

YUNMUN XXX

UNEP

Topic 1: Climate Refugees

The threat of global warming, particularly climate change, has continued to worsen every year, and with it comes a host of adverse effects on the broader population. While there are apparent documented effects such as the global temperature rise and the wildlife extinction, one of the lesser-known effects is the rise in the number of climate refugees. Since 2008,¹ nearly 24 million people have been forced to relocate due to reasons related to their environment.² These sudden changes in their local environments compromise the well being and security of these refugees, causing them to search for shelter within their own country or immigrate to neighboring ones. Unfortunately, these individuals do not fit the current standard criteria for refugee status, thus limiting the amount of legal aid that can be granted to them.³ While there have been recent actions taken, such as the Global Compact for Migration and the Paris Agreement, few tangible changes have been seen by these refugees. The implications of climate change are commonly discussed on a global level, but most solutions require years before they appear to have a significant impact. While necessary, these deliberations tend to neglect the regional and more imminent environmental problems. Climate refugees are often overlooked yet are still an important topic of debate as the solution to their problems deal with the immediate consequences of climate change, and the impact of relevant solutions that can be assessed short term.

A report by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) projects that the number of climate refugees will reach 150 million by 2050 and claims that about 600 million people will be living in areas that are at high risk for climate change. The rising of sea levels, desertification, and natural disasters have been putting many at risk of displacement. Low lying island nations face the most imminent danger of losing part of all their land, while other countries, such as Africa and the Middle East, are experiencing higher numbers of natural disasters.⁴ This issue will only increase in urgency and scale.

Migration related to climate change is a highly complex issue, as environmental factors are intertwined with others. It is hard to attribute the migration of populations to the environment. For example, farmers in specific areas may choose to migrate due to product yield decline, which may lead to an expectation of future shortages, yet these farmers do not fall under the same category of a person experiencing a natural disaster due to climate change.⁵ These grey lines are

¹ <http://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>

² http://www.berlin-institut.org/fileadmin/user_upload/handbuch_texte/pdf_Renaud_Environmental.pdf <https://news.mongabay.com/2005/10/environmental-refugees-to-top-50-million-in-5-years/>

³ http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/about_iom/en/council/94/MC_INF_288.pdf

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/nov/03/global-warming-climate-refugees>

⁵ <http://www.globalization101.org/environmental-refugees/>

where the difficulty comes in providing legal protection to environmental refugees. The need to universally accept a definition of this term is evident as it would significantly streamline protecting and aiding these individuals.

Some questions to consider:

- Has your country aided or dealt with climate refugees in the past?
- Which countries are most responsible for facilitating refugee resettlement and aid? The countries that contribute most to global warming, the countries from which people are displaced, the countries willing to accept climate refugees, or another option?
- How can we help climate refugees best in both the short term and the long term?
- Should climate refugees be a protected type of refugee or asylum seeker under international law? How should this class be defined? (A background knowledge of the 1951 Geneva Convention definition of a refugee is imperative.)

Delegates are encouraged to consider the short-term mitigation and long-term adaptation solutions for climate refugees. One of the significant points that delegates should consider is the diffusion of responsibility of developed nations. While developed nations emit a majority of greenhouse gasses, it is often the developing nations that are most affected by climate changes. Consider who holds the responsibility to facilitate refugee resettlement and aid. Additionally, keep in mind that environmental refugees do not have legal or unified status under international law and therefore are usually given the title of “displaced.”

Good luck, and I look forward to seeing you soon,

Shira Pertou
Chair, UNEP
YUNMUN XXX