

First of all, I would like to thank the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for hosting today's event. The Hub is more needed than ever to continue elevating the importance of climate and environmental issues, including water, in the new security landscape. Only by bringing together many different perspectives can we make the right policy choices while there is still time.

Recent events have made this painfully clear. What can we learn from the war in Ukraine? In addition to unspeakable violence and disasters on the people of Ukraine the war has also had environmental impacts. Civilians in affected areas being denied access to water and basic services. Water being used as a weapon of war in southern Ukraine where Russian forces attacked dams on the Dnieper River.

But there are also other important lessons here that show why we need to focus more on the interlinkages between environment, climate, and security risks.

The first lesson is of course that the war has exposed **an unprecedented level of interconnection between different parts of the world**. [According to the UN Secretary-General](#), the war in Ukraine could push 1.7 billion people into hunger and poverty. That is one-fifth of humanity. Unfortunately, we must expect to soon see similar shock waves sweep across our planet when other food markets collapse from climate pressures such as droughts and floods. We increasingly feel the climate crisis in the form of too little or too much water.

Lesson two: **the poor are always the most likely to suffer**. These skyrocketing food prices led to a comment from the World Food Programme that they now face the impossible choice of taking from the hungry to feed the starving. Sadly, this reflects the new world we are living in, where we will be facing crisis upon crisis. And each crisis will leave poor people and poor countries worse off than before. All existing inequalities tend to be aggravated by a crisis, including inequality between men and women.

And this leads me to the third major trend exposed by the current situation: **conflict, mistrust and polarization are turbo charged by crises**. We are already seeing intensified conflicts in many countries when people protest higher food prices. Countries trying to deal with the situation become increasingly desperate and indebted. And this is also fueling mistrust between countries and communities. Many struggling low-income countries feel that high-income countries have failed them during the pandemic, during the current food crisis and when it comes to dealing with the consequences of climate change. This is a growing security threat since it undermines our ability to find shared solutions.

So, what has all this got to do with water? Much more than you may think. At SIWI we have been working with our partners to address these exact challenges for years because water is one of the most powerful tools to increase resilience, food security, equality, cooperation,

and to mitigate the environment in which disinformation about climate change and water thrives. By doing this, it is possible to create a virtuous cycle and reverse the dangerous trends we now see.

To start with the first trend we identified, the growing instability and hunger. As we all know, this is often an effect of climate change. And this is something we primarily experience in the form of too much or too little water, for example floods or droughts. SIWI is addressing this by improving water governance, to make societies and people less vulnerable to climate shocks. In Sub-Saharan Africa we for example seek to increase investments in rainfed agriculture, which would make local smallholder farmers drastically more food secure.

Another aspect of this is what we call the source-to-sea approach to governance. Basically, we need to take into account the consequences further downstream. Take a river, for example. With growing populations and rising temperatures, we will see intensified pressure on the river from damming and irrigation, but also leakages of fertilizers and all other activities that happen along its course. This can have dramatic consequences for the people living further downstream because it can take away their livelihoods from fishing or tourism practically overnight. They are victims of policies they have no way of influencing.

This is just one example of the close connection between environmental health and the well-being and security of people. We must do more to understand these relationships and how dependent we are on healthy ecosystems. But what we already *do* know should be enough for us to take action to for example protect threatened wetlands and restore watersheds. By doing that we increase food security and reduce the risk of conflicts. And we prevent that ecosystems turn from friendly carbon sinks to dangerous carbon emitters.

Best of all, this can reverse the dangerous trend towards growing inequality – the second trend that I highlighted. Investing in resilient farming, improved water management, nature-based solutions and climate-proof sanitation systems will reduce the gaps between rich and poor, and between men and women.

SIWI is working closely with for example UNICEF to climate-proof the water and sanitation sector. Not even in high-income countries is it built to withstand the weather extremes we are facing. But SIWI is also tirelessly advocating for universal access to clean water and decent toilets. This would lead to higher economic growth and higher education among girls. Otherwise more girls will drop out of school when growing water scarcity forces them to walk longer and longer to fetch water for their families.

Finally, SIWI is working to address the third trend mentioned, the risks associated with growing polarization and mistrust. We were pioneers in water diplomacy and transboundary cooperation over shared waters. This is another powerful tool to reduce conflict risks and foster peaceful collaboration. We are supporting actors in many of the world's most conflict-scarred regions and see promising results. Cooperation in a river basin makes all countries better off. Unfortunately, just when we need this cooperation more than ever, we see new threats in the form of fast-growing polarization and extremism, including

the spread of disinformation. SIWI is therefore increasingly focusing on ways to defuse this type of tension, debunking myths and conspiracies.

Rebuilding trust is one of the greatest challenges of our time and one that must be taken much more seriously. When the world is facing crisis upon crisis, our response cannot be to move aid money around from one crisis to another. We need to invest in preventive measures that create long-term resilience to break this vicious cycle. The first step is understanding our dependence on nature and on each other, across the world.

It is my great pleasure to invite you all to the World Water Week – the leading annual event on water – taking place in Stockholm during the last week of August. I am very proud that the Hub will host its first public event after the relaunch at the Week - **the High-Level Panel on Climate and Peace** – the Panel is a platform for dialogue on shared risks and opportunities for tackling the implications of climate change on human insecurity. It aims to strengthen our understanding of the value of water for peace and development. The High-Level Panel on Climate and Peace will explore how climate and environmental change, including impacts on water, lead to human insecurities and undermine sustainable, just, resilient, and peaceful societies – I am looking forward to seeing you all there.

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