

Where Next? A Charter for Climate Refugees

Excerpts from No Place Like Home - Where Next for Climate Refugees?
 A Report by the Environmental Justice Foundation, London (2009)

EJF website

The Report can be downloaded from: <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page590.html>

“A successful outcome of ongoing climate change negotiations matters for human rights. A new climate change agreement must be fair, balanced and sufficiently ambitious to be effective. Climate change is related not only to environmental factors but also to poverty, discrimination and inequalities – this is why climate change is a human rights issue”

Kyung-wha Kang, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, June 2009.

As a 2009 report by CARE International acknowledged, “Climate change will result in cases that do not fit into current distinctions between voluntary and forced migration, at present, people who move due to gradually worsening living conditions may be categorized as voluntary economic migrants and denied recognition of their special protection needs”.

In the absence of a clear international legal framework, proposals have been mooted that would indeed give ‘climate refugees’ the same rights as refugees under the 1951 Geneva Convention. In 2006, delegates to a meeting organized by the Maldives Government proposed an amendment to the 1951 Convention, extending it to include climate refugees.



Professor Frank Biermann and Ingrid Boas of Vrije University suggest that a protocol under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the most appropriate vehicle to expedite the situation, having at its basis the following five principles:

1. Planned and voluntary resettlement and reintegration (as opposed to ad hoc emergency relief responses).
2. Climate refugees should be treated the same as permanent immigrants as they cannot return to their home.
3. It must be tailored to entire group of people, including entire nations, as is the case with small island states.
4. Support for national governments to protect their people will be required (as opposed to the existing refugee regime).
5. The protection of climate refugees must be seen as a global problem and a global responsibility. “In most cases, climate refugees will be poor and their own responsibility for the past accumulation of greenhouse gases will be small...the responsibility of the industrialized countries to do their share in financing, supporting and facilitating the protection and resettlement of climate refugees.”



In whichever formulation proves to be most politically, technically and financially viable, it is clear that a new legal agreement is needed on both humanitarian and practical grounds. Further, because climate change's link to global human activity and GHG emissions, the international community should take responsibility for mitigating the harm to which it has contributed.

The planned resettlement of millions of people will require substantial funds, which should be committed under a global fund, and should include novel and equitable funding streams, such as will be required to mitigate climate change and planning for a low-carbon future.

With increasing recognition at all levels that the effects of climate change are already shaping lives, agreement for the negotiation of a climate refugees protocol should begin forthwith. Waiting until 2050 will be too late.

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