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Letter dated 1 October 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, during the presidency of Switzerland, the Security Council is planning to hold a high-level briefing on the topic "Anticipating the impact of scientific developments on international peace and security" under the agenda item entitled "Maintenance of international peace and security". The high-level briefing will take place on Monday, 21 October, at 10 a.m. and will be chaired by H.E. Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

Please find attached a concept note to guide the discussions on the topic of the briefing (see annex). I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

Annex to the letter dated 1 October 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

High-level briefing on the maintenance of international peace and security, on the topic “Anticipating the impact of scientific developments on international peace and security”, to be held on Monday, 21 October 2024

Background

The Secretary-General has articulated, through his New Agenda for Peace, a vision for peace and security in a changing world. He notes that rapidly advancing and converging technologies have the potential to revolutionize conflict dynamics in the near future.[1] In the Pact for the Future, Member States are expected to commit to addressing potential risks posed by new and emerging technologies to our collective efforts to maintain international peace and security, and to request the Secretary-General to continue to report to Member States on current developments in science and technology, based on the annual General Assembly resolutions on the role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament, the most recent of which is resolution 78/22.

The Security Council must keep pace with these scientific and technological developments and strive to maintain international peace and security in an evolving world. These developments have affected peace and security throughout history and continue to do so at an ever-increasing pace. On several occasions, the Council has begun to explore this topic. It discussed the potential of science for peace and security in an Arria-formula meeting in May 2024. It has also been briefed by scientists, for example in an Arria-formula meeting on the science of sea-level rise held on 18 October 2021, and during a high-level briefing on artificial intelligence held on 18 July 2023 (S/PV.9381). During a visit to Geneva in August 2024, members of the Security Council reflected on preventing emerging risks to international peace and security through innovation, science and technology.[2]

With a view to mitigating risks, harnessing opportunities and preventing violence, the Security Council should therefore be aware of current scientific developments and anticipate their future impact on international peace and security in order to elaborate appropriate responses now. In so doing, it must look beyond developments that are already under way, including those leading to rapid changes, towards those that are yet to come. The Council might also think about ways to uphold and strengthen international humanitarian law and to promote necessary standards in view of the anticipated impacts of scientific development, while ensuring the protection of civilians and of humanitarian and United Nations personnel in line with resolution 2730 (2024).

The Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA), a platform designed to anticipate future scientific breakthroughs, has identified specific fields that should be on the radar of the Security Council, such as neurotechnology, quantum technologies and synthetic biology. Advances in each of these fields bear risks and opportunities for international peace and security. Quantum computing could deeply disrupt security communication and global cybersecurity, while generating advances

[1] See document A/77/CRP.1/Add.8.

[2] Available at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/09/dispatches-from-the-field-sessions-on-preventing-emerging-security-risks-through-innovation-science-and-technology.php.

in such areas as logistics, mission planning and resource allocation for military, peacekeeping and humanitarian actors. Synthetic biology is likely to accelerate and expand the search, development and deployment of new biological agents, some of which could be used as weapons, while also enabling rapid development of vaccines and treatments.

While the briefing is intended to discuss the impacts of various scientific fields, a focus will be placed on the field of neurotechnology, to exemplify the rapidity of developments. Neuro-enhancement methods have the potential to drastically affect parties involved on battlefields: for example, fighters may need less sleep, be less sensitive to pain or benefit from enhanced decision-making. They may also affect the work of humanitarian organizations by generating new tools to address paralysis or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Objectives of the briefing

The high-level briefing will outline anticipated scientific developments with a significant impact on international peace and security, and examine how the Security Council might deal with them in a timely manner. Addressing the potential for anticipation will strengthen the Council's role in prevention, something that would be consistent with Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, and the commitments enshrined in the Joint Action for the New Agenda for Peace initiative put forward by Sierra Leone, Slovenia and Switzerland.

The briefing has three main objectives. First, it will serve to identify and discuss anticipated scientific developments, taking the example of neurotechnology. Second, it will make it possible to examine the relevance of those opportunities and the risks and opportunities which they entail for the mandate and work of the Security Council, not to mention the implications for strengthening peace and security. Third, it will provide an opportunity to discuss what policy guidance and operational steps should be considered and supported by the Security Council, including in relation to potential gaps in normative frameworks or regulation efforts within the United Nations system. Action catalysed now will facilitate a more effective response to anticipated scientific developments and their impact on international peace and security.

Guiding questions

1. Which aspects of current and future scientific developments should be the Security Council address? What are specific implications of those developments for the work of the Council?

2. How can scientific and technological tools be integrated into Security Council mandates? Which current and future scientific and technologic developments have already affected the work of humanitarian personnel and the protection of civilians? How could anticipating and leveraging scientific developments ensure a more effective fulfilment of mandates in the area of peace and security?

3. What policy decisions and operational steps should be taken today to mitigate risks and leverage opportunities of future scientific developments on international peace and security, and how can the Security Council catalyse action in that regard? What normative frameworks or regulations should be introduced or strengthened?

4. How could the Security Council systematically monitor and address those developments?

Format of the meeting

The high-level briefing will be chaired by Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. It will take place on Monday, 21 October 2024 at 10 a.m. in the Security Council chamber.

Briefers

- The Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
- The President of the Foundation Council of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Amin Awad
- Jocelyne Bloch, Professor at the Neuroscience Research Centre (Faculty of Biology and Medicine, University of Lausanne)
- Grégoire Courtine, Professor at the Centre for Neuroprosthetics and Brain Mind Institute (EPFL, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne) (to be confirmed).