

Press release – Embargoed until 00:01 Thursday 24 January 2008

## Government faces protests and civil unrest as impact of climate change hits home

Fresh analysis outlines new challenges for maintaining national security

LONDON, 24 January: A leading global security think tank today publishes a unique report on the domestic security implications of climate change.

Police and law enforcement agencies are facing an uncertain future as startling new analysis shows how the UK and other Western countries will come under increasing internal pressure from their own populations due to climate change. A new report from Oxford Research Group (ORG) explains, for the first time, how the likely impacts of climate change will force dramatic changes to the policing and law enforcement environment. The report, *An Uncertain Future: Law Enforcement, National Security and Climate Change*, also provides new analysis of the impacts on national security and the military.

Whilst most analysts see the threat to Western countries as coming from the outside, from massive immigration, the report's author, Chris Abbott, instead highlights the security concerns governments will need take into account in relation to their own populations – warning of protests against polluting companies, civil unrest in response to government policies and, in the extreme, a rise in the use of terrorist tactics by groups with environmental ideologies. He also points out the dangers of addressing immigration as a security threat, arguing that these people will be environmental refugees who will need support and protection.

The report develops the potential links between climate change, its socio-economic impacts and the likely security consequences. It warns of a rise in conflict over resources, especially strategically important oil reserves and access to water; major problems with migration where there are large, poor populations adjacent to small, rich populations; and an increase in international legal disputes as the world map is redrawn. "There is genuine concern over whether the international governance system will be able to cope with these new geo-political challenges, particularly if national governments are being undermined at the same time... countries under pressure may turn away from the norms of diplomacy and resort to armed conflict to settle such disputes." (p. 9)

It shows how governments will have to assess the whole spectrum of policies that are needed at every level in order to cope with the demands of climate change. However, the report stresses that if governments simply respond with traditional attempts to control insecurity they will ultimately fail. "In today's globalised world, using military force to secure resources overseas, while attempting to create a fortress state at home, will not work – despite the potential attraction of such policies for governments faced with such an uncertain future." (p. 12)

Commenting on the launch of the report today, Chris Abbott said:

"It is crucial that the Government begins take steps now towards developing effective policy solutions for the police, security services and military to help them adapt to the new and changing demands that climate change will place on them. However, they must resist the temptation to use force to try and control insecurity and maintain the status quo. In this instance, prevention really is the only cure."

He called upon the leadership within the police, security services and military to use their considerable influence to make this clear to policy-makers and impress upon them the importance of taking steps

now to prevent and manage climate change, rather than relying on force to try and control the insecurity later. He said, "Failure to do so could lead to an increasingly unstable country, unable to cope with the challenges and demands placed on it by wider global challenges."

The report concludes that the risks of climate change demands a rethink of approaches to security and the development of cooperative and sustainable ways of achieving that security, with an emphasis on preventative rather than reactive strategies.

#### Notes for Editors

- 1) Advance electronic copies of the report are available to editors and journalists. Please contact ORG's Communication and Advocacy Coordinator, Kayte Rath, on +44 (0)20 7549 0298 or [Kayte.Rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](mailto:Kayte.Rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk).
- 2) Report author, Chris Abbott, is available for interview or comment. Please contact Kayte Rath at Oxford Research Group on +44 (0)20 7549 0298 or [Kayte.Rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](mailto:Kayte.Rath@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk) to arrange.
- 3) This report is based on a briefing given by the author to the Australian Federal Police and other law enforcement and defence agencies in Canberra, November 2007. The author will give a private briefing on the report to a group of Labour MPs the day before publication.
- 4) Chris Abbott is the Programme Coordinator and Researcher at Oxford Research Group, an Honorary Research Fellow of the Centre for Governance and International Affairs at the University of Bristol, and lead author of *Beyond Terror: The Truth About the Real Threats to Our World* (Random House, 2007).
- 5) Oxford Research Group (ORG) is an independent non-governmental organisation which seeks to bring about positive change on issues of national and international security. Established in 1982, it is now considered to be one of the UK's leading global security think tanks. ORG is a registered charity and uses a combination of innovative publications, expert roundtables, residential, consultations, and engagement with opinion formers and government, to develop and promote, sustainable global security strategies. In 2003, ORG was awarded the Niwano Peace Prize and in 2005 *The Independent* newspaper named ORG one of the top twenty think tanks in the UK. [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk)

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