

Climate-Driven Migration: Ethically Managing a National Security Risk  
Policy Proposal for U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry

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**To:** U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry

**From:** Carly Kabot

**RE:** Ethically Managing Climate-Driven Migration

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## **I. Call to Action**

As the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, you will be tasked with protecting the future of this planet and its people. As a Cabinet-level official with a seat on the National Security Council, I call upon you to lead with those most affected by climate change in mind.<sup>1</sup> Acting as a risk multiplier, climate change will exacerbate conflict, deepen poverty, and increase instability. With the capacity to destabilize entire regions— both in the developing world and at home— hundreds of millions of people will be forced to flee within their countries and across international borders. In ‘hot zones’ across the globe, climate-driven migration will prevent the U.S. from achieving key objectives like combatting terrorism, promoting peace, and protecting human rights. Existing frameworks fail to place disaster preparation over response, wasting resources that would be better spent on capacity building.

Meaningful policy change must be fact-based and science-driven, and policymakers must be guided by strong moral judgements grounded on fairness, equity, and justice.<sup>2</sup> To ethically manage the threat climate-driven migration poses to our national security at home and abroad, I propose five recommendations: **1. Prioritize climate change in foreign policy by engaging in multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. 2. Advocate for the legal recognition of climate refugees under domestic and international law. 3. Embed climate-driven migration into development strategies. 4. Strengthen the resilience of U.S. cities to withstand an influx of internal climate migrants. 5. Reimagine refugees as part of the solution to climate change.**

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Sullivan, "Biden Prioritizes Climate Crisis by Naming John Kerry Special Envoy," CNN (Cable News Network, November 24, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/23/politics/john-kerry-biden-climate-envoy/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Somerville, "The Ethics of Climate Change," Yale E360 (The Yale School of the Environment), accessed April 7, 2021 [https://e360.yale.edu/features/the\\_ethics\\_of\\_climate\\_change](https://e360.yale.edu/features/the_ethics_of_climate_change).

## II. Brief Statement of the Problem

Scientists, political representatives, and civil society have recognized climate change as a risk multiplier worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Climate change exacerbates the threats that drive migration within a country and across international borders. The complex interactions between climate, conflict, hunger, and poverty cannot be understated. With 5 billion people expected to be exposed to freshwater scarcity by 2050, widespread insecurity, instability, and displacement will likely ensue.<sup>4</sup> In 2015, the Department of Defense released a report on climate change's security implications, acknowledging its potential to destabilize already fragile states.<sup>5</sup> Pentagon officials emphasized that increases in poverty, social tensions, and environmental degradation—coupled with weak political leadership and institutions—jeopardize stability.<sup>6</sup>

Key U.S. security objectives, especially combatting terrorism and securing peace, will be compromised by climate change. Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, the East Asia-Pacific, and the Arctic are all at heightened risk. Aggravating regional and local tensions in these ‘hot zones’ across the globe, climate change will threaten U.S. diplomacy and defense. Fragile states with limited resources will be unlikely to adapt to new challenges ahead, allowing climate change to further compound ongoing issues. The impact will be worse on poor countries, having a disproportionate effect on already marginalized populations like women, children, and indigenous communities.

### *Development challenges*

Climate-driven migration stifles development, adversely affecting many of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. While the impact on Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger,

<sup>3</sup> “Climate Change Recognized as ‘Threat Multiplier’, UN Security Council Debates Its Impact on Peace | UN News,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed December 5, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1031322>.

<sup>4</sup> Major David J. Stuckenberg and Anthony L. Contento, “Water Scarcity: The Most Understated Global Security Risk,” Harvard National Security Journal, May 18, 2018, <https://harvardnsj.org/2018/05/water-scarcity-the-most-understated-global-security-risk/>.

<sup>5</sup> “DoD Releases Report on Security Implications of Climate Change,” U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/612710/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

and Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation are most obvious, Goal 4: Quality Education and Goal 5: Gender Equality are equally undermined by migration.<sup>7</sup> First, the increasing frequency of disasters will continually disrupt learning and destroy structures used for schooling. In developing countries, where educational resources are often already strained, repairs to damaged infrastructure are slow and delayed.<sup>8</sup> Recent research suggests that educational attainment and academic performance are lower among children who have experienced natural disasters. They are more likely to miss school due to malnutrition, injury, or displacement. Environmental shocks decrease the incomes of poorer households, compelling them to withdraw children from school early to have them enter the labor market and increasing the risk of childhood marriage.<sup>9</sup> If a family flees across international borders, children may spend years out of school. 7.4 million of the world's 19.9 million refugees are of school age, but 4 million cannot attend.<sup>10</sup> Without decisive action, the next 'lost generation' may be climate migrants.

Second, climate-driven migration heightens the risk of gender-based violence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women and girls has increased, with the case of domestic violence rising by as much as 30% in some countries.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates how high-stress events can hinder nations from reaching gender equality. Periods of drought force women and girls to trek farther distances for food or water, where they are vulnerable to sexual assault.<sup>12</sup> As incomes decrease because of reduced crop outputs, sex can become a way of survival. Vendors may exchange food or rent for sex, and men at home—who have lost their traditional role as providers—may become increasingly violent.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development," United Nations (United Nations), accessed December 5, 2020, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

<sup>8</sup> Erica Chung, Jessie Pinchoff, and Stephanie Psaki, "How Natural Disasters Undermine Schooling," Brookings (Brookings, January 23, 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/01/23/how-natural-disasters-undermine-schooling/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Education," UNHCR, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/education.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "UN Supporting 'Trapped' Domestic Violence Victims during COVID-19 Pandemic," United Nations (United Nations), accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-supporting-%E2%80%99trapped%E2%80%99-domestic-violence-victims-during-covid-19-pandemic>.

<sup>12</sup> Anik Gevers et al., "Why Climate Change Fuels Violence against Women," UNDP (UNDP, January 28, 2020) <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2020/why-climate-change-fuels-violence-against-women.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, men are more likely to leave home to find work elsewhere, leaving women and children behind unprotected.<sup>14</sup>

### *Internal displacement*

Unless the international community takes action, there will be more than 143 million internal climate migrants across Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America by 2050.<sup>15</sup> To break this down further, projections show 86 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million in South Asia, and 17 million in Latin America.<sup>16</sup> These three regions comprise over 55% of the developing world and are crucial to global advancement.<sup>17</sup> Yet, rising sea levels, water shortages, and decreasing crop productivity may force up to 2.8% of their populations to flee internally.<sup>18</sup> However, a World Bank report revealed that states can reduce this number by as much as 80% by cutting greenhouse gases, embedding climate migration in development planning, and investing in research to improve the understanding of internal climate migration.<sup>19</sup> Under a “more climate-friendly” scenario, the number of potential climate migrants drops from 143 million to as low as 31 million.<sup>20</sup>

Internal climate migration will have a detrimental impact on development. Climate-driven “out-migration” will happen in areas under high environmental stress, such as the northern highlands of Ethiopia or Bangladesh's major cities.<sup>21</sup> Climate “in-migration” hotspots will emerge in places able to provide better livelihood options, such as Guatemala City, Mexico City, and Nairobi.<sup>22</sup> Urban and peri-urban areas will be unable to meet the needs of a massive influx of people, straining housing and transportation infrastructure, social services, and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank. “Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration.” International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

employment opportunities.<sup>23</sup> Despite these future challenges, migration is a sensible adaptation strategy when policymakers can prepare in advance. However, the most vulnerable may not have the chance to adapt locally or move away from risk, leaving them trapped in unviable areas.

Even in a relatively less climate-sensitive country like Mexico, climate change will deepen poverty among already struggling populations. Mexico's population is expected to grow from 125 million in 2015 to as high as 148 million by 2050.<sup>24</sup> With a diversified economy, Mexico is better positioned to cope with internal climate-driven migration than more agriculturally dependent nations. To accomplish this, Mexico must pursue development pathways that simultaneously target poverty reduction and lower global emission trajectories.<sup>25</sup> As an upper middle-income country, Mexico has a higher adaptive capacity and financial resources to help the most vulnerable areas, such as rural, indigenous communities.<sup>26</sup> However, rampant corruption may prevent Mexico from much-needed change, compelling IDPs to become asylum seekers looking for safety on the other side of the Rio Grande.

### **III. Rationale for Policy Recommendation**

#### *Ethical Grounds: Approaching the Global Commons with Fairness, Equity, and Justice*

Climate-driven migration epitomizes Garrett Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin explains that individuals prefer to maximize their gain and share the costs with others. The effects of climate change on the developing world demonstrate the danger in the incentive to consume a "public good" if an individual does not directly bear the cost. With no technical solution, institutions coerce individuals to facilitate mutually beneficial outcomes. Though the U.S. makes up less than 5% of the global population, we have produced nearly 25% of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>24</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

carbon dioxide humans have added to the atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> Since the industrial revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the U.S. has profited greatly from fossil fuels, contributing to economic success at the expense of long-term consequences at home and beyond our borders. It is far too easy for citizens and policymakers alike to think that the effects they cannot see do not exist; it is more difficult to empathize with individuals living on the other side of the world or people not yet born. The world's top greenhouse gas emitters, including China, the U.S., India, Russia, and Japan, must take responsibility to go above reducing pollution.<sup>28</sup> Addressing climate-driven migration, rather than climate change alone, acknowledges that much of the damage done to communities across the globe cannot be undone. Giving climate migrants a way to ensure a future for their posterity is a step towards intergenerational equity and a necessary action after the abundance of issues greenhouse gases have already set up for them.<sup>29</sup>

An article published by the Yale School of the Environment identified three “major ethical dilemmas” shaping the climate change debate: “how to balance the rights and responsibilities of the developed and developing world; how to evaluate geo-engineering schemes designed to reverse or slow climate change; and how to assess our responsibility to future generations who must live with a climate we are shaping today.”<sup>30</sup> Richard Somerville, a lead report author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, explains that “meaningful international action” must focus on “equity and ethics” in addition to “scientific evidence and recognition of legitimate national interests.”<sup>31</sup> This thinking must be central in policymaking on climate-driven migration. Balancing national interests in an increasingly xenophobic world will

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<sup>27</sup> Somerville, “The Ethics of Climate Change.”

<sup>28</sup> Christy Goldfuss John Podesta, “A 100 Percent Clean Future,” Center for American Progress, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2019/10/10/475605/100-percent-clean-future/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

be a political challenge, but framing climate-driven migration through the threats outlined below will help boost public support even with an absence of empathy.

*Political Grounds: Threats to U.S. Interests Abroad*

Acting as a risk multiplier, climate-driven migration will significantly impact two of the State Department's four main foreign policy goals. First, “Protect the United States and Americans” will become more difficult as climate change fuels terrorist recruitment.<sup>32</sup> With water becoming a weapon of war, terrorists can exploit natural disasters, controlling food and water shortages. In Syria, the Islamic State closed the gates of the Ramadi dam to attack regime forces downstream and cut pro-government towns off from water supplies.<sup>33</sup> Weak states like this are breeding grounds for terrorist recruitment, as the lack of law and order allows terrorists to strengthen their grip on the population. Given the lack of security, makeshift IDP and refugee camps are also targets for radicalization. While terrorist groups like Boko Haram may not strike on U.S. soil, power vacuums will allow new terrorist groups with global aspirations to proliferate.

Second, climate-driven migration will hinder America’s ability to “Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests.”<sup>34</sup> As climate ‘hot zones’ become more destabilized, national priorities will likely be focused on meeting basic needs, not governance. Human rights violations will go unpunished, and competition for scarce resources will drive individuals to do whatever necessary to survive. However, it is not only governments in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, or the Middle East that will become more authoritarian— if not collapsed. The height of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 proved European leaders were willing to abandon democratic values to keep Muslims out. Right-wing populists like Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini

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<sup>32</sup> “Diplomacy: The U.S. Department of State at Work,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed December 6, 2020, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/ci/rls/dos/107330.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Smith-Spark, “Iraq: ISIS Fighters Close Ramadi Dam Gates,” CNN (Cable News Network, June 4, 2015), <https://www.cnn.com/2015/06/04/middleeast/iraq-isis-ramadi/index.html>.

<sup>34</sup> “Diplomacy: The U.S. Department of State at Work,” U.S. Department of State



capitalized on fear to spread xenophobia. With Muslims being the fastest-growing religious group, Europe will have to decide the fate of its democratic character.<sup>35</sup> Europe is an ally the U.S. cannot afford to lose—nor allow to influence how the country responds to a similar wave of climate migrants seeking asylum at the southern border.

### *Threats to U.S. Interests at Home*

At home, climate change poses a threat to U.S. infrastructure, agriculture, economy, and population. Over the past few decades, the U.S. has already experienced massive heatwaves, devastating droughts, deadly hurricanes, and apocalyptic wildfires. These shocks can destroy critical energy and physical infrastructure, decrease agricultural yields, and harm human health. The numbers are discouraging. By 2090, climate change impacts in the U.S. could total above **\$224 billion** more per year.<sup>36</sup> Under a high emissions scenario, extreme heat in 49 U.S. cities will cause **9,300** more deaths each year.<sup>37</sup> An additional **\$26** billion of American coastal property will be lost annually.<sup>38</sup> Flooding alone will cost an extra **\$3.8** billion per year.<sup>39</sup> Beyond the numbers, there will be immeasurable suffering, instability, and desperation. To cope with this new reality, Americans will migrate within the country as an adaptive strategy. 50 million people will be indirectly affected in eight of America's largest metropolitan areas, forcing at least 13 million to move from submerged coastlines.<sup>40</sup>

As in other countries, the poorest communities—especially those across the South and Southwest—will carry the brunt of America's losses. Unable to make a living, families dependent on agriculture will move towards inland cities already being inundated by Americans fleeing the shorelines. By 2100, Atlanta, Houston, and Austin could receive more than a quarter-

<sup>35</sup> Michael Lipka and Conrad Hackett, "Why Muslims Are the World's Fastest-Growing Religious Group," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020),

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>.

<sup>36</sup> "Climate Change Could Cost U.S. Economy Billions" Yale Climate Connections," Yale Climate Connections, April 29, 2019, <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2019/04/climate-change-could-cost-u-s-economy-billions/>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Abraham Lustgarten, "How Climate Migration Will Reshape America," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 15, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/15/magazine/climate-crisis-migration-america.html>.

million new residents due to sea-level displacement.<sup>41</sup> America will be unable to insulate itself from the unrest climate change has already sparked around the world. Stressed infrastructures, growing competition for jobs, and social conflict leads to rising unemployment and poverty. Under these projections, the end of the century looks like the end of the world. Your leadership, vision, and determination to act can make all the difference.

#### **IV. Background Information and Policy Implications**

**First, the U.S. must prioritize climate change in foreign policy by returning to multilateral and bilateral diplomacy.** Unless the U.S. partners with other global powers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all other efforts will be a waste of time, energy, and resources. President-elect Biden has pledged to rejoin the 2015 Paris Agreement his first day in office— an essential first step in making America’s commitment clear. In addition to the rejoining the 2015 Paris Agreement, the U.S. should bring back the Major Economies Forum (MEF) to strategize how the world’s 17 largest economies can achieve the global electricity decarbonization initiative.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the U.S. should re-establish the G-7 and G-20 as platforms to discuss climate change.<sup>43</sup> Last on the multilateral front, the U.S. must reverse Secretary Pompeo’s erasure of climate change from the Arctic Council, a direct blow to national security.<sup>44</sup> Given the effect of climate change on indigenous peoples living in this region, the Biden administration should appoint a special representative for the Arctic to work closely with the affected population.<sup>45</sup> Including local voices, especially those of historically marginalized populations, is paramount in all climate-change negotiations.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Goldfuss and Podesta, “A 100 Percent Clean Future,” Center for American Progress.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The U.S. must increase engagement with the world's top greenhouse gas emitters, including China, the EU, India, and Brazil. First, the U.S. and China should launch a senior-level policy and technical exchange on nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to speed up China's coal-to-renewables transition.<sup>46</sup> Second, U.S.-EU coordination on a Border Adjustment Tariff (BAT) system can motivate trading partners to reduce domestic emissions.<sup>47</sup> Protecting U.S. jobs, economic competitiveness, and smooth trade flows between two major markets creates a win-win situation.<sup>48</sup> Third, robust U.S.-India climate cooperation will enable South and Southeast Asian countries to meet NDC goals. To achieve this, the Biden administration should rejuvenate the Partnership To Advance Clean Energy (PACE) that began during the Obama administration.<sup>49</sup> In India, recognizing economic, technical, and social challenges will be essential to crafting a realistic strategy. Fourth, given that deforestation is at a 12-year high under President Bolsonaro, the U.S. should use trade policy to incentivize sustainable land-use practices in the Amazon.<sup>50</sup>

**Second, the U.S. must advocate for the legal recognition of climate migrants as refugees under domestic and international law.** Though the Trump administration has strained America's relations with the UN, President elect-Biden's nomination of U.S. diplomat Linda Thomas-Greenfield is promising. As a member of the Security Council, the U.S. must reclaim its authority as a protector of human rights to gain support. Despite the 2020 Human Rights U.N. ruling on climate refugees, these individuals still lack official legal status or incorporation into the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>51</sup> However, this landmark ruling opens the door for lawyers to use it as a precedent-setting text in the future. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention recognizes a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "Amazon Deforestation Surges to 12-Year High under Bolsonaro," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, November 30, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/01/amazon-deforestation-surges-to-12-year-high-under-bolsonaro>.

<sup>51</sup> Yvonne Su, "UN Ruling on Climate Refugees Could Be Gamechanger for Climate Action."

refugee as someone who has crossed an international border “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”<sup>52</sup> Before crisis strikes, this language must be amended to include those forced to flee due to environmental degradation. The world has changed since the Second World War; it is time one of the most widely ratified treaties reflects this.<sup>53</sup>

**Third, the U.S. must work with developing countries to embed climate-driven migration into development strategies.** Most countries have poorly prepared laws, policies, and strategies to deal with large population shifts. By implementing climate migration into all aspects of policy, nations can secure better resilience and development outcomes before, during, and after migration.<sup>54</sup> USAID should focus on local preparedness, as reinforcing infrastructure capacity will differ based on the issues facing a particular region. For example, one area may benefit from the rehabilitation of coastal storm defense systems while another constructing water-harvesting structures.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, the U.S. should aid developing countries in creating plans for migration driven by both slow and rapid onset climate change. Evacuation frameworks help reduce loss of life in an emergency situation, while planned relocation decreases exposure to environmental degradation.<sup>56</sup> Past success stories demonstrate that participation of concerned households in the decision-making process leads to better implementation of solutions.<sup>57</sup> The U.S. should also encourage developing countries to diversify livelihoods in a way that promotes conservation.<sup>58</sup> Two out of three people living in extreme poverty live in rural areas, and agriculturally dependent families are already struggling to make ends meet.<sup>59</sup> Historically disenfranchised

<sup>52</sup> “Refugees,” UNHCR Ghana, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/gh/who-we-help-2/refugees/>.

<sup>53</sup> Stephanie Garcia, “What a UN Ruling Could Mean for Climate Refugees,” PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, December 13, 2019), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/as-cop-25-ends-a-look-at-why-climate-migrants-dont-have-refugee-status>.

<sup>54</sup> “Managing Climate-Driven Migration,” International Organization for Migration, November 30, 2015, <https://www.iom.int/oped/managing-climate-driven-migration>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Homi Kharas et al., “To Move the Needle on Ending Extreme Poverty, Focus on Rural Areas,” Brookings (Brookings, February 24, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/02/21/to-move-the-needle-on->

populations— like women, indigenous communities, and religious or ethnic minorities— living in rural areas often have minimal access to land, training, and credit. Working directly with community leaders, from tribal leaders to religious clergy, will be essential for success.

Closing the gender gap in agricultural labor could increase yields on women-run farms by 20-30%, raising agricultural output by 2.5%-4%, and reducing world hunger by 12%-17%.<sup>60</sup> Since women tend to invest in the land's long-term productivity, targeting women producers can raise yields, boost income, and reduce malnutrition.<sup>61</sup> This can be achieved by establishing climate-smart agriculture training programs on a micro level, focusing on techniques like mulching and intercropping that improve resilience.<sup>62</sup> Increasing access to credit in rural areas through microfinance loan funds can maximize these changes, financing capital investments for new technologies and equipment.<sup>63</sup> Though mobility is a strategy for resilience and adaptation, preventative measures like these can prolong the need to migrate because of slow-onset impacts affecting agriculture.

**Fourth, the U.S. must strengthen the resilience of U.S. cities to prepare for an influx of internal climate migrants.** Major cities across the states, from New York to Miami, must prepare now if they want to stand a chance against higher temperatures, more frequent flooding, and severe storms. Reshaping America's crumbling infrastructure will require significant investments, but will save money over time. Climate-resilient infrastructure comes in many different forms and has many different functions.<sup>64</sup> Even small-scale, decentralized green

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<sup>60</sup> "Closing the Gender Gap in Agriculture," FAO, accessed November 22, 2020, <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/52011/icode/>.

<sup>61</sup> "How Land Rights for Women Could Help Fight Climate Change," The World from PRX, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-11-18/how-land-rights-women-could-help-fight-climate-change>.

<sup>62</sup> "Implementing Agriculture for Development: World Bank Group Agriculture Action Plan (2013-2015)," World Bank.

<sup>63</sup> Vietnam Third Rural Finance Project," World Bank, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P100916?lang=en>.

<sup>64</sup> Cecilia Martinez Cathleen Kelly, "A Framework for Local Action on Climate Change," Center for American Progress, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2017/09/28/439712/framework-local-action-climate-change/>.

infrastructure projects can reduce flooding and control damage.<sup>65</sup> Larger projects like smart-grid technologies can reduce energy demand and isolate power outages.<sup>66</sup>

While physical additions like seawalls, permeable streets, and rain gardens are needed in urban areas, capacity building on a local level is equally important.<sup>67</sup> Policies must put people first, and that means making community engagement and planning at the core of climate resilience. Policymakers must work towards environmental justice by closing existing gaps that will widen because of climate change. Lower-income individuals and communities of color already suffer from the pollution others have benefited from— leaving them behind is not an option. Additionally, cities must hire, train, and retrain skilled workers to enter resilience-focused occupations, which have more equitable wages and high demand.<sup>68</sup> Tomorrow's heroes will be the workers responsible for clean energy production, energy efficiency, and environmental management. It is time to elevate their economic potential by empowering them to use their skills for change.

**Fifth, the U.S. must encourage the international community to reimagine a world where climate migrants are part of the solution, not the problem.** The Biden administration must double-down on its commitment to the UN, especially UNHCR. Unlike migrants fleeing conflict, climate migrants do not have the option of voluntary repatriation. Refugee camps should be viewed as hubs for innovation, demonstrating the resilience of this often-invisible community.<sup>69</sup> Cooperating with urban planners, anthropologists, and engineers, the U.S. can help envision refugee camps as sustainable cities.<sup>70</sup> Not only will these camps act as a model for the host community, but they will also prevent the issue of double-displacement. Instead of the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> "Redesigning Refugee Communities," UNHCR Innovation, May 22, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/redesigning-refugee-communities/>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

traditional grid structure, organizing houses in a series of U-shaped compounds provides larger communal spaces that foster creativity.<sup>71</sup>

Sustainable and self-sufficient refugee camps can contribute to their host countries' economic growth, easing the tension that often exists. Many technologies enabling camps to become smarter and greener already exist, but the U.S. should spearhead a global platform to make them more accessible. Bottom-up innovation will be fundamental in improving water, waste, and electricity management. With technical support, refugees have already been able to design their own fuel-efficient cookstoves and produce solar bulbs using plastic water bottles.<sup>72</sup> By making refugees a partner in decision-making, governments, aid organizations, and businesses give them a stake in the camp's success. While America should take a global leadership role, the government must focus on the growing crisis at the southern border. Implementing these solutions in Mexico and Central America will prevent the large-scale migration the government fears.

## **V. Background of Problem**

Syria, Nigeria, and Guatemala all demonstrate the power of climate change to exacerbate conflict, leading to increased migration within and across international borders. Though environmental degradation is not the only cause of immense human suffering in these three nations, it is one they did not alone create. Developing countries like these are expected to unfairly bear the costs of developed nations that have long benefited from fossil fuels, putting their future and international security at risk. Here is where the focus of international security must be broadened— in these three cases, the importance of food and water security has been

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Moulid Hujale, "The Best Way to Achieve Sustainable Energy for Refugees Is to Make Them Partners and Not Just Recipients," UNHCR Innovation, June 29, 2017, <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/the-best-way-to-achieve-sustainable-energy-for-refugees-is-to-make-them-partners-and-not-just-recipients/>.

neglected. The core of this ethical challenge is protecting human dignity and affirming the right to basic resources for all peoples.

### *Syria*

While climate change was not the sole factor in inciting the Syrian Civil War, many analysts overlooked environmental degradation who claimed Syria was “immune to the Arab Spring.”<sup>73</sup> From 2006 to 2011, 60% of Syria experienced one of the worst droughts in modern history.<sup>74</sup> Daraa, a rural farming community where the revolt first began, was hit especially hard and received very little assistance from the Assad regime.<sup>75</sup> Combined with poor irrigation techniques, Assad’s agricultural mismanagement drove many deeper into extreme poverty.<sup>76</sup> During these five years, around 75% of farmers suffered from total crop failure.<sup>77</sup> In the northeast governorate of Hassakeh, herders lost nearly 85% of their livestock, affecting 1.3 million people.<sup>78</sup> In 2011, the U.N. and International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) reported that 800,000 Syrians lost their livelihood due to the drought, leaving about 1 million food insecure.<sup>79</sup>

Without any source of income, 1.5 million agriculturally dependent Syrians left the countryside for the cities.<sup>80</sup> Already overcrowded with Iraqi and Palestinian refugees, this mass influx of people stressed cities with crumbling infrastructure, causing economic insecurity and instability to surge.<sup>81</sup> This internal displacement strained systems to their breaking point, fueling widespread discontent. However, these issues could have been avoided if the Assad regime had better managed Syria’s natural resources. Similar to other Arab countries, the government

<sup>73</sup> Francesco Femia and Caitlin Werrell, “Syria: Climate Change, Drought and Social Unrest,” The Center for Climate & Security, February 29, 2012, <https://climateandsecurity.org/2012/02/syria-climate-change-drought-and-social-unrest/>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Brad Plumer, “Drought Helped Cause Syria’s War. Will Climate Change Bring More like It?,” The Washington Post (WP Company, April 28, 2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/09/10/drought-helped-caused-syrias-war-will-climate-change-bring-more-like-it/>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



heavily subsidized water-intensive crops like wheat and cotton, leading to water shortages and land desertification.<sup>82</sup> Unless Syria can drastically reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, yields of rainfed crops may decline between 29%-57% from 2010 to 2050.<sup>83</sup> Given the country's current status— with 6.2 million internally displaced and 13.1 million in need of humanitarian assistance— it is unlikely that the government will prioritize mitigating the harmful effects of climate change.<sup>84</sup>

Before the Arab Spring, intelligence assessments did not give enough weight to the variables such as access to water or food, which were dangerously glanced over and shoved aside for social and political factors. Without access to these two most basic resources, countries already experiencing conflict face an even higher risk of violence. In Egypt, it is not a coincidence that the revolution's slogan was 'bread, freedom, and social justice.'<sup>85</sup> Adding to the appeal of ousting a corrupt regime, rural communities felt the brunt of an extremely high jump in bread prices.<sup>86</sup> This points to the frustrating reality of climate change: events on the other side of the world can incite chaos thousands of miles away. Droughts in Ukraine and Russia contributed to a global wheat shortage, causing China to purchase a lot of wheat on the global food market, resulting in price spikes.<sup>87</sup>

### *Nigeria*

Nigeria, a country with widespread religious and ethnic conflict, experiences among the highest compound fragility-climate risks.<sup>88</sup> More than 41 million, or 24% of the population, live in high exposure areas, where they are at risk of climate hazards like cyclones, floods, droughts,

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Syria Emergency," UNHCR, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>

<sup>85</sup> "Where's the 'Bread, Freedom and Social Justice' a Year after Egypt's Revolution? | Mariz Tadros," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, January 25, 2012), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/jan/25/egypt-bread-freedom-social-justice>.

<sup>86</sup> Plumer, "Drought Helped Cause Syria's War. Will Climate Change Bring More like It?"

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> "Stretched Thin: When Fragile States Face Climate Hazards," War on the Rocks, November 29, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/11/stretched-thin-when-fragile-states-face-climate-hazards/>.

coastal inundation, and wildfires.<sup>89</sup> As violence continues to escalate, Nigeria faces flooding in the north, fluctuating rainfall patterns in the middle of the country, and wildfires in the south.<sup>90</sup> Similar to the situation in Syria, poor government management under President Muhammadu Buhari has exacerbated instability that is in part due to environmental stress.<sup>91</sup> Though climate change is not alone responsible for the state's fragility, the government's limited capacity to focus on adaptation efforts will push development farther out of reach.

In the Northeastern states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, where the Boko Haram insurgency has its strongest grip, 2.6 million people face severe food insecurity.<sup>92</sup> Thriving where desperation reigns, terrorist organizations like Boko Haram capitalize on this vulnerability. The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced over 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad Basin, and this number will likely grow.<sup>93</sup> While famine risks are primarily caused by political violence disrupting harvests and aid supplies, the government's failure to provide security undermines climate change resilience. With their attention diverted, little is being done to prepare for an uncertain future. Longstanding food crises have reached a tipping point, as floods and maize shortages complicated spring planning.<sup>94</sup> In early September, floods destroyed 90% of 2 million tons of rice in the northwest Kebbi state, with the loss amounting to 20% of the rice Nigeria grew last year.<sup>95</sup> Like Arab states before the Arab Spring, inflation is rising sharply, leaving many unable to pay for basic commodities. The price of chicken feed has more than doubled, forcing farmers to sell or abandon their flocks.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> "Nigeria," Nigeria : FAO in Emergencies, accessed December 5, 2020,

<http://www.fao.org/emergencies/countries/detail/en/c/213439>.

<sup>93</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Nigeria Emergency," UNHCR, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/nigeria-emergency.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Libby George, "Nigeria Reels from Twin Crises That Threaten Food Availability," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, September 14, 2020), <https://ca.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-food-crisis-idAFKBN2652LV>.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Nigeria demonstrates the need to assess fragility and climate risks together, especially in sub-Saharan and North Africa. Of the 26 countries with the highest compound fragility and climate risks, the U.N. has peace operations in 20 and the U.S. military has deployed troops in 22.<sup>97</sup> Until the G7 in 2015, leaders did not consider prioritizing investments in regions where fragility and climate risks intersect.<sup>98</sup> Though the U.S. government provided \$97.8 billion in security, humanitarian, and development aid over the last ten years, policymakers missed the mark on an essential factor contributing to crises.<sup>99</sup>

### *Guatemala*

Unlike Syria or Nigeria, the main threat to U.S. national security compounded by climate change in Guatemala is mass migration, not extremism. Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable. Over 79% of the indigenous population lives in poverty, and the rate of extreme poverty is nearly double that of the rest of the country at 40%.<sup>100</sup> With over 75% of the indigenous community— who make up roughly half of the population— living in rural areas, they are heavily dependent on agriculture.<sup>101</sup> Farmers across the Dry Corridor face the worst dry cropping season in over 35 years, devastating the maize and bean crops their families rely on for income and subsistence.<sup>102</sup> Because of the perfect storm of climate change and COVID-19, the number of hungry people has reached 1.2 million.<sup>103</sup> The pandemic has demonstrated Guatemala’s potential inability to adapt to a rapid onset disaster. However, Guatemala is among one of the most vulnerable nations to climate change. Multiple impacts on crop production, from pests to water shortages, may decrease bean yields by 66% in the valleys

<sup>97</sup> Ashley Moran, “Translating Research to Action: Global Fragility and Climate Risks,” Climatelinks, March 19, 2019, <https://www.climatelinks.org/blog/translating-research-action-global-fragility-and-climate-risks>.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> “The World Factbook: Guatemala,” Central Intelligence Agency (Central Intelligence Agency), accessed November 13, 2020, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_gt.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_gt.html).

<sup>101</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013 - Guatemala,” Refworld, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5261b749b.html>.

<sup>102</sup> “The Dry Corridor in Central America,” World Food Program USA, October 17, 2020, <https://www.wfpusa.org/the-dry-corridor-in-central-america/>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

of Asuncion, Mita Jutiapa, and Monjas Jalapa.<sup>104</sup> Many families will be driven deeper into poverty, leaving them no other option than to flee.

In Guatemala, being born an indigenous woman is a double curse. Women in the Mayan landscapes of Petén, Alta and Baja Verapaz, Zacapa, and Chiquimula are especially at risk.<sup>105</sup> The gender-environment nexus is key to understanding climate-driven migration. Among rural communities, male hegemony is very strong— and so is the cultural stigma against women. Though over 80% of indigenous women are involved with agriculture, only 1 in 10 is paid for her work.<sup>106</sup> Structural, legal, and institutionalized forms of discrimination prevent women from access to land, credit, and training, leaving them out of decision-making.<sup>107</sup> Though women play a fundamental role in food security, they rarely reap the benefits. Gender inequality excludes women from taking action against climate change, and its effects further widen the gap. As crop yields decrease, incomes will drop, and malnutrition will rise. Instead of staying in school, food-insecure students will have to forgo their education to work, raising the likelihood of childhood marriage, gang recruitment, and teenage pregnancy.

Climate change significantly undermines poverty reduction. Of the 250,000 Guatemalan migrants apprehended at the U.S. border since October 2018, the overwhelming majority were from the 24 indigenous communities.<sup>108</sup> With President Giammattei worsening the situation by promising to open up more indigenous lands to mining and hydroelectric projects, these numbers will soon surge.<sup>109</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Guatemala is only one of America's

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<sup>104</sup> Climate Change Knowledge Portal, "Climate Risk and Adaptation Country Profile: Guatemala," World Bank, April 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Resilient Livelihoods of Vulnerable Smallholder Farmers in the Mayan Landscapes and the Dry Corridor of Guatemala," 14.

<sup>106</sup> Pbiocolombia, "Guatemala: the Forgotten Women," PBI Colombia (English), January 23, 2018, <https://pbicolombia.org/2018/01/23/guatemala-the-forgotten-women/>; "In Guatemala, Investing in Indigenous Women's Economic Empowerment Is Key to Building Back Better after COVID-19," June 29, 2020,

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/feature-empowering-indigenous-women-in-guatemala-in-covid-19-rsponse>

<sup>107</sup> "Guatemala," UN Women | Americas and the Caribbean, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://iac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/guatemala>.

<sup>108</sup> Nina Lakhani, "Guatemala Elects Hardline President Who Opposes Trump Immigration Deal," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, August 12, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/12/guatemala-elects-president-alejandro-giammattei-who-called-trump-immigration-deal-bad-news>.

<sup>109</sup> Elisabeth Malkin, "Alejandro Giammattei, a Conservative, Wins Guatemala's Presidency," The New York Times (The New York Times, August 11, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/world/americas/guatemala-election.html>.

neighbors who will experience these impacts. By 2050, the number of Mexican and Central American migrants is projected to increase to 1.5 million a year, from about 700,000 in 2025.<sup>110</sup>

## **VI. Relevant Stakeholders and Perspectives**

Given that climate-driven migration is a transnational issue, the stakeholders are governments, institutions, and organizations that make up civil society, and, most importantly, climate migrants themselves. Recognizing climate migrants as the primary stakeholders is essential to creating and implementing effective, long-term solutions that meet their real needs. As outlined in my recommendations, the U.S. must be willing to prioritize community engagement and amplify the work that is already being done by local organizers, religious leaders, and advocacy groups. For climate-driven migration policy to be ethical, climate migrants themselves must always remain central.

However, climate change and the global refugee crisis do not have bipartisan support from Congress. While refugees have historically enjoyed strong bipartisan support, this changed significantly under the Trump administration, and the COVID-19 pandemic was used as a justification to pursue an anti-immigrant agenda. The Republican Party and special interest groups will need to be persuaded to see the bigger picture— that without reform, their goals for the future will become obsolete. The Union of Concerned Scientists identifies several “global warming skeptic organizations” that will need to be targeted, including the American Enterprise Institute, Americans for Prosperity, the Heritage Foundation, and others.<sup>111</sup> This is why framing climate-driven migration as a national security issue rather than a humanitarian one is so crucial for bolstering conservative support. Advocates of climate-driven migration policy must

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<sup>110</sup> Abraham Lustgarten, “The Great Climate Migration Has Begun,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, July 23, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html>.

<sup>111</sup> “Global Warming Skeptic Organizations (2013),” Union of Concerned Scientists, July 16, 2008, <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/global-warming-skeptic-organizations>.

strategically communicate the threats to America’s safety and economy, emphasizing not only the threats to global stability, but also to jobs and infrastructure at home.

## VII. Legislative Context

Under the Immigration Act of 1990, Congress authorized the attorney general authority to provide temporary protected status to immigrants in the U.S. unable to return to their country of origin due to environmental disaster.<sup>112</sup> As part of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, this authority was shifted to the secretary of Homeland Security, where it was extended to immigrants from countries that had experienced damaging earthquakes and hurricanes like Haiti, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.<sup>113</sup> However, there is no framework for climate migrants escaping slow onset changes like sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, desertification, or loss of biodiversity.

Three bills related to climate-driven migration have recently been introduced in Congress, but none have passed yet. Introduced by Senator Ed Markey, the Global Climate Change Resilience Strategy (S. 2565 and H.R. 4732) would create a new humanitarian program to authorize the admittance of at least 50,000 “climate-displaced persons” into America.<sup>114</sup> Instead, President Trump has continually undermined the existence of climate change while worsening its effects. By withdrawing from the 2015 Paris Agreement, President Trump made clear America would no longer be a leader in sustainable development. Since his time in office, the Trump administration has rolled back over 125 environmental safeguards.<sup>115</sup> Aggressively rolling back environmental regulations during the midst of a global pandemic proves President

<sup>112</sup> “Temporary Protected Status: An Overview,” American Immigration Council, February 11, 2020, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/temporary-protected-status-overview>.

<sup>113</sup> Claire Bergeron Claire Bergeron Madeline Messick, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: A Grant of Humanitarian Relief That Is Less than Permanent,” [migrationpolicy.org](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/temporary-protected-status-united-states-grant-humanitarian-relief-less-permanent), March 2, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/temporary-protected-status-united-states-grant-humanitarian-relief-less-permanent>.

<sup>114</sup> Sabiha Khan, “The U.S. Congress Can Step Up for Refugees and Displaced People in 2020-Here’s How,” Refugees International (Refugees International, January 16, 2020), <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/1/16/the-us-congress-can-step-up-for-refugees-and-displaced-people-in-2020heres-how>.

<sup>115</sup> Brady Dennis Juliet Eilperin, “Trump Rolled Back More than 125 Environmental Safeguards. Here’s How,” The Washington Post (WP Company, October 30, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/climate-environment/trump-climate-environment-protections/>.

Trump was willing to place politics above people, jeopardizing the health of the citizens he swore to protect.

Several key initiatives and global frameworks address the issues of climate change and migration. First, the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties** established a task force to avert, minimize, and address climate change displacement.<sup>116</sup> Second, the **Migrants in Countries of Crisis Initiative** helps protect those who migrate because of environmental factors.<sup>117</sup> Third, U.N. member states adopted the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)** in 2018, representing the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement covering all dimensions of international migration.<sup>118</sup> **Building off of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants**, this agreement aims to target the slow-onset environmental degradation by strengthening global governance on climate change and regular migration pathways.<sup>119</sup> Fourth, the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda** provide a solid foundation for including migrants in climate change policies.<sup>120</sup> Fifth, the **2015 Paris Agreement** was a milestone for global cooperation to combat climate change.

A crucial issue with many of the existing policies is that they do not prioritize disaster preparedness over response. For every dollar spent in the prevention phase, up to \$7 is saved in response and recovery.<sup>121</sup> Yet, only 1% of funds went to preparations between 1991-2010.<sup>122</sup> For example, the **Nansen Initiative and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-30** all focus on the aftermath of climate change-induced disasters.<sup>123</sup> Though the

<sup>116</sup> "Task Force on Displacement," United Nations Climate Change, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://unfccc.int/wim-excom/sub-groups/TFD>.

<sup>117</sup> About MICIC, n.d., <https://micicinitiative.iom.int/about-micic#:~:text=The%20Migrants%20in%20Countries%20in,a%20on%20or%20nature%20disaster>.

<sup>118</sup> "Global Compact for Migration," International Organization for Migration, November 19, 2020, <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> "Addis Ababa Action Agenda," United Nations, n.d., <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&n=2051&menu=35>.

<sup>121</sup> Kristin Lambert, "The Paris Agreement: Spotlight on Climate Migrants," Yale School of the Environment main site, December 15, 2015, <https://environment.yale.edu/blog/2015/12/the-paris-agreement-spotlight-on-climate-migrants/>.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> "Protection Agenda Volume 1," The Nansen Initiative, December 2015.

importance of protection should not be undermined, states would save time, energy, and resources by focusing on building resilience to climate change before crisis strikes. Promoting livelihood diversification, implementing climate-smart policies, and securing land tenure are proactive ways states can help the most vulnerable communities adapt to their new reality.

The 2020 ruling by the U.N. Human Rights Committee on climate change is a game-changer. Though this ruling does not give climate refugees official legal status or incorporation into the 1951 Refugee Convention, it acknowledges a legal basis for refugee protection for those whose lives are immediately threatened by climate change.<sup>124</sup> “The ruling says if you have an immediate threat to your life due to climate change, due to the climate emergency, and if you cross the border and go to another country, you should not be sent back because you would be at risk of your life, just like in a war or in a situation of persecution,” said U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.<sup>125</sup> While not legally binding, this decision is an important first step in incorporating climate refugees into international law.

## **VIII. Overview of Pros and Cons and Ramifications**

Ethically managing climate-driven migration as a national security risk will take unprecedented global cooperation and demands attention from the highest levels of government. Even more so than funding, research, and time, effective policy will require a steadfast commitment that becomes an enduring part of American statecraft rather than shifting between administrations. If the U.S. can implement the five strategies outlined in this proposal, we have the potential to avert a crisis that will soon define— and overwhelm— global politics. Acting with strategic foresight will make migration more manageable and prevent entire regions from

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<sup>124</sup> Yvonne Su, “UN Ruling on Climate Refugees Could Be Gamechanger for Climate Action,” Climate Home News (Climate Home, February 4, 2020), <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/01/29/un-ruling-climate-refugees-gamechanger-climate-action/>.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.



becoming uninhabitable, ungovernable, and lacking resources to sustain the next generation.

While the advantages of this policy proposal are clear, climate-driven migration is a trans-national issue that the U.S. cannot combat without the support of our allies and a unified home-front. The bilateral and multilateral relationships needed to sustain such an ambitious policy are not exempt from conflicting political and economic national interests. Climate-driven migration policy will likely face resistance from two groups. Because this threat cannot be reduced without prioritizing cutting fossil fuels, special interest groups and corporations— who wield immense political power— will push back. Additionally, the reality that far-right, nationalist parties are growing in power cannot be understated. Their xenophobic attitude towards refugees remains a cultural challenge that will continue to influence policy. This is why focusing on framing climate-driven migration from a national security perspective, rather than a humanitarian one, will be crucial in getting these groups to recognize proactive policy fits their self-interest.

In this hour of need, American leadership on climate change is more important than ever. The U.S. cannot eliminate climate-driven migration, as it is too late to reverse much of the damage. However, you can be fundamental in managing this threat to ensure America's security while preserving human dignity. America's choice to reassert global leadership on climate change could save hundreds of millions of lives. The choices you make today will define the future of this country— and for many, if that future will exist at all. The fate of global stability, peace, and prosperity hangs in the balance.

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