

Environmental Justice Foundation

What is a Climate Refugee?

Climate change is set to create millions of environmental refugees – people forced from their homes and land – by rising temperatures, sea-level change and extreme weather events.

Many will be among our planet's poorest and most vulnerable people. These will be the first victims of our failure to prevent uncontrolled climate change. People, who without international help and new binding agreements on assistance, will have nowhere to go and no means to survive.

EJF's 'No Place Like Home' campaign is dedicated to arguing their case. Putting the call to governments and our political leaders for a new agreement on environmental refugees, guaranteeing them rights and assistance and a fair claim to our shared world.

The gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration

As many as 26 million people have already been displaced as a direct result of climate change. Entire communities in Alaska, Mozambique, and the Carteret Islands have become among the first to be relocated.

By 2050, there could be 150 million of these 'climate refugees'.



Despite the numbers that stand to be affected although it is an easy concept to grasp, there is **no legally-binding, international agreement that identifies and protects climate refugees**. The international community does not recognise them as it does refugees fleeing persecution.

EJF contends that the formal legal definition of refugees needs to be extended to include those affected by climate



change.

We have it in our power to prevent the worst effects of global climate change and to help those who are now and who will be worst affected. What we need is political leadership and popular action.

Right now

- 12 million people live in poverty because of climate change
- 26 million people have been displaced as a direct result of climate change
- 250 million people are affected by desertification
- 508 million people in water-stressed or water-scarce countries
- 2.8 billion people live in areas of the world prone to more than one of the physical manifestations of climate change: floods, storms, droughts, sea level rise

In a decade

- More than 400 million Africans could be living in extreme poverty.

By the end of the century

- More than 100 million people could be affected by exacerbated storm surges
- 200 million people may have been displaced by deteriorating environmental conditions
- 700-1500 million people could be affected by water shortages

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Even with stringent greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions cuts, some degree of climate change will be unavoidable. Deteriorating environmental conditions are likely to displace millions of people: climate refugees.

At present, the term 'climate refugee' has no basis in international law. Unlike refugees fleeing persecution, climate refugees are not protected under the 1951 Geneva Convention.

EJF believes that there needs to be a new legally-binding instrument identifying and protecting climate refugees.

EJF is working towards establishing such an instrument, either as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or as a stand-alone Convention.

Such a new legally-binding agreement must, as a basic requirement, include:

- Planned and voluntary resettlement and reintegration (as opposed to ad hoc emergency relief responses);
- Climate refugees to be given the same treatment as permanent immigrants, as they cannot return to their home;
- Tailoring to anyone from individuals to entire nations;
- Support for national governments to protect their people (as opposed to the existing refugee regime);
- The founding concept that displacement due to climate change is global problem and a global responsibility.

An agreement must have a global fund able to support the needs of the most affected peoples to adapt, or, if no alternative exists, for planned migration.

EJF is also committed to tackling the causes of climate change: empowering individuals to take positive actions to reduce their personal impact on the natural environment.

EJF encourages everyone to act now, playing their part in halting climate change and ensuring equitable solutions for climate refugees.

EJF's campaign will call for political commitments and action, inspiring hope for the future. The international community has acted to alleviate the global financial crisis - climate change demands a similar response. An estimated \$300 billion will be needed to address climate change. Sound a lot? In 2008, the US Federal Government paid just one failing financial company a US\$150bn bail-out.

Let's create the political will, and make change happen.

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

'No Place Like Home' video:

<http://www.ejfoundation.org/page592.html>