IMUN 2025 Research Report

Human Rights Commission Issue #2: The question of ensuring asylum for climate-displaced peoples

There has been a growing correlation between displacement and climate change in recent years. As a result of increased extreme weather conditions, many individuals have been stripped of their human rights, and as stated by the UNHCR, “refugees, internally displaced and stateless people are on the frontlines of the climate crisis” ("Climate change"). Most of the world is not yet equipped for the effects of the climate crisis, leaving them utterly vulnerable to its impacts. Currently, 1.6 billion people reside in what are known as climate hotspots and that number is set to double by 2050 ("There could"). Additionally, the death rate in these locations is fifteen times higher than the rest of the world, subjecting millions to extreme conditions ("Vulnerability hotspots").

Due to climate change being recently acknowledged as a contributor towards displacement, the term "climate refugee", lacks a legal basis, and instead should be referred to as “climate displaced person”. The 1951 Refugee Convention, which is stated to protect those with a “well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and who are unable or unwilling to seek protection from their home countries”, does not address the environment. Meaning legally, they are not labelled under the refugee status ("The concept"). The Refugee Convention was written roughly 70 years ago when climate change was not nearly as critical of an issue. However, recently it has become increasingly notable as a leading cause of displacement. While there is a grey area in the definition of a “climate refugee”, it is obvious that the issue is escalating, with about 32.6 million

displaced due to climate change in 2022 alone ("There could"). The rising trend clearly indicates that the number of climate refugees will continue to grow, driven primarily by climate change.

The displacement individuals have experienced has also left a cascading effect of other significant losses of human rights such as “rights to food, water, sanitation, housing, health, education and, for some, their basic right to life ("Legal protection"). What is important to note is that even in cases where climate change is not the sole cause of migration, it exacerbates others. In many cases, “climate change is a threat multiplier”, meaning that countries battling unemployment, poverty, resource shortages and other stressors, climate change can aggravate them all and causes people to flee ("Making a World").

While all humans are affected by climate change in some way, not all are impacted equally and those most affected by the climate crisis are Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). The 2030 Agenda placed LEDCs at the forefront of the development plan, acknowledging that they are the “most vulnerable countries in the world”, meanwhile they are also impacting climate change the least. Ultimately, while efforts to mitigate climate change should be advanced as a preventative measure, the climate crisis has already taken effect and impacted countless individuals. It is imperative that Member States take action to safeguard individuals affected by climate change. Addressing climate-based displacement is one of the most challenging and dire issues that heavily requires international cooperation. Delegates should approach the issue with consideration for their respective delegations' perspectives, motives, political and social climates. The question of ensuring asylum for climate-displaced peoples is a nuanced issue and requires an understanding of the legal, ethical, and moral questions surrounding the right to asylum for climate displaced peoples is crucial for effective debate.

Works Cited

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