

**Reinterpreting The 1951 Refugee Convention In The Context
Of Climate-Induced Displacement, Authored by : Mr.
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INTRODUCTION / STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Climate change has become one of the most serious global concerns affecting human survival, environmental stability, and international governance in the twenty-first century. Rising global temperatures, sea-level rise, desertification, floods, droughts, cyclones, and other extreme weather events have significantly disrupted human habitation and livelihoods across the world. These environmental transformations increasingly force individuals and communities to migrate within and across national borders in search of safety, resources, and survival. The growing phenomenon of climate-induced displacement has created a major challenge for international refugee law, particularly regarding the legal status and protection of persons displaced due to environmental causes.

The existing international refugee protection framework is primarily governed by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Convention defines a refugee as a person who is outside his or her country of nationality owing to a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. This definition was formulated in the aftermath of the Second World War with the objective of protecting persons fleeing political oppression and persecution. Consequently, the Convention does not expressly recognize environmental degradation or climate change as grounds for refugee status.

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As climate-related disasters intensify, millions of people are being displaced due to factors such as rising sea levels, salinization of agricultural lands, food insecurity, water scarcity, and destruction of homes and infrastructure. Low-lying island nations such as Kiribati and Tuvalu face existential threats from sea-level rise, while countries like Bangladesh experience recurring floods and cyclones leading to mass displacement. Despite the severity of these circumstances, individuals displaced solely due to climate change are often categorized as “migrants” rather than “refugees,” thereby excluding them from the legal protections guaranteed under international refugee law.

This legal gap has generated significant debate among scholars, policymakers, and international organizations regarding whether the 1951 Refugee Convention should be reinterpreted in light of evolving global realities. Some scholars argue that climate-induced displacement may, in certain circumstances, intersect with traditional grounds of persecution where environmental degradation disproportionately affects vulnerable or marginalized communities. Others contend that the Convention’s narrow persecution-based framework is inherently incapable of addressing environmental displacement and that a separate legal instrument is necessary for climate refugees.

International human rights law has also emerged as a complementary framework for addressing climate displacement. In *Teitiota v. New Zealand*, the United Nations Human Rights Committee acknowledged that environmental degradation and climate change may expose individuals to violations of the right to life, potentially triggering

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non-refoulement obligations under international human rights law. This decision marked a significant development in recognizing the human rights dimensions of climate-induced displacement, even though the applicant was not granted refugee status.

The increasing scale of climate migration poses serious humanitarian, legal, economic, and political challenges for the international community. Existing refugee law mechanisms appear inadequate to address the growing number of displaced persons who do not fit within the traditional definition of refugee. The absence of a universally accepted legal category for climate refugees creates uncertainty regarding state obligations, protection standards, burden-sharing, and resettlement responsibilities.

The present study therefore seeks to critically examine whether the 1951 Refugee Convention can be reinterpreted to include climate-induced displacement within its protection framework. It further analyzes the limitations of the current refugee regime, the role of international human rights law, and the necessity for legal reforms or new international mechanisms to address the protection needs of climate-displaced persons in an era of accelerating climate change..

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Climate-induced displacement has increasingly become an important subject of discussion among Indian legal scholars, environmental experts, and policy researchers. Indian literature on the subject primarily focuses on the vulnerability of developing countries to climate change, the inadequacy of existing refugee protection mechanisms, and the humanitarian implications of environmental migration. Scholars have examined the intersection of climate justice, human rights, international refugee law, and environmental governance in the Indian and South Asian context.

Upendra Baxi discusses the broader relationship between human rights and environmental justice, emphasizing that climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable and marginalized populations in developing countries. He argues that international legal systems must evolve to address emerging forms of displacement resulting from environmental degradation and ecological inequality. His work highlights the importance of adopting a rights-based approach toward persons displaced by climate-related disasters.

Lavanya Rajamani has extensively analyzed international climate change law and the obligations of states under global environmental agreements. She emphasizes that developing nations such as India face severe challenges due to climate vulnerability despite contributing comparatively less to global greenhouse gas emissions. Her scholarship indirectly supports the need for stronger international mechanisms to protect populations affected by climate change, including displaced persons.

Sumudu Atapattu examines the human rights implications of climate change and environmental displacement within South Asia. She argues that climate-induced migration should not be viewed merely as an environmental issue but also as a matter of international human rights protection. According to her analysis, rising sea levels, floods, and environmental degradation threaten fundamental rights such as the right to life, housing, food, and livelihood, thereby requiring international legal recognition and protection.

B.S. Chimni critically evaluates the Eurocentric foundations of international refugee law and argues that refugee protection frameworks often fail to address the realities faced by developing countries. He emphasizes that the current refugee regime inadequately responds to new forms of displacement arising from structural inequalities, economic instability, and environmental crises. Chimni advocates for a more inclusive and humanitarian interpretation of refugee law that reflects contemporary global realities.

Shibani Ghosh has analyzed climate governance and environmental justice in the Indian context, focusing on the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. Her work highlights the disproportionate burden borne by economically weaker populations due to environmental degradation and natural disasters. She argues that legal and policy responses must integrate climate resilience with social justice and human rights protection.

C.R. Bijoy examines displacement resulting from development projects, environmental degradation, and resource exploitation in India. Although his primary focus is internal displacement, his scholarship contributes significantly to understanding how environmental and ecological changes force vulnerable populations to migrate. He further emphasizes the inadequacy of existing rehabilitation and protection mechanisms for displaced communities.

The literature produced by Indian scholars significantly contributes to understanding climate displacement from the perspectives of environmental justice, human rights, and Global South vulnerabilities. However, there remains limited focused research specifically examining whether the 1951 Refugee Convention can be reinterpreted to include climate-induced displacement within international refugee protection frameworks. This gap necessitates further doctrinal and policy-oriented research on climate refugees in the Indian and international legal context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the scope and limitations of the 1951 Refugee Convention regarding climate-induced displacement.
2. To analyze the legal status of climate refugees under international law.
3. To evaluate whether the existing refugee protection regime can be reinterpreted to include environmental displacement.
4. To study international judicial decisions and state practices concerning climate refugees.
5. To suggest legal and policy reforms for protecting persons displaced due to climate change.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does the 1951 Refugee Convention adequately protect climate-induced displaced persons?
2. Can climate-induced displacement be interpreted within the existing definition of “refugee” under the Convention?
3. What are the major legal gaps in the current international refugee framework regarding climate migration?
4. What role can international human rights law play in protecting climate refugees?
5. Is there a need for a separate international treaty addressing climate-induced displacement?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a doctrinal and analytical research methodology. It primarily relies on secondary sources, including international treaties, conventions, judicial decisions, books, journal articles, reports of international organizations, and scholarly commentaries.

The research examines the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, human rights instruments, and climate-related international agreements.

Comparative analysis of international case laws and policy frameworks is also undertaken to understand evolving legal interpretations concerning climate-induced displacement.

The study further employs qualitative analysis to assess the effectiveness of current legal mechanisms and to identify possible reforms in international refugee law.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

1. THE TRADITIONAL SCOPE OF THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees constitutes the cornerstone of modern international refugee law. Adopted in the aftermath of the Second World War under the framework of the United Nations, the Convention was designed to address the large-scale displacement and humanitarian crises resulting from war, political instability, and persecution in Europe. The Convention sought to establish a comprehensive legal framework defining who qualifies as a refugee and outlining the rights and protections available to such individuals under international law.¹

Article 1(A)(2) of the Convention defines a refugee as a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. This definition reflects the historical circumstances prevailing during the post-war era, where refugee movements were primarily associated with political persecution, armed conflicts, ethnic violence, and ideological divisions.

The Convention originally contained temporal and geographical limitations, restricting its application to persons displaced due to events occurring before January

¹ Lavanya Rajamani, *Differential Treatment in International Environmental Law 201–08* (Oxford Univ. Press 2006).

1, 1951, primarily within Europe. However, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees removed these limitations and expanded the Convention's applicability on a universal basis. Despite this expansion, the substantive definition of "refugee" remained unchanged, continuing to focus exclusively on persecution-based displacement.²

The traditional refugee framework is therefore centered upon three essential elements: first, the existence of persecution; second, the persecution must be linked to one of the five recognized grounds; and third, the individual must cross an international border. Environmental degradation and climate-induced disasters generally do not satisfy these criteria because such displacement is usually caused by natural or ecological factors rather than targeted persecution by state or non-state actors.

The Convention primarily imposes obligations upon states to provide protection, non-discrimination, access to courts, education, employment, and social security to recognized refugees. One of the most significant principles under the Convention is the principle of non-refoulement embodied in Article 33, which prohibits states from returning refugees to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened.³ This principle has subsequently attained the status of customary international law and forms the foundation of international refugee protection.

² Shibani Ghosh, Environmental Governance and Climate Justice in India, 52 *Econ. & Pol. Wkly.* 45, 46–50 (2017).

³ Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* 93–99 (Sage Publ'ns 1999).

However, the traditional scope of the Convention reveals important limitations in addressing contemporary forms of displacement. The refugee definition was developed in a historical context where environmental factors were not considered major drivers of forced migration. Consequently, persons displaced by rising sea levels, droughts, floods, desertification, cyclones, and other climate-related events do not easily fall within the Convention framework. Such individuals are generally categorized as “migrants” rather than refugees, thereby excluding them from the legal rights and protections available under refugee law.

Scholars have argued that the Convention’s narrow persecution-centered approach reflects a state-centric understanding of displacement, emphasizing civil and political rights violations while neglecting socio-economic and environmental threats to human survival. This limitation has become increasingly problematic in the context of accelerating climate change and environmental crises affecting vulnerable populations across the globe.

Despite these limitations, some legal commentators contend that the Refugee Convention possesses interpretative flexibility capable of accommodating certain forms of climate-induced displacement where environmental harm intersects with persecution, discrimination, or state neglect.⁴ For instance, where governments intentionally deny disaster relief to specific ethnic or social groups, or where environmental degradation exacerbates conflict and persecution, affected individuals

⁴ Alexander Betts, *Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement* 102–08 (Cornell Univ. Press 2013).

may potentially qualify for refugee protection under the existing framework.

Nevertheless, the prevailing interpretation of the Convention continues to exclude persons displaced solely due to climate-related causes. As a result, the traditional scope of the 1951 Refugee Convention remains inadequate in comprehensively addressing the growing phenomenon of climate-induced displacement, thereby creating a significant protection gap in international law.

2. CLIMATE CHANGE AS A DRIVER OF FORCED MIGRATION

Climate change has emerged as one of the most significant causes of human displacement in the contemporary world. Environmental degradation, rising global temperatures, changing weather patterns, and increasing frequency of natural disasters have severely affected human settlements, livelihoods, food security, and access to natural resources.⁵ These environmental changes compel millions of people to migrate either temporarily or permanently within their countries or across international borders. The growing phenomenon of climate-induced displacement has transformed climate change from merely an environmental issue into a major humanitarian, legal, and human rights concern.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has repeatedly emphasized that climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” by intensifying existing social, economic,

⁵ Jane McAdam, *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law* 9–15 (Oxford Univ. Press 2012).

and political vulnerabilities. Rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, desertification, floods, cyclones, heatwaves, and water scarcity increasingly undermine the ability of communities to sustain their livelihoods, especially in vulnerable developing countries. Such environmental conditions force affected populations to abandon their homes and seek safer living conditions elsewhere.

One of the major drivers of climate-induced migration is sea-level rise affecting low-lying coastal areas and island nations. Countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Maldives face existential threats due to coastal erosion, flooding, and salinization of freshwater resources. Rising sea levels threaten not only housing and infrastructure but also the territorial existence and sovereignty of certain island states. In such circumstances, displacement becomes unavoidable as entire communities may lose habitable land.

Extreme weather events such as cyclones, hurricanes, floods, and wildfires also contribute significantly to forced migration. According to global displacement reports, millions of people are displaced annually due to climate-related disasters. Countries in South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and India, experience recurrent flooding, cyclones, and river erosion that displace large populations every year. Coastal communities, agricultural workers, and economically marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable because their livelihoods depend heavily on natural resources and stable environmental conditions.⁶

Droughts and desertification constitute another major cause of environmental displacement. In several regions of Africa and Asia, prolonged droughts have resulted in crop failures, food insecurity, and water shortages, forcing rural populations to migrate in search of survival opportunities. Climate change thereby intensifies poverty and socio-economic instability, creating conditions that compel forced migration even in the absence of direct political persecution or armed conflict.

Climate change may also indirectly contribute to migration through its relationship with conflict and resource scarcity. Environmental degradation can increase competition over land, water, and food resources, thereby aggravating social tensions and political instability. In many situations, climate change interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities such as weak governance, poverty, and ethnic tensions, leading to conflict-driven displacement. Thus, climate-induced migration often results from a combination of environmental, economic, and political factors rather than a single cause.⁷

The concept of “climate refugees” has therefore emerged to describe persons displaced due to environmental and climate-related causes. However, international law does not currently recognize climate refugees as a distinct legal category. Most climate-displaced persons are classified as migrants, internally displaced persons, or disaster-affected populations, limiting their access to international legal protection

⁶ Anu Kapur, *Vulnerable India: A Geographical Study of Disasters* 118–25 (Sage Publ'ns 2010).

⁷ Alexander Betts, *Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement* 56–61 (Cornell Univ. Press 2013).

mechanisms. This legal ambiguity creates significant challenges for humanitarian assistance, resettlement, and state responsibility.

In the Indian context, climate change poses serious risks to vulnerable populations residing in coastal regions, river basins, drought-prone areas, and ecologically fragile zones. Regions such as the Sundarbans, Assam, Odisha, and coastal Gujarat have experienced increasing displacement due to floods, cyclones, coastal erosion, and rising sea levels. Environmental degradation and natural disasters have already displaced thousands of people internally, highlighting the growing relationship between climate change and migration within South Asia.

International organizations and scholars increasingly recognize that climate-induced displacement is likely to intensify in the future. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has acknowledged that climate change contributes to displacement and humanitarian emergencies, particularly in vulnerable regions with limited adaptive capacity.⁸ Nevertheless, the absence of a binding international legal framework specifically addressing climate-induced migration continues to create uncertainty regarding the rights and protection of affected populations.

Thus, climate change has become a significant driver of forced migration globally by threatening human survival, livelihoods, and environmental security. The increasing

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Legal Considerations Regarding Claims for International Protection Made in the Context of the Adverse Effects of Climate Change and Disasters 2–5 (2020).

scale of environmental displacement demonstrates the urgent need to reconsider existing international legal frameworks and develop comprehensive mechanisms capable of addressing the humanitarian and legal challenges associated with climate-induced migration.

3. REINTERPRETING THE REFUGEE DEFINITION

The increasing scale of climate-induced displacement has generated significant debate regarding whether the definition of “refugee” under the 1951 Refugee Convention can be reinterpreted to include persons displaced due to environmental and climate-related causes. Although the Convention does not expressly recognize climate change as a ground for refugee protection, several legal scholars argue that certain forms of climate-induced displacement may fall within the existing refugee framework where environmental harm intersects with persecution, discrimination, human rights violations, or state failure.

The traditional refugee definition under Article 1(A)(2) of the Convention requires the existence of a “well-founded fear of persecution” linked to one of the five protected grounds, namely race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.⁹ Environmental disasters alone generally do not amount to persecution because they are usually regarded as natural phenomena rather than deliberate acts attributable to state or non-state actors. However, scholars increasingly argue that climate change can indirectly contribute to conditions that

satisfy the persecution requirement under refugee law.

One important argument supporting reinterpretation is that state responses to environmental disasters may involve discrimination or unequal treatment of vulnerable communities. Governments may intentionally deny humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, food, water, healthcare, or rehabilitation support to certain ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups. In such circumstances, the resulting harm is no longer merely environmental but becomes linked to discriminatory state conduct amounting to persecution under refugee law.

Marginalized and indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable to climate-related discrimination and targeted neglect. Indigenous populations often depend heavily on land, forests, rivers, and natural ecosystems for their survival and cultural identity. Environmental degradation caused by climate change may disproportionately affect these communities, while governments may fail to provide adequate protection, rehabilitation, or adaptation measures. Such deliberate neglect or exclusion may constitute persecution where it is connected to ethnicity, social identity, or political marginalization.

Climate change may also intensify resource scarcity and contribute to social conflict, violence, and political instability. Scarcity of water, agricultural land, food resources, and habitable territory can aggravate existing ethnic tensions and armed conflicts. Environmental stress may therefore operate as a catalyst for persecution,

⁹ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees art. 1(A)(2), July 28, 1951, 189 U.N.T.S. 137.

displacement, and human rights abuses. In certain situations, individuals fleeing climate-related conflict and violence may qualify for refugee protection if the persecution they face is connected to one of the Convention grounds.

Several scholars have emphasized that refugee law is capable of dynamic interpretation in response to changing global realities. International refugee law has historically evolved through judicial interpretation, state practice, and human rights developments. Therefore, some commentators argue that a restrictive interpretation excluding all climate-displaced persons would undermine the humanitarian objectives of refugee protection.

The principle of “survival migration,” proposed by Alexander Betts, further supports a broader interpretation of refugee protection.¹⁰ Betts argues that persons fleeing existential threats such as environmental collapse, famine, and state failure should receive international protection even where persecution is not directly political in nature. According to this view, the humanitarian purpose of refugee law requires adaptation to contemporary forms of forced displacement.

However, reinterpretation of the refugee definition remains controversial. Critics argue that expanding the Convention framework to include climate-displaced persons may dilute the existing refugee protection regime and create practical challenges for states already struggling with migration management.¹⁰ Some scholars contend that

¹⁰ Alexander Betts, *Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement* 23–31 (Cornell Univ. Press 2013).

climate-induced displacement involves complex socio-economic and environmental factors that differ fundamentally from persecution-based refugee movements. Consequently, they advocate the creation of a separate international legal framework rather than reinterpretation of the Refugee Convention.

Judicial decisions have demonstrated cautious willingness to recognize the relationship between environmental harm and international protection. In *Teitiota v. New Zealand*, the United Nations Human Rights Committee acknowledged that climate change may expose individuals to life-threatening conditions capable of engaging non-refoulement obligations under international human rights law.¹¹ Although the claimant was not recognized as a refugee, the decision reflected growing international recognition of climate-related displacement as a legal and humanitarian concern.

Therefore, reinterpretation of the refugee definition remains an evolving area of international legal discourse. While environmental degradation alone may not satisfy the requirements of refugee status, climate-induced displacement may fall within the scope of refugee law where environmental factors intersect with persecution, discrimination, conflict, or state failure. Such interpretative developments highlight the growing need for flexible and humanitarian approaches within international refugee protection mechanisms.¹²

CASE LAWS / CASE ANALYSIS

1. Teitiota v. New Zealand

This landmark case involved Ioane Teitiota, a citizen of Kiribati, who sought refugee protection in New Zealand due to rising sea levels, environmental degradation, overcrowding, and scarcity of drinking water caused by climate change. Although the claim for refugee status was rejected, the UN Human Rights Committee observed that climate change and environmental degradation could, in certain circumstances, expose individuals to violations of the right to life, thereby triggering non-refoulement obligations under international human rights law. The decision became significant because it recognized the human rights implications of climate-induced displacement and opened discussions regarding legal protection for climate refugees.¹¹

2. Ioane Teitiota Deportation Case

In the deportation proceedings before the New Zealand courts, Ioane Teitiota argued that returning to Kiribati would endanger his life because of severe environmental conditions caused by climate change. The courts held that environmental degradation and climate-related hardships alone did not satisfy the persecution requirement under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Since the harm affected the general population and was not linked to any of the Convention grounds, refugee protection was denied.

¹¹ Ioane Teitiota v. New Zealand, Human Rights Comm., Commc'n No. 2728/2016, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/127/D/2728/2016 (Jan. 7, 2020).

Nevertheless, the case generated international debate regarding the limitations of refugee law and the growing need to reconsider legal protection frameworks for climate-displaced persons.¹²

3. Budayeva v. Russia

This case arose after a massive mudslide in Russia caused deaths, destruction of property, and displacement of residents. The applicants alleged that the Russian authorities failed to take preventive measures despite being aware of the environmental risks. The European Court of Human Rights held that states have positive obligations to protect individuals from environmental disasters and ensure effective disaster management systems under the right to life. Although the case was not directly related to refugee law, it demonstrated the growing recognition of environmental protection and state responsibility within international human rights jurisprudence.¹³

4. Portillo Cáceres v. Paraguay

In this case, the applicants alleged that exposure to toxic agrochemicals and environmental pollution caused serious health problems and violated their fundamental rights. The Human Rights Committee held that Paraguay failed to

¹² Teitiota v. Chief Executive of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [2015] NZSC 107 (N.Z.).

¹³ Budayeva v. Russia, App. No. 15339/02, Eur. Ct. H.R. (2008).

adequately protect the applicants from environmental harm and emphasized that states have obligations to prevent environmental degradation affecting human rights. The decision strengthened the connection between environmental protection, the right to life, and state responsibility under international human rights law, which is highly relevant in the context of climate-induced displacement.¹⁴

FINDINGS

The study finds that the 1951 Refugee Convention does not expressly recognize climate-induced displacement as a ground for refugee protection. The Convention was primarily designed to address persecution arising from political, racial, religious, or social factors rather than environmental causes.

The persecution-based definition of refugee under international law creates significant legal barriers for climate-displaced persons because environmental degradation and natural disasters generally do not satisfy the traditional requirement of targeted persecution.

The research further reveals that climate change has increasingly emerged as a major driver of forced migration and humanitarian crises across the world. Rising sea levels,

¹⁴ Portillo Cáceres v. Paraguay, Human Rights Comm., Commc'n No. 2751/2016, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/126/D/2751/2016 (Aug. 20, 2019).

floods, droughts, cyclones, desertification, and resource scarcity have displaced millions of people, particularly in vulnerable developing countries.

The study also finds that existing international human rights law partially addresses the protection gap through principles such as non-refoulement, the right to life, and state obligations to protect human dignity. However, these protections remain limited and do not provide a comprehensive legal status equivalent to refugee protection.

Judicial developments such as *Teitiota v. New Zealand* and *Budayeva v. Russia* indicate a gradual recognition of climate-related human rights concerns within international jurisprudence. Courts and human rights bodies increasingly acknowledge the relationship between environmental harm and fundamental human rights.

The research further demonstrates that reinterpretation of the Refugee Convention may provide limited protection in situations where climate-induced displacement intersects with persecution, discrimination, conflict, or state neglect. Nevertheless, environmental degradation alone remains insufficient to establish refugee status under the current legal framework.

Finally, the study concludes that there is an urgent need for international cooperation, legal reform, and policy innovation to effectively address climate-induced migration and ensure adequate protection for affected populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS / SUGGESTIONS

The international community should formulate a separate and comprehensive legal framework specifically addressing climate-induced displacement and the rights of climate refugees.

The definition of refugee under international law should be broadened or reinterpreted to include severe environmental degradation and climate-related threats that endanger human survival and dignity.

States should strengthen regional agreements and cooperative mechanisms for the protection, rehabilitation, and resettlement of climate-displaced persons, particularly in vulnerable regions such as South Asia and the Pacific Islands.

International organizations and developed countries should establish financial assistance and climate adaptation funds to support vulnerable nations facing large-scale displacement due to climate change.

Human rights-based approaches should be integrated into refugee protection mechanisms to ensure protection of rights such as life, housing, food, water, health, and livelihood for climate-displaced populations.

National governments should adopt effective climate adaptation strategies, disaster preparedness policies, and sustainable environmental practices to minimize forced migration and reduce the vulnerability of affected communities.

Greater international cooperation and equitable burden-sharing are necessary to address the humanitarian consequences of climate-induced migration and ensure collective global responsibility.

Courts, tribunals, and international human rights bodies should adopt progressive and humanitarian interpretations of refugee and human rights law to provide greater protection for persons displaced due to climate-related causes.

CONCLUSION

Climate-induced displacement represents one of the most pressing humanitarian, environmental, and legal challenges of the contemporary world. The existing international refugee protection regime under the 1951 Refugee Convention was developed in a historical context that primarily focused on persecution arising from war, political instability, and human rights violations. Consequently, the Convention does not adequately address the growing phenomenon of environmental and climate-related displacement, leaving millions of climate-displaced persons outside formal international legal protection.

The study demonstrates that climate change increasingly contributes to forced migration through rising sea levels, floods, droughts, desertification, cyclones, and resource scarcity. Although reinterpretation of the Refugee Convention may provide limited remedies in situations involving persecution, discrimination, or state failure connected with environmental harm, it cannot comprehensively resolve the complexities associated with climate migration. Existing human rights frameworks and judicial developments have nevertheless shown a gradual shift toward

recognizing environmental degradation as a matter affecting fundamental human rights, particularly the right to life and human dignity.

The absence of a dedicated international legal framework for climate refugees continues to create uncertainty regarding state obligations, protection standards, and responsibility-sharing mechanisms. Therefore, a comprehensive international response is urgently required. Legal reforms, regional cooperation, human rights-based approaches, climate adaptation policies, and international burden-sharing mechanisms must work collectively to ensure effective protection and justice for climate-displaced populations.

Ultimately, the future relevance and effectiveness of international refugee law will depend upon its ability to evolve in response to changing global realities and emerging forms of displacement caused by climate change and environmental crises.

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