

Committee/Council: Social and Humanitarian  
Issue: Climate change and human rights: the status of climate refugees  
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## Introduction

Climate change is nowadays an important issue. The weather constantly changes and each change has its consequences. During the last decade tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, tornados and other meteorological phenomena hit many countries from all over the world. This has affected not only the human beings, living in these areas, but also the animals and the environment. Due to these factors, people were encouraged to abandon their homes, and as a result, their way of living behind and to travel to another country/city. These people, after moving to another place, adjust their previous habits to the new ones, since every area is different from the other. Sometimes we can observe aggressive behavior between the “old” citizens and the “new” ones, which can lead to racism and discrimination. Therefore the rights of the people should be protected and each government and non-governmental organizations, through their rules, can make this happen. Protection, equal rights and friendly behavior between all citizens should be achieved. Until today we have seen that people coming from Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) were migrating to More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs). But this direction of migration has changed since some MEDCs have faced problems with climate change and some areas have become unapproachable for the human beings. Scientists predict that at least 200 to 500 million people will have to leave their home and migrate to another area until 2050.



## Definition of Key-Terms

### Refugee

Person who doesn't live in his own country anymore because they suffered or for fear of suffering a kind of discrimination due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion

### Climate change

The constant change of the weather due to the factors such as but not limited to: floods, sea level rise, tornados, tsunamis, draughts, earthquakes

### Climate refugee

Person who has to leave his home and move for a long/short period of time to another country/region/town because of bad weather conditions, which endanger their lives or have destroyed their way of living

### Geneva Convention

Convention which supports the legal status of a refugee and encourages every effort made towards that direction

### Sea level rise

The gradual rise of the water of the sea

### Tsunami

The water of the sea passes the "line" of the beach sea level and it turns itself to a big wave that covers the area near the sea (the area, which is covered by water, depends on the level and height of the tsunami)

### Earthquake

(many times caused by a volcanic movements) any sudden shaking of the ground caused by the passage of seismic waves through the Earth's rocks

### Droughts

The lack of water in a specific area that causes something like desertification

### Hurricane

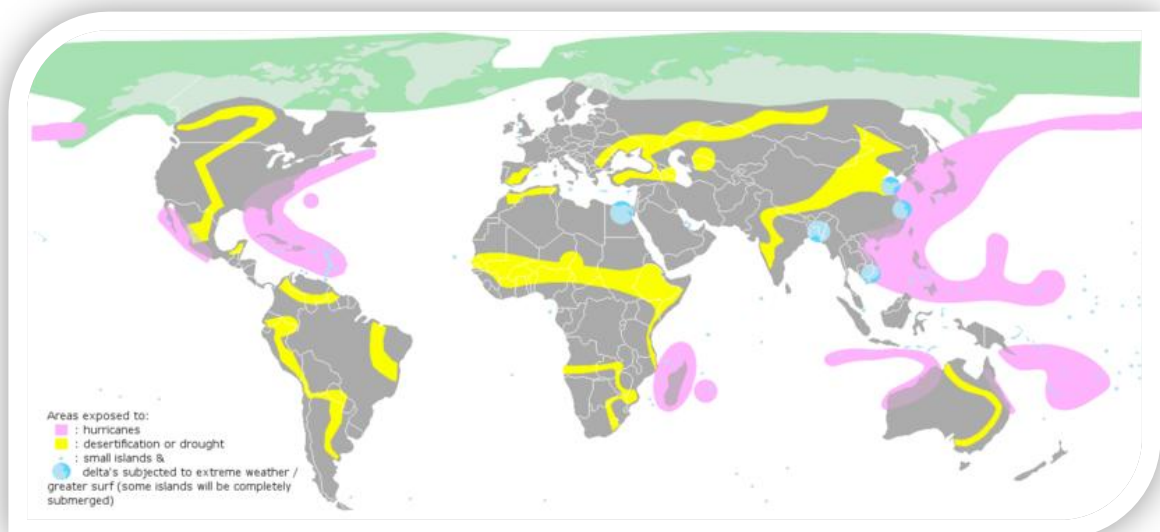
(scientific name: Tropical cyclone) a rapidly-rotating storm system characterized by a low-pressure center, strong winds, and a spiral arrangement of thunderstorms that produce heavy rain

## Background Information

Migrants due to extreme weather conditions have been troubling our world for a long time. Therefore the United Nations decided to hold a meeting with its members in 1951 in Geneva. Their main issue for discussion was the legal status of refugees. The General Assembly approved the so called Geneva Convention, which defines the term “refugee”, their social rights and their obligations towards the host countries. That effort though was not signed by all countries. 140 countries have signed the convention. The implementation of the convention has not fully solved the current issue as every day, one government may come up with a new, on-going situation. It should be mentioned, however, that some argue that climate refugees belong to a particular social group which is explicitly included in a definition of refugees. After 1970, scientists observed that migration could be connected in some way with the changes in the environment. During the last decade many people should move to another place, for example:

- in Vanuatu 100 people in 2005
- in the United States, 607 people
- in India 10.000 people, because of sea level rise.

In New Orleans, in 2005, people had to face the most destructive hurricane of all times. Near 2.000 people died and others tried to save themselves. In December 2006, the Indian Ocean Tsunami occurred in the area: Sumatra, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Maldives. 230210 people died and many others left their country and travelled to countries, located north to India.



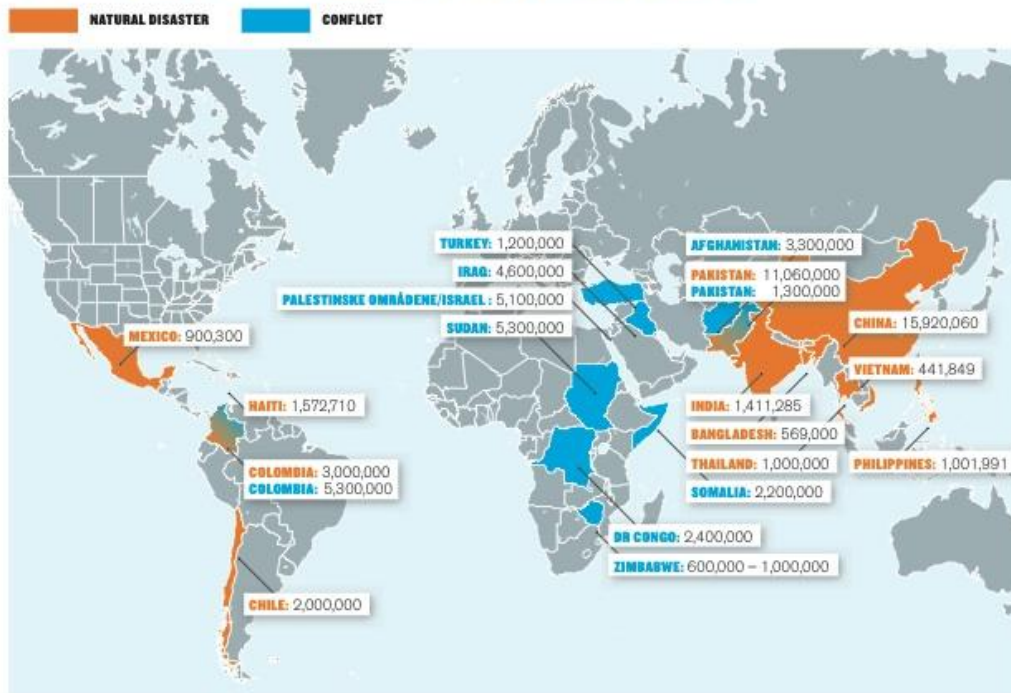
After 2010, more natural disasters have occurred in comparison with the period 2000-2010. Starting with the Haiti Earthquake in 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010. 222570 people died and many people tried to protect themselves and migrate to neighboring countries, such as, but not limited to, Dominican Republic. In February 2010, in the Pacific Coast of Chile began an earthquake and followed a tsunami.

In March 2011, Japan dealt with more than 20.000 dead people and million people abandoned their home because the tsunami hit also the nuclear power station. In 2012 the hurricane "Sandy" burst in the United States of America. The hurricane caused the death of more than 100 people and the migration of people from USA, Cuba, Haiti, the Bahamas, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. In 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013 a tornado "hit" Oklahoma. As a result many people died and others migrated to another city/country. During the history, millions of people have migrated to another country, away from their "basis". Discrimination could be a frequent phenomenon.

Generally, focusing on the issue as a whole, according to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Climate refugees, a refugee has the right to be free from penalties pertaining to the illegality of their entry to or presence within a country, if it can be shown that they acted in good faith- that is, if the refugee believes that there was ample cause for their illegal entry/presence, for example to escape threats upon their life or freedom, and they swiftly declare their presence.

The United Nations Secretary General called the "phenomenon" of the climate refugees as the phenomenon, which will reshape the human geography. By that it was meant that the percent of migration (people moving to other countries) due to extreme weather conditions or natural disasters, will be raised, but not intentionally. Despite that fact, each country should try for its best and protect not only its people but also migrants coming from all over the world.

## TEN WORST HUMANITARIAN CRISES CAUSED BY (1) NATURAL DISASTERS AND (2) CONFLICT, 2010



The number of people displaced by conflict are cumulative figures, numbers of displaced by natural disasters are, on the other hand, newly displaced in 2010. All statistics regarding the number of people displaced by war and armed conflict in 2010 are approximate. Final numbers of conflict-induced displacement will be published at the end of June by UNHCR/NRC.

### Major Countries and Organizations Involved

#### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is urged to be open to new people, migrating from other countries because of the weather conditions. UK is a country who should support migrants and protect them. This is what every country should do. Climate refugees in UK should be treated as equal and not underestimate them and not marginalize them from the society.

#### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The UNHCR supports climate refugees and, generally, refugees. The organization tries for the best so that peoples' lives can become better. This happens because they understand that they have lost everything except, in some cases, their families. Now they have to adjust their habits and their previous lives to new living conditions. Therefore UNHCR helps every migrant who needs help with their new life.

#### International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The International Organization for Migration was founded in order to provide any necessary help to refugees. The organization protects them and they can address

people involved with the organization any time. Headquarters of the organization can be found all over the world including Guatemala, USA, Switzerland, Turkey, Syria, Ghana, South Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe. Their main goal is the process of mutual adaptation between host society and migrant.

### United States of America

United States of America has been affected a lot by the climate changes during the last years. Tornados and tsunamis have changed the way of living of people, their habitats and, for sure, their psychology. USA needs support through funding these people and by building from the beginning the destroyed areas.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
28 <sup>th</sup> July 1951	Geneva Convention
1970	Scientists connect migration with climate changes
August 1980	Mt. Saint Helens Volcano – Washington, United States
1993	Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action
September 1994	Kliuchevskoi Volcano – Russia
April 2001	Dust Storm – China
October 2002	Mt. Etna Volcano – Sicily, Italy
2005	hurricane in New Orleans
2006	Indian Ocean Tsunami
2006	Double Cyclone – Iceland
2007	Hurricane Felix – Honduras
2008	Flooding – Cedar Rapids, Iowa
2008	Chaiten Volcano – Chana, Chile
2008	Tornado – Iowa, United States

2009	Storm Clouds – South Dakota, United States
2009	Brushfires – Victoria, Australia
2009	Dust Storm – Australia
2009	Wildfires – California
2009	Undersea Volcano – Tonga
2010	Eyjafjallajokull Volcano – Iceland
2010	Haiti: Earthquake
2010	Chile: Earthquake and tsunami
2010	Mount Merapi Volcano – Indonesia
2010	Lightning Strike – New York City
2011	Japan: Earthquake
2012	Hurricane Sandy
2013	Tornado Kansas City - Oklahoma
2013	Heavy rain and flood – China

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### UN Resolution 7/23

In this resolution is mentioned organizations involved with the issue as well as conventions, which were signed related to climate change and human rights.

### Geneva Convention(1951)

The Geneva Convention was signed by 140 countries. The Convention defines who is a refugee, refugees' obligations towards the host countries and their social rights. The equality of the refugees is fully supported in article 3 of the convention. Some believe though that since the issue has not been solved yet an extension of the convention could help the situation in the future.

### Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action(1993)

In one Article of the Declaration, it invites the Member States to consider to position towards migrants as workers and encourages the States to show equality and respect to these people.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In 1951, the first effort was made through the Geneva Convention to protect generally refugees. The convention covers aspects of dealing with refugees. Climate refugees belong to a special subset of societies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offers protection not only to refugees, but also to asylum seekers and people, who need help. Furthermore, the Congress approved for example to pay 9.7 billion dollars to the people who have suffered from the hurricane "Sandy". This is the first step in order to help climate refugees to integrate better in the host countries and become equal with the other. Also the American Red Cross spent 1.3 million dollars to support emergency relief for more than 90,000 people, including providing hygiene kits, kitchen supplies, blankets, mattresses, shelter, water and sanitation and health care for those who were left without their homes and livelihoods. In the past many countries provided psychological support to climate refugees as it was essential for them in order to continue living a normal life again.



## Possible Solutions

The issue of the climate refugees is very controversial and each delegate should bear in mind that he/she represents a country, which has a particular perspective towards this topic. This topic is also related to the environment and culture.

A possible solution related to the issue can be to enforce the laws of each country. People deserve to be treated as equal and this should be achieved by every government, which deals with climate refugees. United Nations organizations should help in order to improve the situation faster.

We should bear in mind though that people should keep using renewable energy resources in order to improve the current situation and not worsen it more.

Furthermore, climate refugees often in the host countries are not friendly accepted because the local people disagree with their integrity to the country. And this happens because there is a conflict between them for the natural resources. So the government plays a major role as it has to protect the rights of both the local people and the “new” ones.

Also through education could people learn about climate refugees and try to help them. Education and raising public awareness always plays a major role in combating a global problem.

Last, but not least, the Geneva Convention should finally come into effect by all countries. Another possibility, of course, could be the creation of a new Convention, signed this time by the majority of the countries, recognizing the climate refugees and their new rights and obligations or a new resolution submitted by the UN which will be realistic and applicable to all or at least most of the countries.

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