

United Nations Security Council

7818th Meeting: Open Debate on Water, Peace and Security

Tuesday, 22 November 2016 from 10 am to 5.46 pm

Chair

Mr Mankeur Ndiaye, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Senegal

Briefers

Mr Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations

Mr Danilo Turk, Chairman of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace

Ms Christine Beerli, Vice President of the International Committee of Red Cross

Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President of the Strategic Foresight Group

Interventions

69 Member States of the United Nations

Briefing by Dr Sundeep Waslekar at the United Nations Security Council 7818th Meeting

Thank you, Mr. President. I want to compliment the Government of Senegal and Your Excellency Minister Mankeur for convening this debate on Water, Peace and Security, which we understand is happening for the first time in the history of the Security Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to address three questions. One, why should the UN Security Council address the linkage between Water, Peace and Security? Two, what is it that the Security Council can do to create a positive relationship between water and peace? And three, what is it that the UN system and the international community in general can do?

To answer the first question, the Secretary General in his briefing already pointed out how water can be a source of crisis. He also pointed out how water can be a source of cooperation. One of the greatest challenges of our time is how to transform water from a potential source of crisis into a potential instrument of cooperation. If the political and intellectual capital of the world can be applied to this question, I am sure we can find answers.

What are we talking about, Mr. President? Currently, there are about 2 billion people living in shared river basins in the developing world. So, it is the future of 2 billion people that this meeting is addressing. Many times we feel that the water is a local issue or it is a regional issue and it can be managed with good governance at the local level or good trans-boundary cooperation at the regional level. But increasingly, we are finding out that water is also a global security issue.

In the last 6 years, we saw that when the mismanagement of water combined with the mismanagement of climate change and drought further combined with the mismanagement of politics happened in some parts of the world, it led to the displacement of large number of people. And the refugees went from one part of the world to other parts of the world, leading to severe political consequences in different regions.

So what we do with the management of water in combination with the management of social contact and political relationships in any one region could have implications for other regions of the world. And this is what we saw in the last three years in particular.

If we look ahead and if we see the rate at which water resources are depleting, there is a risk that the net availability of fresh water could go down by 25-30 per cent in the next 30 years. And this could lead to decline in the production of food grains. What it would mean is that by 2030 or 2035, some of the countries that are self-sufficient today could enter the international food grains market as importers.

If you have additional demand of 100-200 million tonnes of food grains, suddenly, then you will find that the food grain prices are skyrocketing all over the world. And even though the importing countries will be there in only some regions, the impact will be felt by poor

people all over the world. And therefore, Mr. President, we must recognize the global nature of the relationship between water, peace and security.

Secondly, the Strategic Foresight Group, with which I have a privilege to be associated, has undertaken a number of studies and we found out, assessing the situation in 148 countries with shared river basins and more than 220 shared river basins in the world, that any two countries, which are engaged in active water cooperation, with political support, do not go to war for any reason at all; whether related to water or whether unrelated to water.

Thus, there is a direct correlation, that we can see through the Water Cooperation Quotient between water cooperation and reduced risk of war. Therefore, it is in the interest of the international community that this relationship is further examined and explored.

We also discovered that there is a continuum in the management of water relations. Water managers can manage the day-to-day relations in basins but when it comes to introducing large infrastructure projects, when it comes to addressing the question of big public goods and tradeoffs between water and other public goods, like large investments and security, then the involvement of the managers of political systems and the managers of security establishments is really necessary.

So, at the routine level, water managers can manage the water relations but at a more complex level, the involvement of national security establishments, regional security establishments, global security establishments and the mainstream political leaders in absolutely necessary.

Therefore, Mr. President, water is not just a subject relevant for SDG-6. It can also be used in a positive way as a tool to achieve SDG 16, which is about peaceful and inclusive co-existence of people. And therefore, Mr. President, water is a subject very much owned by the Security Council.

I would now urge the members of the Security Council to consider something unconventional, something unprecedented.

Considering that the impact of management of water is not always confined to one region but there is always a risk that it can have implications for different regions of the world;

Considering that there is a positive relationship between water cooperation and comprehensive peace and security; and

Considering that water can make a useful contribution to the achievement of SDG-16;

I urge the members of the Security Council to apply their minds to see if they can find some unconventional, some unprecedented way to proclaim water as 'the strategic asset of humanity'.

How you do that, you are the best judge and you know the rules and procedures of the Security Council.

Mr. President, I was touched by the briefing made by Christine Beerli of ICRC. The work that ICRC is doing in some of the conflict zones is amazing. It is highly commendable. But we need to support them and we need to support similar organizations. And how can we do that?

Earlier this year, the UN Security Council passed a resolution protecting medical installations and medical personnel. If I am not wrong, it was UN Security Council resolution number 2286, but the members can correct me if I am wrong on this technical detail. Can the Security Council consider passing a follow-up resolution inspired by the Resolution 2286, in the same spirit, to protect water installations and the personnel protecting water resources?

It is a thought that I would like to urge you to consider. And going beyond that, I would also like to ask the Security Council members, and in particular the permanent members of the Security Council, to consider if once in a while you can consider negotiating an occasional ceasefire in protracted conflicts to repair and restore the water systems. Such a ceasefire can last for a week or three days or four days.

And let me explain my logic for this request, Mr. President. Many members of the United Nations systems, particularly including some of the permanent members of the Security Council, are investing huge amount of resources and the best of their talent and best of their scientific minds to find water on the Mars, to find water on the Moon of the Jupiter and to find water in some other parts of the universe so that human civilization can exist.

If we can invest human capital, intellectual capital, political capital to find water on another planet, why can't we find some ways and means to negotiate a ceasefire just for a few days, from time-to-time, to protect water resources and water installations on this planet?

So I would strongly like to urge the members of the Security Council to consider this.

It is also important to see how in different ways we can protect water resources. Mr. Secretary General, yourself and Christine Beerli have mentioned how the water resources are being increasingly targeted.

The Department of Political Affairs has Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. Whether the mandate of this Task Force can be specifically expanded or sharpened, to include the protection of water infrastructure and water resources from terrorist action is something we need to explore.

Finally, Mr. President, there is also role for the international community beyond the Security Council, guided and inspired by the Security Council. And that role is to incentivise water cooperation. We not only have to look at the protection of water infrastructure but we must also see how we can have preventive diplomacy and preventive measures to promote water cooperation. And in this, the role of financial incentives is very important.

The Secretary General and the President of the World Bank have launched a very important panel on water as a sustainable development goal. Mr Danilo Turk is chairing a panel on Water and Peace. Now, the objectives of these two panels can be linked through a very innovative measure. And the measure I propose is that the world should consider creating a Blue Fund only to take care of interest and insurance and other related costs of collaborative water infrastructure - not the water infrastructure which is built within the countries but water infrastructure which is built through cooperation between the countries.

And if we can do that and if we can have only \$1 billion of annual fund, which can be easily carved out of the Green Climate Fund which has got a \$100 billion budget per year,

\$1 billion of annual replenishment can create \$30 billion of collaborative infrastructure worldwide.

The issue, therefore, is Mr. President, that we have to look at water as an instrument of cooperation. We have to bear in mind that it could be a potential source of crisis but we have to find a way to convert it from potential source of crisis to potential instrument of cooperation.

And to do that, in conclusion, we have to look ahead. We have to be unconventional. We have to look at things we haven't thought of. And philosophically, I would urge you only to have a re-look at Time. We think that first there is a Past, then there is a Present and then there is a Future. In reality, first there is a Future. What is Future today will become Present tomorrow and what is Present today will become Past later. If we look at this direction of time, then we will take it upon ourselves to shape the Future. We will look at prevention. We will look at the next generation. And once we start looking at the next generation, I am sure that the world has enough talent, enough political will, and enough capacity to find solutions to our problems. And the Security Council and your Chairmanship, Mr. President, can provide guidance and provide inspiration. Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me this opportunity.