



NGMUN II

SOCHUM - Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Delegates,

I welcome you to Noble and Greenough Model United Nations II and to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee. My name is Kayla Henderson, and I am excited to be your chair for the SOCHUM (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee) discussing environmental migrants. I would like to personally thank you for choosing to attend NGMUN II and express how honored I am to be the chair of this committee. The topic that you will discuss is very pressing with environmental disasters becoming more frequent, and I am hopeful that you will gain a newfound understanding of the topic from this debate.

Currently, I am a Senior at Nobles and started Model UN my Freshman year. Outside of MUN, I enjoy photography, specifically my role as staff photographer for *The Nobleman*, our school newspaper, as well as dance, track and field, and guitar. I am extremely excited for this conference and look forward to meeting all of you!

This is a general assembly committee, so the goal will be to pass a resolution. I strongly encourage each delegation to write a position paper, as it will serve as an additional way to show me what you know and the preparation you have done. Papers should address your country's policy regarding environmental migrants, the rights that they have, and your proposed solutions. Some things to consider are how one should define an environmental migrant (for there is no official definition), and how your policies will affect both those who have already been impacted by and those who have yet to be impacted by climate change. Papers can be submitted to khenderson21@nobles.edu. I am eager to read all of them, and I wish you all the best of luck with your preparation and the conference!

Respectfully,

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Introduction:

Environmental migrants or climate refugees are becoming increasingly more common throughout the world. While a universal definition is still yet to be confirmed, the International Organization for Migrants defined “environmental migrants” as people who, “predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”¹ Of the many factors affecting environmental migrants, global sea level, a main contributor, has risen about 8 inches in the last century. The rate in the last two decades, however, is nearly double that of the last century and is accelerating slightly every year. Since the late 19th century, average global temperatures have increased 0.9° C (1.62° F). The number of record-high temperature-related events have been steadily increasing worldwide as well.² With the increasing climate change, the number of environmental migrants is subject to increase from several million to tens of millions within the next twenty years, as estimated by the International Organization for Migrants.³ As of now, environmental migrants receive no protection under the law, and although this issue is affecting the lives of millions of people, world leaders have yet to show much concern.⁴ It is

¹ Curtis, Kimberly. "Climate Refugees, Explained." UN Dispatch, 14 Apr. 2017, www.undispatch.com/climate-refugees-explained/. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020.

² “Climate Change Evidence: How Do We Know?” NASA, NASA, 30 Dec. 2019, climate.nasa.gov/evidence/.

³ Park, Jacob. “Environmental Migrants: More than Numbers.” Our World, 13 July 2011, ourworld.unu.edu/en/environmental-migrants-more-than-numbers.

⁴ Curtis, Kimberly. "Climate Refugees, Explained." UN Dispatch, 14 Apr. 2017, www.undispatch.com/climate-refugees-explained/. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020.

imperative that these people secure their own set of rights so that they are able to easily adjust to their new home and contribute to society as soon as possible.

Discussion of the topic and bloc positions:

Since 2008, varying climate-related issues have caused the displacement of about 26.4 million people.⁵ In the coming years, with the rising of sea levels, drought, and fires becoming more common, 143 million people are expected to be displaced from their homes by 2050 in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America alone.⁶ Despite the fact that this is an extremely large amount of people, global leaders have yet to pay much attention to them. There is no universal definition of who qualifies as a climate refugee, no set of rights for them, and no set place for them to go. Currently, international attention is much more focused around other types of migrants, particularly those originating from areas of armed conflict. Developed nations have taken adamant stances against addressing the problems of climate change. “Industrialized countries are not only ignoring the issue, but actively undermining attempts to craft durable solutions. For instance, in advance of the Paris climate summit, Australia helped to scuttle a plan to create a coordination facility for handling climate refugees, even as its Pacific Island neighbors were raising alarms about the impact of rising oceans.”⁷ Further examples of resistance to climate talks are evident in the Trump Administration’s firm opposition to the 2015

⁵ Yonetani, Michelle. “Global Estimates 2015: People Displaced by Disasters.” IDMC, 1 July 2015, www.internal-displacement.org/publications/global-estimates-2015-people-displaced-by-disasters.

⁶ McDonnell, Tim. “The Refugees The World Barely Pays Attention To.” NPR, NPR, 20 June 2018, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to.

⁷ Hollifield, James, and Idean Salehyan. “Environmental Refugees.” Wilson Center, 21 Dec. 2015, www.wilsoncenter.org/article/environmental-refugees.

Paris summit (COP21/CMP11), as well as Marine Le Pen and the Front National's strong presence in French politics. Le Pen, leader of the FN, is against all climate talks. Both politicians have not only expressed their distaste for climate talks but have also voiced hostility towards climate refugees. This hostility further alienates climate refugees from society, making it even harder for them to cope with their displacement.

Although most global leaders choose to ignore this issue, some smaller countries to which climate change is an extreme issue have started to speak out against the issue. For example, Barbados, a popular tourist destination and home to over 300,000 people is projected to face extreme issues if the temperatures continue to rise as they have been. These issues could make the country uninhabitable, leaving those 300,000 people as climate refugees with no home and no rights. Mia Mottley, Barbados' Prime Minister, warns that "there will be mass migration by climate refugees that will destabilize the countries of the world that are not on the front line of this climate crisis."⁸ While Barbados and other countries are beginning the fight against climate change, they still are avoiding making a plan for those who will inevitably be displaced by natural disasters. Unfortunately, "even if we stopped emitting greenhouse gases today, global warming would continue to happen for at least several more decades, if not centuries."⁹ In Barbados specifically, it is a matter of 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit that will determine whether the

⁸ Golgowski, Nina. "Expect A Mass Migration Of Refugees If Climate Crisis Continues, Barbados Warns." HuffPost, HuffPost, 23 Sept. 2019, www.huffpost.com/entry/barbados-warns-mass-climate-migration_n_5d891b9ce4b0938b59329653.

⁹ "Is It Too Late to Prevent Climate Change? – Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet." NASA, NASA, climate.nasa.gov/faq/16/is-it-too-late-to-prevent-climate-change/.

country can be inhabitable or not.¹⁰ This change could happen anyway due to the amount of carbon dioxide that is already in the atmosphere. These facts only contribute to how vital it is for the countries of the world to come together and finally come up with a standardized plan for these refugees.

In the meantime, nations must take the initiative and open their borders to the millions of environmental refugees. Although this proposition may sound daunting to host nations at first, accepting influxes of refugees can actually prove to be beneficial. The earlier a state commits to housing refugees, the earlier they can move forward with their lives without uncertainty blocking the way. Once settled, refugees can start productive lives and integrate into the labor force. Contrary to popular belief, migration economists agree that the presence of foreigners within a workforce does not impede the livelihood of natives. This is because natives and foreigners usually have different sets of skills and compete for different types of jobs. Additionally, the presence of foreigners boosts the performance of local workers because natives can pursue higher paid positions for which migrants cannot always compete (for example, jobs that require proficiency in the local language.)¹¹

¹⁰ Gologowski, Nina. "Expect A Mass Migration Of Refugees If Climate Crisis Continues, Barbados Warns." HuffPost, HuffPost, 23 Sept. 2019, www.huffpost.com/entry/barbados-warns-mass-climate-migration_n_5d891b9ce4b0938b59329653.

¹¹ Bahar, Dany. "Why Accepting Refugees Is a Win-Win-Win Formula." Brookings, Brookings, 19 June 2018, www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/06/19/refugees-are-a-win-win-win-formula-for-economic-development/.

History and what the UN has already done:

To try to help this issue, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) developed the Global Compact on Refugees in December of 2018 which was embraced by the majority.¹² It also made planned relocation guidance which attempts to protect those who have been or may be affected by natural disasters from climate change.¹³ Despite the UN's best efforts to help these people, most of it is in the hands of the leaders of the countries themselves.

Recently, on January 15th, the UN helped a group of Native American tribes and villages to write a lengthy complaint against the United States federal government because their home of many centuries could be lost due to the rising sea levels.¹⁴ This is the UN's way of pressuring the United States to take action, for the UN has little influence over the specific needs of these Native American tribes. Currently, it appears that the United States government would rather relocate individuals as opposed to communities, something with which these tribes do not agree. The government has not shown any concern for the emotional connection that the people have to this land and the importance of it in their culture. Hopefully, considering that this case has received considerable amount of media coverage, the United States government will feel more

¹² United Nations. "Climate Change and Disaster Displacement." UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html.

¹³ UNHCR, et al. "Planned Relocation Guidance (October 2015)." UNHCR, 7 Oct. 2015, www.unhcr.org/protection/environment/562f798d9/planned-relocation-guidance-october-2015.html.

¹⁴ Martin, Nick. "America's Climate Refugees Are Pleating for Help. The Government Has No Answer." *The New Republic*, 24 Jan. 2020, newrepublic.com/article/156299/americas-climate-refugees-pleading-help-government-no-answer.

pressured to make a plan regarding these environmental migrants and be more understanding with respect to the emotional burden that losing land can bring.

Questions a resolution must answer:

Each resolution paper must provide a universal definition of environmental migrant or climate refugee as well as a list of rights and protection that these people have. This also includes protection under the law for those who are at risk of displacement from climate change. In order for this to be completed, it is essential to understand the status quo in your country in terms of the current policy it has on this matter. You must understand where and why this issue is so severe, and the paper must cater towards and outline who needs help, what resources they need, what support they have and from whom, where they are going to go, and most importantly, how these policies will be implemented in each country. Creativity will be necessary for coming up with solutions that could actually be implemented, and I hope that you will be able to think outside the box to find these answers. I am so excited to meet all of you when the committee starts, and do not hesitate to reach out with any questions about the background guide, your country's policies, or the conference in general. Good luck!

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