peace, and Security

Colonel Sesay outlined the AU's evolving strategy to address the complex interplay between climate change, peace and security. He referenced the AU's 2018 resolution that launched a dedicated study on the nexus, leading to the development of the African Risk Assessment Report. This report maps out regional climate-related risks and frames a common African approach, structured around eleven guiding principles, nine key challenges, and fifteen strategic messages. Colonel Sesay stressed the importance of continental coordination and political will in advancing this agenda, highlighting the leadership of the Committee of Heads of State on Climate Change (CAHOSCC), chaired by His Excellency, President William Ruto.

He also emphasised the AU's efforts to align its climate-security agenda with broader international frameworks, particularly the UN's peace and security mandate. Strengthened collaboration with member states, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and UN partners is central to these efforts. Colonel Sesay called for deeper inter-agency coordination, including with the AU's Department of Agriculture, Economy, and Rural Development, to ensure comprehensive responses to the climate-security nexus. Looking ahead to COP30, he underlined the need for a unified African voice on climate security, backed by multilateral engagement and resilient institutional frameworks.

4.3.2. Adapting Peacekeeping Operations to Climate Realities

Professor Cedric de Coning highlighted how climate change is reshaping the operational landscape for peacekeeping missions, with a particular focus on Somalia and South Sudan. He stressed that while broader climate adaptation and mitigation efforts are handled by specialised agencies, peace operations must respond directly to how climate impacts their core mandates such as protecting civilians and facilitating humanitarian access. He gave practical examples, including the construction of dikes to protect IDP camps and the use of boats during floods to maintain access to affected communities.

Professor de Coning underscored the importance of anticipatory planning, such as identifying high ground for displaced populations ahead of flood seasons, and called for increased adaptability in mission planning, especially as weather variability affects predictable events such as transhumance movements. He also emphasised the need to integrate climate analysis into peacekeeping operations, engage communities more effectively and leverage local knowledge to inform early warning systems and adaptation strategies.

5. KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussions highlighted the growing importance of incorporating climate considerations into peace operations to enhance their effectiveness in addressing the complex challenges posed by climate change. The following key takeaways emphasise the need for a more climate-sensitive, community-focused and coordinated approach to peace and security efforts.

- Peace operations need to be climate-sensitive, adaptable, and community-oriented.
- Climate change exacerbates conflict, undermines governance and disrupts peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts.
- Integrating climate analysis into peace operations is essential to protect civilians, deliver aid and strengthen community resilience.

- There is a need for a shift from a state-centric approach to one that focuses on communities and their structures for more effective peace efforts.
- Regional and international coordination is crucial, with an emphasis on AU-UN and AU-RECs collaboration.
- Strengthening early warning systems, leveraging local knowledge and improving engineering and logistics are key operational priorities.
- Climate change poses significant challenges to the humanitarian and development sectors, necessitating cross-sectoral partnerships and increased financial investment. This need is particularly acute in contexts where peace operations have been given expanded mandates that include climate-related responsibilities, yet these expanded roles are not always matched by corresponding funding commitments.
- Peace operations must institutionalise climate adaptation strategies and learn from field experiences such as UNMISS.
- There is a need to support African-led frameworks for long-term, integrated responses to the climate-security nexus.

The following recommendations from the roundtable discussion outline the steps forward to strengthen the effectiveness of peace operations in addressing the climate-security nexus. These actions aim to enhance collaboration, prioritise community resilience and foster long-term integrated responses to climate challenges.

- Integration of climate adaptation strategies into peace operations;
- Enhancement of AU-UN collaboration and regional coordination;
- Focus on community-centred approaches and strengthen local resilience;
- Fostering cross-sectoral partnerships and secure financial investments for long-term solutions; and
- Supporting African-led frameworks for climate-security integration.

6. CONCLUSION

The roundtable discussion on the impact of climate change on peace operations underscored the urgency of integrating climate-sensitive approaches into the planning, execution and evaluation of peace efforts across Africa. Participants highlighted that climate change is no longer a peripheral concern but a central variable shaping conflict dynamics, operational constraints and the long-term sustainability of peace. From Mozambique to South Sudan, field experiences demonstrate that peace operations are increasingly challenged by environmental disruptions that affect mobility, logistics, protection mandates and civilian well-being. Crucially, the roundtable discussion reaffirmed that effective responses require multi-level collaboration, from grassroots communities to regional and international institutions. The insights shared called for a paradigm shift, moving away from state-centric, reactive models to proactive, community-based strategies that build resilience and anticipate climate risks. The experiences of AU and UN missions illustrated both the barriers to and opportunities for innovation in this space, including the use of climate data for conflict prevention, improved mobility infrastructure and locally grounded adaptation measures.

As the effects of climate change intensify, peace operations must evolve accordingly. This demands not only the integration of climate risk assessments into mission planning but also a commitment to institutional learning, cross-sectoral partnerships and the empowerment of African-led initiatives. The roundtable contributed to advancing this agenda by fostering dialogue, sharing field-based knowledge and identifying practical entry points for action. Going forward, the challenge lies in translating these rich discussions into concrete, coordinated and adequately resourced strategies that enhance the agility and relevance of peace operations in a rapidly changing climate landscape.

7. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Total Number of Participants	29 (23 in person 6 online)
Gender representation	16 males 13 females
Sector representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Missions • AU & regional bodies • Research institutions • Think tanks • Academia • Civil Society • Diplomatic Missions

ANNEXURE A: PROGRAMME

ROUNDTABLE ON THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PEACE OPERATIONS

28 March 2025 • Danish Ambassador's Residence | Pretoria, South Africa

PROGRAMME

TIME	PROGRAM
0830–0900	Arrival & Registration
0900–0930	Welcome & Opening Session
	Opening Remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Head of Mission: Embassy of Denmark Ms Signe Dam • Senior Political Advisor: ACCORD H.E. Ambassador Welile Nhlapo
0930–1030	Roundtable Discussion 1: Key Factors Shaping the Impact of Climate Change on Peace Operations
	Facilitator: Ms Rumbidzaishe Matambo ACCORD Guiding Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does climate change influence peace operations at strategic, operational, and tactical levels? • What are the key challenges faced in integrating climate considerations into peacekeeping efforts? • What role do regional and international actors play in mitigating climate-related security risks? Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Mpho G. Molomo Former SRC for SADC Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation and Head of the SADC Mission in Mozambique • Dr Johnson Nkem United Nations Mission in South Sudan • Ms Giulia Caroli CGIAR

TIME	PROGRAM
1030–1130	Roundtable Discussion 2: Strategies for Managing Climate-Related Risks in Peace Operations
	<p>Facilitator: Dr Andrea Prah ACCORD</p> <p>Guiding Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What experiences can you share on peace support operations and climate-related challenges? • What innovative strategies and measures have been or can be adopted to enhance climate resilience in missions? • How can coordination between UN, AU, host-nation, partners, and other actors be improved to enhance climate resilience and responses? <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonel Sheku Sesay AU PAPS Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department • Professor Cedric de Coning ACCORD
1130–1145	<p>Reflections & Key Takeaways</p> <p>Professor Cedric de Coning</p>
1145–1200	Closing Session
	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Head of Mission: Embassy of Denmark Ms Signe Dam
<p>END OF WORKSHOP</p> <p>(Lunch 1200–1300)</p>	