



# Hon. Dr. Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade

## Security Council Open Debate on 'Sea-Level Rise: Implications for International Peace and Security'

### New York, 14 February 2023

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I shall now deliver a statement in my national capacity.

Members of the Security Council,  
Excellencies,

I begin by thanking the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, the Co-Chair of the International Law Commission Working Group on Sea-Level Rise, and Ms Pasisi for their presence today, and for sharing their views and observations on the implications to peace and security of Sea Level Rise.

The Security Council was established with the responsibility of ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security. While wars and conflict persist, we are now increasingly aware of other global challenges that may exacerbate insecurity if left unchecked.

Scientific research can help us discern the impacts of these new and emerging threats, such as climate change. By tapping into this knowledge, the Council would be better placed to identify, address, and drive responses to peace and security.

The manifestations of climate change are multi-fold and are felt across the globe. Ocean-related climate security risks are a daily reality to many countries, with such threats disproportionately affecting island states, small island developing states, coastal regions and low-lying cities, threatening their very existence.

Malta, as an island state, knows this reality all too well. In fact, science is what had guided Malta when it first proposed the issue that climate change is a common concern to humankind at the United Nations. Today, especially as a member of the Security Council, our commitment is just as strong to ensure that this remains an important part of the discussion within this body. We are deeply appreciative of the extensive work that has been carried out in this area in the last few years in the Council, and we stand ready to continue building on what has already been achieved.



## Excellencies

Today highlights our recognition that sea-level rise unleashes threats to the existence, identity and security of peoples and nations. These threats, both sudden and gradual, have the potential to wipe out entire communities and nations. Submerged coastlines will threaten critical infrastructure and precipitate disputes over scarce vital resources such as food and water while pushing our most vulnerable communities into further marginalization.

Sea-level rise is already resulting in partial or total inundation of coastal areas, further leading to loss of land, housing and property; sea-water intrusion into agricultural lands and water tables, and; disruption of basic services.

The dire humanitarian consequences that could result from rising sea-levels are no longer a discourse in rhetoric. Science is already forecasting that up to 1 billion people will be at risk from coast-specific climate hazards by the year 2060, and hundreds of millions will be displaced by the year 2100. This pattern will only set to increase if no action is taken.

Largely responsible for securing household water and energy resources, women and children, including girls, often face the brunt of these climate-induced adverse manifestations, with devastating impacts on family survival. Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns and reduced freshwater access disproportionately impact women's small scale agricultural livelihoods. This also limits the capacity of current and future generations to be resilient.

## Excellencies

These consequences have now reached a turning point for international peace and security, and it is our belief that the Council is to appropriately address these risks.

It is amply clear that the issues created by sea level rise run through the very heart of state sovereignty as they represent a direct threat to the security of these areas, and to the people who call these areas their home. The potential loss of statehood, as one of the most severe consequences arising from rising sea-levels, as well as issues related to maritime boundaries and jurisdiction are an established theme in this discourse because of the associated far-reaching security implications.



While the legal issues arising from rising sea-levels are under review by the International Law Commission, the obvious security-related risks require the attention of this Council.

## Excellencies

The political and security consequences of sea-level rise reflect a potentially catastrophic reality which if left unaddressed may lead to a completely different world than the one we currently live in. In having spearheaded the UN Convention on the Law of Sea which to this day, remains the fundamental pillar that ensures peace and security at sea, Malta continues to be committed to ensure that the voices of those States and peoples most affected by these threats are heard.

Today, we are encouraged to hear of best practices from people who face this reality on a daily basis, especially from women who are on the frontline in identifying actions in this field which are long-lasting and can truly drive positive impacts to their populations and regions. As climate change catalyses new waves of activism around the world, threats and violence against women environmental defenders is increasing, especially against indigenous women. Their protection must be an integral part of the global agenda for peacebuilding and for sustaining peace.

We are therefore pleased to have this opportunity to engage in an open dialogue so as to properly address the threats that sea-level rise has on international peace and security, and we look forward to hearing from all of you today.

I thank you.