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Welcome Letter

Esteemed Delegates,

SECRETARIAT

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Human Rights Council*

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Welcome to the annual Brigham Young University Model United Nations Conference (BYUMUN). I am grateful that you are seeking to work towards global development and a more sustainable future for all of us. At this conference, you will not only deepen your understanding of international communities and current issues, but you will exercise your skills in leadership and persuasion.

My name is Tim Assink. I am a Senior at BYU majoring in International Relations with a minor in Asian Studies. After I graduate, I hope to attend law school to study international law and eventually contribute to international policymaking. In April of this year, I represented China on the Commission for Social Development at the National Model UN (NMUN) conference in New York City. Participation in the MUN conferences has demonstrated to me the importance of the issues that Member States and their citizens discuss. As delegates representing a Member State, your research, speeches, and developed policies will answer some of the major questions our global community is facing.

This year, the issue before the General Assembly is as follows:

I. Safeguarding Human Rights for Populations Displaced by Climate Change

As the primary governing body of the UN, the resolutions passed by the General Assembly (GA) ensure that possible solutions will be enacted to serve each individual person around the world. The purpose of this background guide is to serve as a basic launch point for your research, providing basic background information on the key issue. This is not a document that can replace your research. As you consider innovative solutions, make sure they align with how your individual Member State would approach the issue. Remember to keep your solutions simple, inclusive, and within the GA's mandate.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I'm excited to be working with you on this issue.

Best,
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Introduction

As World War II was about to end in 1945, representatives of 50 countries gathered, drafted, and signed the UN Charter, which established the United Nations with a mission to uphold international peace, foster relationships, and promote cooperation among countries.¹ The United Nations is now made up of 193 Member States, structured into six main bodies: the General Assembly (UNGA), the Security Council (UNSC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat.²

Unlike other UN bodies, the GA is represented by all Member States in the UN, which allows several topics to be discussed and debated.³ There are six main committees within the GA including: the Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee); the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee); the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee); the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee); the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee); and the Legal Committee (Sixth Committee).⁴ The issue we will debate aligns most closely with the Third Committee's mandate.

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

Before you can properly address the issue on the agenda, it is important to understand the GA's mandate, functions, and powers. The GA meets annually from September to December and can call special sessions as needed.⁵ The GA makes recommendations to States on international issues under their direction.⁶ Informal consultations are held within the GA so that Member States can negotiate proposals.⁷ Each of the Member States in the Assembly has one vote, with decisions being made through a simple majority.⁸

The GA plays a critical role in the progress of the United Nations and works closely with the Security Council and the Secretary-General.⁹ However, because the GA does not have authority to enforce resolutions or laws, Member States must be clear and intentional when drafting working papers to ensure multilateral implementation. Following informal consultations among Member States, the majority of resolutions are adopted by consensus without a vote.¹⁰ The Third Committee generally focuses on high-level policy recommendations, calling for meetings or

¹ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *History of the United Nations*. 2026.

² United Nations Department of Global Communications. *About Us*. N.d.

³ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *About Us*. N.d.

⁴ United Nations Department of Global Communications. General Assembly of the United Nations. *Main Committees*. N.d.

⁵ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

⁶ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

⁷ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

⁸ United Nations Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

⁹ United Nations, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. *Protocol and Liaison Service*. N.d.

¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

other conferences on specific issues, relying on bodies with specific expertise.¹¹ In line with *The Charter of the United Nations*, the mandate of the General Assembly can be summarized as:

- The General Assembly may generally: Recommend policies and actions for Member States to voluntarily implement; encourage cooperation between governments, United Nations agencies, and international organizations; establish or strengthen United Nations programs, frameworks, committees, or reporting mechanisms within the GA's authority; request research, assessments, reports, or studies from relevant United Nations bodies; promote international standards, best practices, and guidelines regarding human rights protections; address humanitarian, economic, social, and developmental challenges through multilateral cooperation.¹²
- The General Assembly will not generally: create legally binding obligations for Member States; require states to change domestic laws or policies, allowing governments to maintain sovereignty over internal affairs; create military operations, sanctions, or enforcement mechanisms; require specific financial contribution from Member States without voluntary agreement; create new UN bodies; make recommendations on situations under consideration by the United Nations Security Council.¹³

Current Priorities

The Third Committee of the General Assembly continues to address emerging social, humanitarian, and human rights challenges through international cooperation and consensus-building.¹⁴ As global challenges become increasingly interconnected, GA 3 emphasizes the importance of multilateral approaches that allow Member States to coordinate policies, share resources, and strengthen international frameworks.¹⁵ The committee's work remains centered on promoting human rights, advancing sustainable development, and addressing humanitarian concerns affecting vulnerable populations.¹⁶

One major priority of the General Assembly is strengthening international cooperation to address the impacts of climate change, particularly its effects on human security and vulnerable communities.¹⁷ Through resolutions related to sustainable development, environmental protection, and human rights, Member States continue to examine how international institutions can support countries facing challenges that exceed national capacities.¹⁸ Climate-related displacement demonstrates the need for coordinated responses that balance humanitarian protection, state sovereignty, and long-term development.¹⁹

¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

¹² United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d. p. 37

¹³ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d. p. 36

¹⁴ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d.

¹⁵ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d.

¹⁶ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d.

¹⁷ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *Secretary-General report on Our Common Agenda (A/75/982)*. 2021.

¹⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹⁹ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change and displacement*. N.d.

GA 3's effectiveness ultimately depends on the ability of Member States to develop practical, cooperative solutions.²⁰ While General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, the committee provides an important forum for establishing international norms, encouraging collaboration, and creating frameworks for addressing global challenges through collective action.²¹

Conclusion

Established after a global conflict to foster unity, the United Nations General Assembly remains a single space where every nation holds an equal voice. While the GA lacks the authority to legally enforce its decisions, its true power comes from multilateral cooperation and consensus-building. As global tensions rise in 2026, the priorities outlined by Secretary-General António Guterres demonstrate the urgency of finding a resolution. Navigating these complex issues requires intentional, innovative drafting and deep collaboration within the mandate of the GA. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the GA depends on the ability of its Member States to negotiate, cooperate, and build consensus to address international challenges within the Assembly's mandate.

²⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

²¹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d.

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United Nations, Department of General Assembly and Conference Management. *Protocol and Liaison Service*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.un.org/dgacm/content/protocol>

This article describes the responsibilities of the Protocol and Liaison Service, which manages diplomatic protocol and ceremonial functions within the United Nations.

United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *About Us*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: www.un.org/en/about-us

This page provides an overview of the United Nations as an international organization founded in 1945 following the Second World War. The article identifies the organization's primary purposes and briefly introduces the six principal organs of the UN, highlighting the organization's role in coordinating international responses to global issues.

United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

This article explains the authority and responsibilities of the United Nations General Assembly under the UN Charter. The article outlines the Assembly's powers to discuss international issues, make recommendations, approve the UN budget, elect members to various UN bodies, appoint the Secretary-General upon Security Council recommendation, and establish subsidiary organs.

United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *History of the United Nations*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un

This article traces the origins and development of the United Nations. It also describes the organization's expansion over time and its evolving role in peacekeeping, development, humanitarian assistance, and human rights promotion.

United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *Secretary-General report on Our Common Agenda (A/75/982)*. 2021. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf

This report presents the Secretary-General's vision for strengthening multilateralism and addressing emerging global challenges, including climate change, inequality, and displacement. It is useful for understanding how the United Nations views climate-related displacement within broader discussions of sustainable development, human rights, and international cooperation.

United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

The United Nations Charter establishes the purposes, principles, and organizational structure of the United Nations, including the principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention. It provides the legal foundation for understanding the balance between protecting human rights and respecting Member State sovereignty throughout discussions on climate-related displacement.

United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Main Committees*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/maincommittees/>

This webpage explains the structure, responsibilities, and jurisdiction of the General Assembly's six Main Committees. It was used to define the mandate of the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee) and clarify the committee's authority over issues involving human rights and humanitarian affairs.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/70/1>

The 2030 Agenda establishes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and emphasizes international cooperation to address interconnected global challenges, including climate change, poverty, and inequality. It supports discussion of how climate-related displacement affects sustainable development and highlights the importance of coordinated international action.

United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change and displacement*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/build-better-futures/climate-change-and-displacement>

This resource examines the relationship between climate change and human mobility. It emphasizes that climate change often interacts with existing vulnerabilities such as conflict and poverty, making displacement more likely. It is useful for explaining why climate displacement has become a growing international concern.

Safeguarding Human Rights for Populations Displaced by Climate Change

“The solution to today’s crises lies in greater respect for human rights... upholding the laws and institutions built to protect human dignity, safeguard civilians, limit harm, and ensure justice.

Human rights are universal. They must be upheld—for every person, everywhere.”

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

Introduction

Human rights are rights we have simply because we are human beings.²² We are all equally entitled to our human rights, and they should not be taken away, except in specific situations and according to due process.²³ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, was the first legal document to set out the fundamental human rights to be universally protected.²⁴ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization of all human rights.²⁵ The GA establishes legal standards, enforcement bodies and passes resolutions that apply international political pressure to ensure the security of these rights by all nations.²⁶ This encompasses all forced movement—whether people cross an international border (Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Immigrants, Displaced by disaster) or remain within their home country (Internally Displaced Persons).²⁷

In 2021, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 48/13 on “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment,” reflecting the growing importance of environmental protection within international human rights discussions.²⁸ Focused efforts in securing these rights for displaced populations is a foundation of peace, justice, and sustainable development across the globe.²⁹

Current Atmosphere

The world is facing an unprecedented displacement crisis.³⁰ Weather-related disasters have displaced approximately 220 million people internally over the past decade, averaging about 60,000 displacements daily.³¹ The number of countries facing extreme climate-related hazards is expected to rise from 3 to 65 by 2040, the vast majority of which host displaced people.³² As

²² United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. *What are human rights?*. N.d.

²³ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. *What are human rights?*. N.d.

²⁴ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Mandate of UN human rights*. 2026.

²⁵ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Mandate of UN human rights*. 2026.

²⁶ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Mandate of UN human rights*. 2026.

²⁷ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

²⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/RES/48/13)*. 2021.

²⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement*. 2022.

³⁰ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Global Trends Report 2025*. 2025. p. 2.

³¹ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

³² United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

climate change increasingly causes population displacement, pressure grows on governments, humanitarian organizations, and existing legal frameworks to find a resolution.³³

Low- and middle-income countries host 68 percent of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection.³⁴ The Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 26 percent of the total.³⁵ Furthermore, 65 percent of refugees and other people in need of international protection lived in countries neighboring their countries of origin.³⁶ In other words, countries with neighbors experiencing conflict or environmental challenges are more likely to hold displaced populations.

The United Nations addresses climate-related displacement through multiple institutions, with the General Assembly promoting international cooperation and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) promoting the protection of human rights.³⁷ As climate-related disasters become more frequent, the displacement of affected populations has increasingly been recognized as a human rights concern.³⁸ Environmental hazards affect the enjoyment of rights including access to adequate housing, food, water, health, and security, while also placing additional pressures on governments and host communities.³⁹ These challenges often extend beyond national borders, highlighting the importance of international cooperation and sustainable development in addressing the needs of displaced populations.⁴⁰

The United Nations has increasingly included climate-related displacement in discussions on human rights, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, and disaster risk reduction.⁴¹ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes international cooperation in addressing global challenges that affect sustainable development.⁴² This shift has prompted Member States and United Nations entities to examine how existing legal and institutional frameworks can respond to populations displaced by climate-related hazards.⁴³

The Global Compact on Refugees and *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, both adopted by the General Assembly, acknowledges that disasters, environmental degradation, and climate change affect the ease of mobility for refugees.⁴⁴ In 2021, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 48/13 further highlighting the relationship between environmental conditions

³³ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Global Trends Report 2025*. 2025.

³⁴ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

³⁵ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

³⁶ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

³⁷ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Mandate of UN Human Rights*. 2026.

³⁸ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 2004.

³⁹ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change and displacement*. N.d.

⁴⁰ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change and displacement*. N.d.

⁴¹ United Nations, Commission for Global Communication. *The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement*. 2022

⁴² United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁴⁴ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *The Global Compact on Refugees*. 2018.; United Nations, General Assembly. *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/RES/70/1)*. 2019.

and the enjoyment of human rights.⁴⁵ The following year, the Secretary-General released the *Action Agenda on Internal Displacement* identifying climate change and disasters as significant drivers of displacement that require coordinated international responses.⁴⁶

These developments demonstrate an expanding international focus on climate-related displacement while also illustrating the complexity of the issue. Existing initiatives promote cooperation, strengthen institutional coordination, and encourage the protection of displaced populations, yet they do not establish an international legal framework specifically addressing climate-related displacement.⁴⁷ As climate-related displacement has increased in frequency and scale, Member States have expanded discussions examining whether existing international frameworks provide adequate protection for affected populations.⁴⁸

Although Member States agree that climate-related displacement presents significant humanitarian and human rights challenges, they continue to differ on whether existing international legal frameworks provide sufficient protection for affected populations.⁴⁹ The 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* establishes protections for individuals fleeing persecution, but it does not address displacement caused by environment factors.⁵⁰ Discussions have arisen regarding whether existing refugee and human rights tools should be expanded or whether new legal mechanisms are necessary.⁵¹ While the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has emphasized that existing international law may provide protection in certain circumstances, it has also identified legal gaps that shape discussions among Member States.⁵²

A second area of debate concerns responsibility for responding to climate-related displacement. The *Global Compact on Refugees* and the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* emphasize international cooperation and responsibility-sharing.⁵³ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights partnerships as an important part of addressing global challenges.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Member States continue to hold differing views to the extent of which the international community should assist countries experiencing large-scale

⁴⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/RES/48/13)*. 2021.

⁴⁶ United Nations, Commission for Global Communication. *The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement*. 2022.

⁴⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁴⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁴⁹ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change impacts and cross-border displacement: international refugee law and UNHCR's mandate*. 2023.

⁵⁰ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁵² United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁵³ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *The Global Compact on Refugees*. 2018.; United Nations, General Assembly. *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/RES/70/1)*. 2019.

⁵⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

displacement, particularly in relation to financial assistance, resettlement, climate adaptation, and support for host communities.⁵⁵ The Secretary-General's *Action Agenda on Internal Displacement* further emphasizes prevention, protection, and durable solutions, contributing to ongoing discussions over whether international efforts should focus on reducing displacement before it occurs or strengthening humanitarian responses after it has already happened.⁵⁶

Member States also examine how international action should balance the protection of human rights with respect to state sovereignty.⁵⁷ Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13 recognizes the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, while existing human rights initiatives affirm the importance of protecting the dignity and rights of displaced populations.⁵⁸ At the same time, the Charter of the United Nations recognizes the sovereignty of Member States and limits international intervention in matters primarily under national government jurisdiction.⁵⁹ As a result, discussions continue regarding the appropriate role of the United Nations in encouraging international cooperation while respecting national authority over migration, border management, disaster response, and domestic implementation of human rights obligations.⁶⁰ These debates continue to influence the development and implementation of the international legal and institutional frameworks discussed in the following sections.

International and Regional Framework (What law already Exists)

There is currently no single legally binding treaty specifically designating “climate refugees.”⁶¹ Safeguarding human rights for populations displaced by climate change relies on a multi-layered framework consisting of international human rights law, regional binding agreements, and non-binding global policy mechanisms.⁶² The UN international human rights framework is anchored by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which established the foundational principles that have since been incorporated into binding treaties, international law, and international human rights oversight.⁶³

One particularly relevant treaty is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly as well as the right to a fair

⁵⁵ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *The Global Compact on Refugees*. 2018.

⁵⁶ United Nations, Commission for Global Communication. *The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement*. 2022.

⁵⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁵⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/RES/48/13)*. 2021.

⁵⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d.

⁶⁰ United Nations, Commission for Global Communication. *The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement*. 2022.

⁶¹ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change impacts and cross-border displacement: international refugee law and UNHCR's mandate*. 2023.

⁶² United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁶³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217(III))*. 1948.

trial.⁶⁴ These protections may become especially important when individuals are forced to relocate due to environmental disasters or long-term climate-related changes. Regional binding human rights agreements are legally enforceable treaties negotiated by intergovernmental organizations outside the UN.⁶⁵ Regional human rights agreements complement the international human rights framework by addressing regional priorities and providing additional mechanisms for enforcing human rights obligations.⁶⁶

Although not a legally binding treaty, the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* provide the primary international framework for protecting internally displaced persons, including those displaced by disasters and climate-related hazards.⁶⁷ These principles compile existing obligations from international human rights law, humanitarian law, and refugee law into a single framework that guides governments and humanitarian organizations in protecting displaced populations.⁶⁸ Regional binding human rights agreements may be considered by the UN when deciding potential direction for policy and legal reform.⁶⁹

Despite these existing frameworks, many significant legal challenges remain.⁷⁰ The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugees as individuals fleeing persecution on specific grounds such as race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.⁷¹ Climate-related factors are not explicitly included within this definition.⁷² As a result, many individuals displaced by sea-level rise, drought, desertification, or extreme weather events may not qualify for refugee status under current international law.⁷³

Role of International System

Climate-related displacement brings challenges that no state can fully address on its own. Environmental hazards frequently affect multiple countries simultaneously, while displaced populations often move across national borders or into neighboring states.⁷⁴ Furthermore,

⁶⁴ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. 1966.

⁶⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁶⁷ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 2004.

⁶⁸ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 2004.

⁶⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁷⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁷¹ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

⁷² United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

⁷³ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.; United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁷⁴ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

countries that are the most vulnerable to climate-related displacement are often those with the fewest resources to respond effectively.⁷⁵ As a result, international cooperation has become central to safeguarding the human rights of displaced populations.

The international system plays an important role in coordinating humanitarian assistance, supporting long-term development efforts, and organizing cooperation between states.⁷⁶ Several international organizations contribute to these efforts. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works to protect refugees, asylum seekers, and many internally displaced persons, while also providing legal guidance regarding displacement due to climate change.⁷⁷ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works to strengthen climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and sustainable development, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) coordinates emergency humanitarian responses during crises.⁷⁸ These organizations provide assistance that many states would be unable to deliver on their own.

Humanitarian and development programs rely heavily on voluntary contributions from member states, creating funding shortfalls that can limit assistance for displaced populations.⁷⁹ At the same time, many of the countries hosting a large, displaced population are developing countries with limited financial resources.⁸⁰ This has led to ongoing debates regarding burden-sharing and climate justice.⁸¹ Some member states argue that countries with greater greenhouse gas emissions should take more financial responsibility in responding to climate-related displacement, while others emphasize that all states share a collective responsibility to address humanitarian needs.⁸²

The international community must also balance state sovereignty with the protection of human rights. States maintain the authority to regulate migration, control their borders, and determine admission policies within their territories.⁸³ However, international standards require that individuals be protected from discrimination and that their rights be respected regardless of migration status.⁸⁴ This tension is particularly significant when climate-related disasters force populations to seek safety beyond their country's borders.

Internally Displaced Persons

⁷⁵ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change and displacement*. N.d.

⁷⁶ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Global Trends Report 2025*. 2025. p. 13

⁷⁷ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *UNHCR's mandate for Refugees and stateless persons, and its role in IDP situations*. N.d.

⁷⁸ United Nations, Development Programme. *About us*. N.d.

⁷⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁸⁰ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025.

⁸¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁸² United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁸³ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Law and policy for protection and climate action*. N.d.

⁸⁴ United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change impacts and cross-border displacement: international refugee law and UNHCR's mandate*. 2023.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence but remain within the internationally recognized borders of their country.⁸⁵ According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, displacement may result from armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural disasters, or human-made disasters.⁸⁶ Climate-related disasters such as floods, droughts, desertification, sea-level rises, wildfires, and extreme weather have become increasingly significant drivers of internal displacement.

Unlike refugees, IDPs remain under the jurisdiction of their own governments.⁸⁷ As a result, responsibility for protecting their human rights rests primarily with the state in which they live.⁸⁸ Displaced populations may also experience food insecurity, disruptions to healthcare services, interrupted educational opportunities, and limited access to employment.⁸⁹ Women, children, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations frequently face heightened risks of exploitation, violence, and social exclusion during periods of displacement.⁹⁰ In some cases, displaced communities may become politically marginalized and excluded from decisions regarding relocation, reconstruction, and resource distribution.⁹¹

Protecting the rights of IDPs presents significant governance challenges. Many governments must respond to displacement while simultaneously addressing damaged infrastructure, limited public services, and declining economic productivity.⁹² Decreased financial resources, insufficient administrative capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and underdeveloped emergency response systems can limit the ability of states to provide long-term assistance.⁹³

Cross-Border Displaced Populations

When climate-related events force individuals to cross an international border, questions concerning legal status and protection become significantly more complex.⁹⁴ Under international law, a refugee is generally defined as a person who is outside their country of nationality and unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.⁹⁵ An asylum-seeker is an individual who has requested refugee protection, but whose claim has not yet been formally determined.⁹⁶ While these categories provide important legal protections, many people

⁸⁵ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁸⁶ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁸⁷ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁸⁸ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁸⁹ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁹⁰ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁹¹ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁹² United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁹³ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d.

⁹⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁹⁵ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

⁹⁶ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951.

displaced by climate-related factors do not automatically qualify under existing refugee definitions.

Current international law provides limited protection for populations displaced across borders primarily because of environmental degradation, sea-level rise, desertification, or recurring climate-related disasters.⁹⁷ Although international human rights law continues to apply to all individuals regardless of status, no universally recognized legal category currently exists for most climate-displaced persons.⁹⁸ This gap is especially relevant for small island developing states facing long-term environmental threats.⁹⁹

Countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Maldives have drawn international attention because rising sea levels may eventually make portions of their territory uninhabitable.¹⁰⁰ These circumstances raise unprecedented legal and political questions concerning state continuity, citizenship, territorial sovereignty, and the preservation of cultural identity.¹⁰¹ The General Assembly must therefore consider whether existing legal frameworks are sufficient to protect climate-displaced populations or whether new international mechanisms are necessary.¹⁰² Any future approach will require balancing humanitarian obligations, state sovereignty, practical implementation challenges, and the long-term protections of human rights.¹⁰³

Conclusion

Climate change is increasingly reshaping patterns of human displacement across the globe. While international human rights law establishes important protections for all persons, significant legal gaps remain in safeguarding populations displaced by environmental degradation and climate-related disasters. The international community continues to face complicated questions concerning legal recognition, humanitarian responsibility, financial support, and the balance between state sovereignty and the protection of human rights. As climate-related displacement increases, delegates must evaluate how existing international frameworks, institutions, and cooperative mechanisms can address the evolving challenges facing displaced populations while considering the diverse priorities and capacities of Member States. Delegates may consider how the international community can support national governments while respecting state sovereignty and ensuring that displaced populations maintain access to fundamental human rights.

⁹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁹⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

⁹⁹ De Bray, Edouard. United Nations News. *Earth Day: The battle to save a drowning Pacific island nation*. 2026.

¹⁰⁰ De Bray, Edouard. United Nations News. *Earth Day: The battle to save a drowning Pacific island nation*. 2026.

¹⁰¹ De Bray, Edouard. United Nations News. *Earth Day: The battle to save a drowning Pacific island nation*. 2026.

¹⁰² United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

¹⁰³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Providing legal options to protect the human rights of persons displaced across international borders due to climate change*. 2023.

Questions to Consider

1. Should climate-displaced persons receive a distinct legal status under international law?
2. How can states protect the human rights of internally displaced persons while respecting national sovereignty?
3. What responsibilities do high-emission states have toward populations displaced by climate change?
4. How should the international community distribute the financial burden of responding to climate displacement?
5. What role should regional organizations play in addressing cross-border displacement?
6. How can vulnerable populations maintain access to housing, healthcare, education, and employment after displacement?
7. Should existing legal frameworks be expanded to include climate-related displacement, or should a new framework be created?
8. How can the United Nations improve coordination among humanitarian, development, and human rights institutions responding to climate displacement?

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This UN News article examines the effects of sea-level rise on Pacific island communities, illustrating the real-world human consequences of climate change and displacement. It provides a case study demonstrating how environmental degradation can threaten livelihoods, territorial integrity, and human rights.

United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *The Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement*. 2022. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.un.org/en/content/action-agenda-on-internal-displacement/>

This report presents the Secretary-General's vision for strengthening multilateralism and addressing emerging global challenges, including climate change, inequality, and displacement. It is useful for understanding how the United Nations views climate-related displacement within broader discussions of sustainable development, human rights, and international cooperation.

United Nations, Department of Global Communication. *United Nations Charter*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

The United Nations Charter establishes the purposes, principles, and organizational structure of the United Nations, including the principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention. It provides the legal foundation for understanding the balance between protecting human rights and respecting Member State sovereignty throughout discussions on climate-related displacement.

United Nations, Development Programme. *About us*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.undp.org/about-us>

This page explains the mission and activities of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It demonstrates how development assistance can help address the root causes and consequences of climate-related displacement.

United Nations, General Assembly. (2018). *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*. A/RES/73/195. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/195>

The Global Compact for Migration is the first UN framework addressing international migration through a comprehensive cooperative approach. It recognizes environmental degradation and climate change as drivers of migration and provides guidance for international cooperation on migration governance and climate-related mobility.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Institution-building of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/RES/5/1)*. 2007. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/601912?ln=en&v=pdf>

This resolution established the Human Rights Council's institutional framework, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). It was used to explain how non-binding human rights mechanisms promote accountability through peer review and international dialogue among Member States.

United Nations, General Assembly. *The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/RES/48/13)*. 2021. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://docs.un.org/en/a/hrc/res/48/13>

This resolution recognizes the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right. It supports discussion of the growing relationship between environmental protection and the enjoyment of human rights in the context of climate-related displacement.

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights established the foundational principles of the modern international human rights system. It was used to define human rights and explain the legal and normative basis for protecting populations displaced by climate change.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/70/1>

The 2030 Agenda establishes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and emphasizes international cooperation to address interconnected global challenges, including climate change, poverty, and inequality. It supports discussion of how climate-related displacement affects sustainable development and highlights the importance of coordinated international action.

United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 2004. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.unhcr.org/us/sites/en-us/files/legacy-pdf/43ce1cff2.pdf>

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement compile existing international legal standards applicable to internally displaced persons and provide guidance for governments and humanitarian organizations. They are particularly relevant because most climate-related displacement occurs within national borders, making the Principles a key framework for protecting affected populations.

United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *About internally displaced persons*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/about-internally-displaced-persons>

This resource defines internally displaced persons (IDPs) and discusses the unique vulnerabilities faced by IDPs and explains the international legal framework used to protect their rights. This source is particularly useful for the IDP subtopic.

United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. 1951. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>

The 1951 Refugee Convention establishes the international legal definition of a refugee and outlines the rights and protections afforded to refugees under international law. It is central to this topic because it explains why many individuals displaced solely by climate change do not currently qualify for refugee status.

United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. 1966. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

The ICCPR is a legally binding treaty that guarantees fundamental civil and political rights to individuals. It was used to explain how existing human rights treaties continue to protect many rights relevant to populations displaced by climate-related disasters and environmental degradation.

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This resource explains the mandate, responsibilities, and authority of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The article is useful for understanding how human rights protections are implemented within the UN system.

United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Climate change impacts and cross-border displacement: international refugee law and UNHCR's mandate*. 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from:

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This resource examines the relationship between climate change and human mobility. It emphasizes that climate change often interacts with existing vulnerabilities such as conflict and poverty, making displacement more likely. It is useful for explaining why climate displacement has become a growing international concern.

United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Global Trends Report 2025*. 2025. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-trends-2025-report>

The Global Trends Report is UNHCR's annual assessment of worldwide forced displacement, providing the latest statistics and analysis on refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and other displaced populations. It was used to establish the scale of the current global displacement crisis and place climate-related displacement within broader global displacement trends.

United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Law and policy for protection and climate action*. N.d. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/climate-change-and-displacement/law-and-policy-protection>

This resource examines legal and policy approaches for addressing climate-related displacement. It is useful for discussions regarding future legal reforms and policy solutions.

United Nations, Refugee Agency. *Refugee Data Finder*. 2025. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>

This database provides current statistics regarding refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and other populations of concern. The platform allows researchers to examine global and regional displacement trends and is useful for obtaining quantitative evidence regarding displacement patterns and humanitarian needs.

United Nations, Refugee Agency. *The Global Compact on Refugees*. 2018. Retrieved 13 July 2026 from: <https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr/who-we-are/global-compact-refugees>

The Global Compact on Refugees provides a framework for improving international cooperation and responsibility-sharing in responding to refugee situations. It was used to explain ongoing discussions regarding burden-sharing, support for host communities, and coordinated international responses to displacement, including displacement influenced by climate change.

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