

Environment Commission

The question of environmental refugees



Forum	Environmental Commission
Issue:	The question of environmental refugees
Student Officer:	Teodor Yankov
Position:	President of the Environmental Commission

Introduction

Global warming, and similarly climate change, are definitely not a hoax. Due to rising temperatures and climate disruptions, the severity of natural disasters and extreme weather phenomena is the cause of a rising number of humanitarian crises and cases of displacement for survival. The IPCC estimates that by 2050 the increasingly frequent extreme weather patterns will give rise to between 150 and 300 million environmental refugees worldwide. Coastal flooding, coastal erosion and agricultural disruption are just some of the problems hitting nations across the world, especially island states. Forced evacuation of threatened areas result in numerous societal issues, such as financial stability, and the abandonment of traditional tribal lands, forcing the people affected to leave behind a piece of their culture. Unlike localised conflicts and refugee crises, climate change and global warming can devastate any international community, and as appropriate, a threat to the whole world requires the whole world to work together to provide a solution.

Definition of Key Terms

Environmental Refugee

A person displaced owing to environmental causes, notably land loss and degradation, and natural disaster.

Climate Change

Climate change is the long-term alteration of temperature and normal weather patterns in a place. This could refer to a particular location or the planet as a whole. Climate change is currently occurring throughout the world as a result of global warming.

Desertification



Land degradation in typically dry areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.

Global Warming

An increase in the planet's overall temperature due to the burning of fossil fuels, such as natural gas, oil, and coal. Burning these materials releases certain gases into Earth's atmosphere. These gases trap the heat from the Sun's rays inside the atmosphere, causing Earth's average temperature to rise.

Drought

Drought is a complex phenomenon which is difficult to monitor and define. Hurricanes, for example, have a definite beginning and end and can easily be seen as they develop and move. Drought, on the other hand, is the *absence* of water. It is a creeping phenomenon that slowly sneaks up and impacts many sectors of the economy, and operates on many different time scales. As a result, the climatological community has defined four types of drought: 1) meteorological drought, 2) hydrological drought, 3) agricultural drought, and 4) socioeconomic drought. Meteorological drought happens when dry weather patterns dominate an area. Hydrological drought occurs when low water supply becomes evident, especially in streams, reservoirs, and groundwater levels, usually after many months of meteorological drought. Agricultural drought happens when crops become affected. And socioeconomic drought relates the supply and demand of various commodities to drought. Meteorological drought can begin and end rapidly, while hydrological drought takes much longer to develop and then recover.

Flood

A flood is a general and temporary condition where two or more acres of normally dry land or two or more properties are inundated by water or mudflow.

General Overview

The main refugee crisis that the media has concerned itself with exists due to internal and international political conflicts. However, that is definitely not the only cause of population displacement. The generations of today live in a world plagued by unpredictable extreme weather patterns, temperatures increasing at dangerous rates causing a catastrophic disturbance in natural habitats, ecosystems, and living conditions in the long term. A recent



example is illustrated by a 2008 article on the melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet since 1990, supported by articles such as an Independent story, over 10 years later, showing a photo by climatologist Steffen Olsen in which sled-dogs appear to walk through a shallow lake covering their intended ice path:

However, there are still nations whose population does not fully believe in climate change and global warming. For instance, only 61% of the United States of America's population say that they are concerned with climate change. Although a majority, it is still 30% lower than Mexico, and represents how there is still more action that can be adapted in order to urge the public to take action.



Regardless of the divergence in opinions, the statistical evidence and research is overwhelmingly indicative that global warming and climate change are real threats to the modern world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which includes more than 1,300 scientists from the United States and other countries, forecasts a temperature rise of 2.5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century. The IPCC further predicts that the aforementioned increase in temperatures will lead to positive impacts in some regions, and adverse effects in others, stating that “Taken as a whole, the range of published evidence indicates that the net damage costs of climate change are likely to be significant and to increase over time.”

Key facts and Statistics regarding Climate Change



- Average global temperature has risen by 0.85°C between 1880 and 2012. Alternatively stated, for every 1 degree of temperature increase, grain yields decline by about 5%. Maize, wheat and other major crops have experienced significant yield reductions at the global level of 40 megatons per year between 1981 and 2002 due to increasing global temperatures.
- The world has seen an increase in temperatures of oceans, as well as a diminishing amount of snow and ice and a dangerous rise in sea levels. Between 1901 and 2010, the global average sea level rose by 19 cm as the volume of water contained in the oceans increased due to melting of ice. Simultaneously, the Arctic's sea ice extent has shrunk in every successive decade since 1979, with 1.07 million km² of ice loss every decade.

Statistics regarding the future

- It is likely that the increase in global temperature will exceed 1.5°C.
- Oceans worldwide will continue to heat up and the melting of ice will continue. Average sea level rise is predicted to be between 24 cm and 30 cm by 2065 and between 40 cm and 63 cm by 2100.
- Most aspects of climate change will persist for many centuries even if emissions are stopped
- Global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) have increased by almost 50 per cent since 1990
- Emissions grew at a faster rate between 2000 and 2010 than in each of the three previous decades
- It is still in the realm of possibility, through the use of a wide array of technological measures and changes in behavior, to limit the increase in global mean temperature to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. In order to increase the chances of confinement of global warming within the aforementioned threshold, major institutional and technological changes are required.
- 18.8 million new disaster-related internal displacements recorded in 2017.



Aside from the scientific viewpoint on the effects of climate change, the increased generation of climate refugees guarantees political effects as well. Countries are currently more reluctant than ever to allow refugees within their borders given recent refugee crises. Numerous politicians have deemed refugees as a threat to national security and economic growth and development, putting up both figurative and physical walls between their nations and displaced persons. With this in mind, it is of paramount importance that all nations utilize all available resources to aid environmental refugees, as Climate Change is not confined to one political region, and cannot tell the difference between countries - all nations are united under the common threat that global warming and climate change pose.

Herein lies a major problem - the absence of unity in the aim to reduce difficulty and instability for environmental refugees manifests itself in the absence of legal frameworks addressing the needs of incoming refugees, and in the lack of contingency plans to aid nations if and when a natural disaster strikes. The very definition of 'refugee', recognising two main categories of refugees (economic migrants that relocate to pursue economic opportunities and conflict refugees who have escaped war and persecution), fails to accommodate environmental refugees within, therefore making it more difficult for nations to deal with the problem. The consequences of rising sea levels on small island nations, such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Maldives, must be recognised by all Member Nations, alongside the effects of water scarcity in areas being lost to desertification and the effects of frequent floods on farmland and agricultural settlements. The establishment and development of long term objectives and strategies is crucial to obtaining a solution to the problem at hand.

Examples of recent extreme weather events

- Severe floods in *Afghanistan*
- Tropical cyclone Gita in *Samoa*
- Increased frequency of storms and hurricanes in the *United States of America* and *Mexico*
- Flooding in the *Philippines*.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)



The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has shown commitment regarding the protection of the environment and is fully aware of the environmental challenges. It recognises that the effects of climate change are “extremely serious”, and through documents such as the 2018 “Global Compact on Refugees”, it shows engagement in actively seeking a solution to the problem at hand. The UNHCR’s role in addressing climate change and disaster-related displacement are as follows:

1. Legal advice, guidance and the development of norms to support the enhanced protection of the rights of people displaced in the context of disasters and climate change.
2. Promoting policy coherence to ensure that issues of disaster displacement are effectively mainstreamed across relevant areas.
3. Research to fill gaps that underpin this operational and policy work.
4. Field-based activities to address internal and cross border disaster displacement; to reduce the environmental impact of refugee settlements and ensure sustainable responses to displacement; risk reduction activities and others which may contribute to efforts to avert, minimize and address displacement

UNHCR plays a leading role in the Global Protection Cluster for protecting and assisting people who are forcibly displaced inside their countries and cannot return safely home. When called upon to intervene, can deploy emergency teams and provide concrete support in terms of registration, documentation, family reunification and the provision of shelter, basic hygiene and nutrition. UNHCR is also a standing invitee to the Steering Group of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, in follow-up to the Nansen Initiative on cross-border disaster displacement. The Platform on Disaster Displacement is a State-led initiative focused on the implementation of the Nansen Initiative’s Protection Agenda.

UNHCR has developed planned relocation guidance together with Georgetown University and other partners for the relocation of at-risk populations to protect them from disasters and the impacts of climate change while respecting their human rights. Furthermore, UNHCR has provided technical support to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process since 2008, including through the Advisory Group on Human Mobility and Climate Change, and in its role as a member of the Task Force on Displacement (TFD) mandated by the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage.

European Union (EU)



The European Union (EU), being one of the most influential supranational organisations, plays a vital role in obtaining a solution to the issue at hand. The EU has been discussing and establishing numerous programmes to deal with migration and asylum issues, and are being urged to build a framework for including environmental and climate refugees by an appropriate definition, to which they are responding. Examples include:

- In the Stockholm Convention, agreed upon in 2009, they called for greater focus on climate change as a driver of security-relevant migratory flows.
- A strategy paper for a European Commission project with a €179 million budget over the 2011–2013 period, including funds for 'cooperation with third countries in the areas of migration and asylum', explicitly commits to working more on the nexus between climate change and migration.
- Working towards the appropriate recognition of climate refugees and the implications of climate change through publication series such as “Migration in Response to Environmental Change”.

The European Union, with heavy influence, has not maximised its potential in terms of the ability to take in environmental refugees within the borders of its member nations. It is crucial for European Member States to work towards an appropriate definition of the problem, in order for actions to be taken.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

In the past two decades, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed a comprehensive policy, research and operational programme on migration, environment and climate change. The Organization’s interest in migration, environment and climate change stems from its dedication – outlined in the IOM Strategy – to explore emerging themes related to migration governance. Paying attention to these “new” issues is part of IOM’s commitment to supporting Member States find innovative solutions by turning challenges into opportunities. It is widely recognized that human mobility, in both its forced and voluntary forms, is increasingly impacted by environmental and climatic factors and that migration in turn also impacts the environment. The *Fifth Assessment Report* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights the importance and complexity of human mobility in the context of climate change.

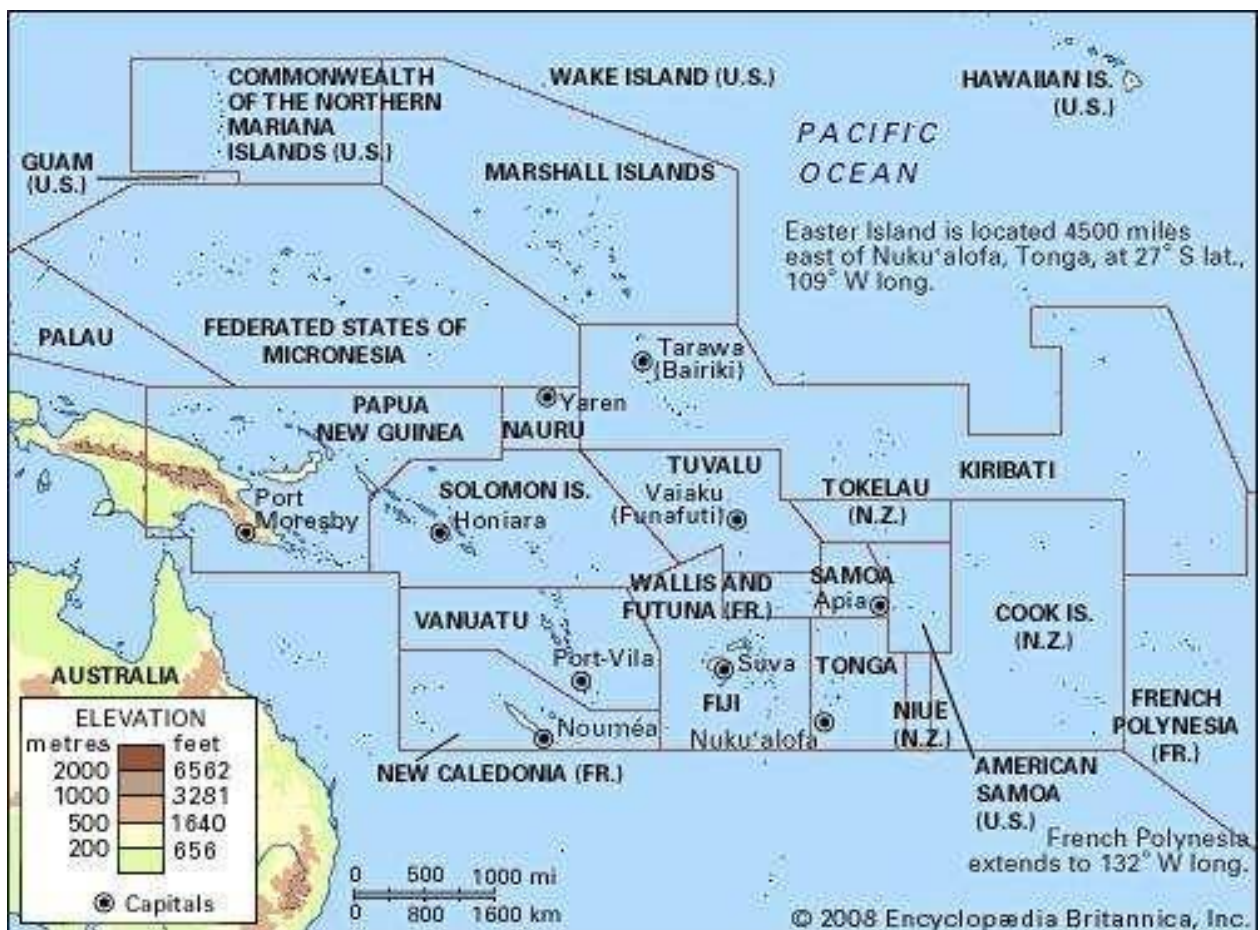
Chad



According to the “Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2016”, out of 186 countries assessed, Chad was rated most at peril, hence it is also most at peril in terms of the issues of environmental refugees. The fact that, according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index factoring in health, education and living standards, around 87% of Chad’s population lives in poverty only intensifies the consequences of extreme climate related natural disasters. Any poor or conflict-prone nation will always be vulnerable, but Chad’s geography means climate change is a particular risk. At 1.28m km² it’s larger than Nigeria and twice the size of Texas, Chad is much larger than the majority of the world perceives it to be. Around 90% of its 10 million people live in the southern half of the country, as most of the northern half extends well into the Sahara desert. All the aforementioned factors, combined with numerous others, means that Chad is in particular need of a solution to the problem at hand to be established.

Pacific Islands

In order to provide further substance to debate, find below a table outlining the impacts of certain phenomena related to climate change specifically on the pacific island nations. The Pacific Islands are the nations shown below:



Climate Change Impact	Community Security Impact
<p>Sea level rise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inundation - Coastal erosion - Storm surge exacerbated 	<p>Land security in coastal regions may be severely compromised, and livelihood security may be compromised further due to the loss of agriculture land and salinisation of soils, plants and water supplies.</p>
<p>Water resource impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rainfall uncertainty - Increased frequency and magnitude of droughts - Reduced quantity and quality of water resources - Salinisation 	<p>Livelihood security may be affected by decreased agricultural productivity; the loss of fertile soils. Habitat security is affected by waterborne diseases.</p>
<p>Coral reef health decline (in the Pacific region)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reef degradation as a result of increased sea surface temperatures and increased ocean acidity. 	<p>Livelihood security is affected adversely by the reductions in fisheries and other marine resources dependent on the well-being of the coral reef. Furthermore, land security may be compromised by increased exposure to tall waves and storm surge.</p>
<p>Agricultural Production decline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative impacts from a variety of processes including temperature rise, reduced availability of water, salinisation, exposure to tropical cyclones (wind, wave and rain damage). 	<p>Compromised agricultural productivity would adversely affect livelihood security, and in extreme cases in Pacific regions it may render an area uninhabitable.</p>
<p>Human health challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing disease vectors such as malaria, dengue, etc. - Increased incidence of waterborne diseases - Increased incidence of heat related diseases. 	<p>Effects on human health reduce habitat security of island. In extreme cases in Pacific regions it may render an area uninhabitable.</p>

Timeline of Key Events

This is a timeline demonstrating the course of climate change and international awareness of its implications, also showing moments of recognition of the problem.



Date	Description of event
1968	The possibility of the collapse of Antarctic ice sheets is suggested by a relevant study, which would lead to a catastrophic raising of the sea levels.
1970	The first Earth Day is held - the environmental movement gains strong influence, spreading concern about global degradation.
1970	Creation of US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the world's leading benefactor of climate research.
1981	The election of US President Reagan generates backlash against environmental movement to power. Political conservatism is linked to skepticism regarding global warming.
2001	Preparation and implementation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) begin.
2003	The divergence between European and American public opinion regarding climate change and global warming accelerates due to a catastrophic heat wave during the summer.
2004	Influence of the public increases with the media beginning to include books, movies and artwork featuring global warming and climate change.
2005	(October) Global Commission on International Migration delivers final report.
2006	Global Migration Group established.
2008	(December) Migration first mentioned in assembly documents, Poznań COP14
2011	(December) Cancun COP16 establishes Cancun Adaptation Framework, Advisory Group on Climate Change and Migration, and National Adaptation Plans process.
2012	Donald J. Trump (current President of the United States) states that the "concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive". Although he later confirmed that he was joking, this ideology entered public opinion.
2012	(October) Nansen Initiative launched
2015	Researchers establish that the collapse of West Antarctic ice sheets is irreversible, bringing meters of sea level rise over future centuries, with catastrophic implications.
2015	The average global temperature reaches 14.8°C, the hottest in thousands of years, and the level of CO ₂ in the atmosphere reaches 400 ppm, which is the highest figure in millions of years.



- 2015 (March) Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) adopted.
- 2015 (September) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) adopted, including:
- A green rectangular graphic with the number '13' in large white font, followed by 'CLIMATE ACTION' in smaller white font. To the right is a white eye-shaped icon containing a globe.
- 2015 (November) Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submitted ahead of Paris COP21.
- 2015 (December) Task Force on displacement established in the Paris Agreement, Paris COP21.
- 2016 “Well, look, there’s no question that the activities that take place in this country and in countries around the world have some impact on the environment and some impact on climate” - a statement by Mike Pence, President Donald Trump’s running mate.
- 2016 (May) Platform on Disaster Displacement Launched
- 2016 (September) Adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants
- 2016 (October) New Urban Agenda adopted.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UN Involvement

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

The UNEP states on its website that it is a “Leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment”. They narrow down their aims to the following three points:

1. Assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions and trends



2. Developing international and national environmental instruments
3. Strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment

The aforementioned points make the UNEP a key contributor to Climate Action, with relevant aims ensuring that action is taken. It is of paramount importance for the UN to not only deal with the environmental refugees, but with the natural disasters causing their displacement.

UN Water

UN Water identifies itself as follows on its website: “UN-Water is the United Nations inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater related issues, including sanitation. It provides the platform to address the cross-cutting nature of water and maximize system-wide coordinated action and coherence.” Therefore, its function with regard to environmental refugees manifests itself in aiding the refugees in freshwater related issues, such as hygiene and drinking water for survival.

The World Food Programme (WFP)

The WFP summarises its function on its website as: “Assisting 80 million people in around 80 countries each year, the World Food Programme (WFP) is the leading humanitarian organization fighting hunger worldwide, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience.

As the international community has committed to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition by 2030, one in nine people worldwide still do not have enough to eat. Food and food-related assistance lie at the heart of the struggle to break the cycle of hunger and poverty.” Therefore, its contribution is crucial to making sure that persons displaced by extreme weather conditions are able to eat and survive.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Refer to Major Parties Involved - the UNHCR plays a key role in dealing with persons displaced by various factors, including extreme climate events.

Relevant UN Documents

Contribution to the Fifteenth Coordination Meeting on International Migration, 08 February 2017 (UN/POP/MIG-15CM/2017/2)



This is a document summarising the UNEP's involvement with the issue of environmental migration. The document is divided into two sections, the first of which is "UN Environment's 2016 Work to Support The Implementation of the Migration-related Commitments of the 2030 Agenda", in which it discusses: the convention of environmental actors to discuss action on environmentally induced displacement and migration, the raising of awareness on the environmental dimensions of migration and displacement, the aligning of their work with key partners, and the implementation of on-the-ground work to address dimensions of environmentally induced migration and displacement. The second part of the document is titled "UN Environment's plans in 2017 to implement aspects of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants" and it discusses: Partnerships with entities such as the Global Migration Group and the Environment and Emergencies Forum; Research and Knowledge; Programmes, dealing with environment displacement in Guatemala, Nigeria and Lebanon, as well as establishment of sustainable livelihoods in Darfur, Sudan.

New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, 3 October 2016 (A/RES/71/1)

According to the UNHCR: "As the name suggests, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants addresses the situations faced by refugees and by migrants. There are robust commitments that apply equally to refugees and migrants (on topics including racism, xenophobia and human trafficking), as well as separate commitments for refugees and for migrants. Furthermore, the New York Declaration lays the groundwork for further action to improve the situation of refugees and migrants by laying out a process for the development of two 'global compacts', one on refugees and the other for safe, orderly and regular migration, which are to be adopted in late 2018. States have also pledged to consider the development of non-binding guiding principles for migrants in vulnerable situations."

Global Compact on Refugees, 13 September 2018 (A/73/12)

According to the UNHCR, the resolution recognises the burden that extreme climate events create in generating displaced persons, and "Against this background, the global compact on refugees intends to provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden - and responsibility-sharing among all United Nations Member States, together with other relevant stakeholders as appropriate, including but not limited to: international organizations within and outside the United Nations system, including those forming part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; other



humanitarian and development actors; international and regional financial institutions; regional organizations; local authorities; civil society, including faith-based organizations; academics and other experts; the private sector; media; host community members and refugees themselves (hereinafter “relevant stakeholders”).

Treaties and Events

- Kyoto Protocol: this was the first major global step in dealing with the issue of global warming and its consequences. Although the United States of America rejected it, it remains an important step in building future protocols.
- Copenhagen Accord: this accord was intended as a continuation of the Kyoto Protocol. Despite the success of the Kyoto Protocol. The Copenhagen Accord was conceptually flawed and therefore failed.
- Montréal Protocol: concerned with matters relating to the Ozone layer, this protocol was first enacted in the late 20th century (around 1980), and has been revised 8 times since then. The protocol’s beneficial consequences manifested in positive outcomes relating the ozone layer recovery in Antarctica.
- Paris Agreement: This agreement is signed by the majority of member states, and was a step of paramount importance towards achieving a solution to combat global warming and the negative influence of greenhouse gas emission. This particular agreement was portrayed in the media as “the world deciding its own fate”, contributing to its significance.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Zero Hour Platform

According to Kibiriti Majuto, a 20 year old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo based in the United States, and the main author of the Zero Hour Platform movement: “The Zero Hour Platform is a nationwide coalition presenting a list of demands that we want our elected officials in the United States to implement in order to effectively address the impact of climate change. We were inspired by the Children’s Climate Lawsuit, and we aim at guiding the actions taken by governments at all levels—state, county, city—to achieve climate justice. We also work to engage populations to take action on climate change, which we hope will produce an effect that will eventually push governments to act.” This is an effective step in



achieving a solution because through “Young Champions of the Earth”, young people with potential to bring change are able to get involved. However, this would not be as effective if other sectors of society do not work in alignment and recognition.

In general, previous attempts to resolve this issue have been mostly unsuccessful due to the fact in the majority of situations, actions proposed contradict the wellbeing or belief of a particular nation’s government, preventing its passing. This makes the majority of resolutions ineffective, as international cooperation to the highest degree is required for the solution to the problem at hand.

Possible Solutions

Possible solutions to the problem of environmental refugees should be in alignment with the three points summarising the aim of the UNEP:

1. Assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions and trends
2. Developing international and national environmental instruments
3. Strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment

Delegates could explore the following areas when coming up with possible solutions:

- The micromanagement and encouragement of investment into local organisations in areas affected by the issue at hand, in order to combat the issue through actions that are in alignment with the respective nation’s culture and traditions. This would minimise resistance, and ensure the reaching of a compromise.
- The establishment of new trading blocs and new legislation and policies by which nations in competition with each other would be more willing to raise their costs of production by using more environmentally-friendly production methods. Furthermore, policies preventing nations from resisting measures that would lead them to increase costs of production. As many nations have their personal economies as a priority, changing those interests would be of benefit to the world.
- Incentives for the establishment of programmes and resources which would increase inventions that take the environment as a priority.

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Appendix or Appendices

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