The Rights of Environmental Refugees

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PEACE STUDIES ASSOCIATE DEGREE

- PEAC 101: Introduction to Peace Studies
- PEAC 102: Nonviolence and Conflict Resolution
- PEAC 201: Environmental Sustainability, Justice and Ethics

SUSTAINABILITY ASSOCIATE DEGREE

- SUST 101: Introduction to Sustainability
- SUST 102: Environmental Ethics
- SUST 103: Ecological Commerce
- PEAC 201: Environmental Sustainability, Justice and Ethics
Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:
• Evaluate the different populations who are forcibly displaced.
• Differentiate between a refugee and an environmental refugee.
• Critique current definitions of environmental refugees.
• Explain how international legal standards and instruments have been created to assist refugees worldwide.
• Relate environmental factors such as climate change to issues of human security.
• Critically analyze the responsibility of the international community to protect the rights of environmental refugees.
• Recommend international legal standards and instruments to protect the rights of environmental refugees.
Migrants worldwide: 150 million in 2002 to 214 million persons in 2010. (IOM)

Internally Displaced Persons - 21 million in 2000 to 27 million at the end of 2009 (IOM)

Refugees: 15.2 million in 2009 (IOM)

Less than 1% of all refugees are resettled (UNHCR)

Source: UNHCR and IOM
A Refugee is...

A person who has been forced to leave their country and cannot return home because of a legitimate fear of persecution based on their:

Race  Ethnicity  Religion  Nationality  Politics

Source: the IRC - San Diego 30 yrs exhibit
Established in 1950 by the UN General Assembly

Mandate:
- “lead & co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide”
- “strive to ensure everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum”
- “option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally, or resettle in a third country” (UNHCR)
36.4 million people of concern

- **Children** (almost half of 36 million)
- **Refugees** – “persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”
- **Asylum Seekers** – “an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.”
- **Stateless People** – “statelessness refers to the condition of an individual who is not considered as a national by any state.” (12 million)
- **Internally Displaced Persons** – “have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries.” (27 million in 2009)

Source: UNCHR
“person displaced owing to environmental causes, notably land loss and degradation, and natural disaster.”

20 million environmental refugees worldwide (Lovgren, 2005)
- Natural disaster
- Environmental degradation
- Sea-level rise

50 – 200 million people may move by middle of the century (UNHCR, Forced Displacement, p. 3)
Climate Refugees

PROTECTING CLIMATE REFUGEES
The Case for a Global Protocol
BY FRANK BIERMANN AND INGRIEG BOAS

A documentary about “the human face of climate change.”
Guiding Questions

- Philosophy: Who should be included in the definition of an environmental refugee and why?
- Environmental Science: Will climate change create large populations of stateless people due to the rising sea levels and loss of land and homes? Explain.
- Peace Studies: Whose responsibility is it to protect environmental refugees and how can the international community create a universal mandate to protect the rights of this population?
- International Relations: What international organizations are in place to protect the rights of environmental refugees?
- International Law: What legal instruments or standards can be used or created to protect the rights of environmental refugees?
Kiribati

- 32 islands – Pacific Ocean
- Population 102,000
- Avg height of island is 6.5 feet
- Sea levels could rise 3 feet (w/in 50 yrs)

- “I’m not easily taken by global scientists prophesizing the future” Tito, Country’s former president
- “migrating with dignity” Current President, Anote Tong
- AusAID – Kiribati Australian Nursing Initiative

Reed, NPR and U.S. Dept. of State
Statelessness

- Article 1 of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons defines a stateless person as “a person who is not considered a national by any state under the operation of its law” (UNHCR)

- “Should a state cease to exist, citizenship of that state would cease, as there would no longer be a state of which a person could be a national.” (UNHCR, Climate Change and Statelessness: An overview)
Env. Refugees - considerations

- International instruments do not allow for stateless persons to acquire a new nationality
- Need for international agreements to establish legal status
- Dual nationality?
- Temporary resettlement options?
- Family unity
- Disaster Risk Reduction (DDR) - Need for early preparedness
- (source: UNHCR, Climate Change and Statelessness)
Further Research

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (http://unfccc.int/2860.php)
- International Organization for Migration: http://www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp
For more information:

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