



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
COUNCIL  
TOPIC BULLETIN

ESTEBAN MEDINA  
CHRISTA AKERELE  
CHAIRS

## Contents:

Letters from the Chairs .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Topic A: Rights of Climate Refugees .....	5
Topic History .....	5-6
Current Situation .....	6-9
Country Policy .....	9-11
Questions to Consider .....	11
Topic B: Rights of Journalists in Conflict Zones .....	12
Topic History .....	12-14
Current Situation .....	14-15
Country Policy / Conclusion .....	15-16
Questions to Consider .....	17
References .....	17-18



## SECRETARIAT

SARAH MCILROY  
SECRETARY GENERAL

ARIEL BARNEA  
CHARGÉ D' AFFAIRES

ZHIZHEN ZHANG  
DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

JUSTIN OH  
DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

RAEHASH SHAH  
DIRECTOR OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

LUCAS KIM  
DIRECTOR OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

KRISHI DESAI  
DIRECTORS OF OPERATIONS

ANNETTE KIM  
DIRECTORS OF OPERATIONS

JASON PING  
CHIEF OF STAFF

MARK KRAMER  
FACULTY ADVISOR

SCOTT DEMETER  
FACULTY ADVISOR

ANDREA BUCCINO  
FACULTY ADVISOR

# Academy Model United Nations

- THE TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE -

Dear Delegates,

My name is Esteban Medina, and I am extremely excited to be your co-chair for UNHRC at AMUN XXI. I am currently a junior at the Academy of Business and Finance, and have been an active MUN-ner for some time now!

I started Model UN late into my freshman year, and ever since then I've developed a passion for it. During the conferences I have attended, I've been able to meet new, intelligent people and discuss a wide-range of topics, including the Kashmir conflict to cybersecurity. The high level of debate present at MUN conferences never fails to amaze me, and I hope to further see that at this year's AMUN conference.

Outside of MUN, you can find me hanging out with friends, reading, or watching Netflix. I can not wait to meet you all, and if you have any questions about the conference or topics, please feel free to contact me!

Sincerely,  
Esteban Medina, Co-Chair, UNHRC  
[estmed21@bergen.org](mailto:estmed21@bergen.org)

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this year's Academy Model UN conference and more specifically, the United Nations Human Rights Council. My name is Christa Akerele and I am currently a junior in the medical academy here at Bergen Academies. In addition to my passion for medicine and science, Model UN is something I have enjoyed since I was first introduced to it in middle school. Ever since then I have loved attending conferences, talking about topics that have a huge impact on the day to day lives of people around the world, and meeting all kinds of new people.

Apart from Model UN, I love to run all throughout the year, whether its cross country, winter track, or spring track. The teamwork and desire to do one's absolute best is something I see every practice/meet and it reminds me greatly of ambitious model UN delegates such as yourselves. I look forward to meeting you all and having some great committee sessions. Please feel free to reach out to me or Esteban if you have any questions!

Sincerely,  
Christa Akerele, Co-Chair, UNHRC  
[chrake21@bergen.org](mailto:chrake21@bergen.org)



# Introduction

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a global body whose mission is to promote and protect human rights internationally. The UNHRC primarily works to investigate breaches of human rights in UN member states. Some of the human rights issues commonly addressed include freedom of assembly, expression, and religion, as well as protecting the rights of different groups of people, such as women, LGBT+, journalists, refugees, etc.

The UNHRC was established on March 15, 2006 by the UN General Assembly in order to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). This was due to heavy criticism of the UNCHR for allowing countries with long histories of human rights violations to become members.

The UNHRC has 47 members. These members are elected for terms lasting three years and are based on a regional group basis by members of the General Assembly. No member of the UNHRC is allowed to occupy a seat for two consecutive terms. The

distribution of seats are 13 for Africa, 13 for Asia, 6 for Eastern European states, 8 for Latin America and the Caribbean, and 7 for Western European and other regional groups. The UNHRC also holds regular sessions three times a year (in March, June, and September), although if there are any special cases of human rights violations or emergencies the body can decide at any time to hold a special session at the request of one-third of the member states.

Since the establishment of the body in 2006, the UNHRC has gone to raise awareness and set standards on several cases of human rights violations. For example, the Human Rights Council has adopted the Resolution 10/4 regarding climate change and human rights. Furthermore, violations from several countries have been addressed by the UNHRC. Overall the UNHRC aims to promote and protect the rights of the international community, as well as any address violations present.



## Topic A: Rights of Climate Refugees

### Topic History

The term “climate refugee” has been in the public discourse since 1985. According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), climate refugees are defined as “... those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life.” Even though every year there is an increasing amount of climate refugees present, there is actually no international legal recognition for them. This is especially perplexing as the term “environmental refugees” have been used since the 1970s and the International Organization of Migration estimates there to be as many as 200 million climate refugees by the year 2050.

In 2018, crises such as the severe drought in Afghanistan, the tropical cyclone Gita in Samoa, and extensive floods in the Philippines, have created a huge demand for humanitarian aid. The Internal



Displacement Monitoring Centre recorded 18.8 million new displacements of people within their countries in relation to multiple climate disasters recorded in 2017. The majority of disaster displacement was connected to natural hazards and climate change that extensively impacted the people within their own nation. However, displacement across borders has and will continue to occur, and it may be connected with other political conflicts.

The Nansen Conference on climate change and displacement was held in June 2011 in Norway and was a crucial step forward in the protection of climate refugees. The conference established ten principles on climate change and the subsequent possibility of cross-border displacement, especially in the context of sudden events that may lead to displacement. The principles revolve around the facilitation of regional policy in response to displacement caused by changes in the environment. Following the Nansen Conference, Norway and Switzerland created the Nansen initiative in 2012. The goal of the Nansen initiative was to

address the legal gaps present in human rights law for people being displaced across borders due to change in weather or environment.

The Paris Agreement also indirectly addresses climate refugees. At the 2017 UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany, decision-makers discussed how to implement the Paris Agreement's Goals, including aiding displaced people. Several countries have already pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to combat climate change, and subsequently prevent climate refugees. Recently the United States (one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions) withdrew from the Paris Agreement. The effects of this may potentially be negative in terms of preventing displacement from climate change.

## Current Situation

As changes in the environment and climate continue to take place, the amount of global migration has been estimated to increase significantly. The problem of climate refugees is that many



nations have already begun to take precautions against the influx of millions of refugees due to the inevitable continuation of climate change and the displacement that it results in. Some countries such as India, an already heavily overcrowded country, have taken to creating physical barriers that may help to lessen the amount of migration into the country. Furthermore, some countries have attempted to deter migrants by offering money to applicants for asylum that withdraw their requests. While countries continue to make the effort to decrease the amount of migrants, environmental factors are still forcing people to leave their homes.

The conditions that climate refugees face in their home countries are unbearable and a clear infringement upon human rights. Changes in the Earth have caused a scarcity of natural resources. In many places, access to drinking water is extremely limited. Local people struggle immensely to make a living as they endure very difficult living conditions and the lack of resources results in the death of livestock and crops which

are normally relied upon to make a living. These problems are amplified by “hot spots” which make the area excessively hot and dry for a certain period of time. At other times, the climate will become extremely wet or cold and the combination of such conditions makes agricultural efforts almost futile.

For many countries, such as Bangladesh and the villages within, natural disasters have become apart of daily life causing many to lose their homes to disasters such as extreme floods. Hundreds of thousands of people occupy this country while it is very susceptible to natural disasters. This leaves many people with no home and nowhere to go to escape these recurring conditions but other countries. Some areas previously had land but have lost this land due to weather conditions and the floods. Monsoons contribute to the magnitude of floods that will continue to grow and cyclones will become much more intense due to human induced climate change.

The European Council on Foreign Relations estimated that upwards of 500,000 people were



displaced within Chad due to environment changes. Average temperatures continue to increase, resulting in more potent natural disasters. Prolonged droughts, in combination with wanton irrigation practices, have caused crucial natural resources to dry out. According to The Climate Institute “The Lake Chad Basin, for example – encompassing regions of Niger, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Chad – once covered an area of 25,000 km<sup>2</sup>, but only 10 percent of this remains. NASA has estimated that even this could disappear within 25 years. A staggering 2.4 million people have already become displaced, yet this basin remains the lifeblood for a further 38 million, who rely heavily on its water and arable land.”

As people move away from catastrophe, overcrowding may become a huge problem. Urban areas are becoming overpopulating even within the same country from people in rural areas who can no longer survive in the current conditions.

The debate over climate has been long standing. While certain countries acknowledge its presence

more than others, even in the developed countries, people are being forced to leave their homes due to the sinking of entire towns. Over the past few decades, islands and mainlands have experienced more flooding as a result of climate change to the point where residents who had not planned on ever leaving have no choice but to leave for their own safety. Increased climate change is heavily associated with warming ocean temperatures, rising sea levels, and more severe hurricanes. In fact, some studies have found that the change in climate has made natural disasters such as hurricanes much more destructive than they ever were before. This is taking place in some of the most advanced countries such as the United States, making it clear that this is not only a problem for poor undeveloped countries but for all nations. Sadly, many of the people and countries that suffer the most from the natural disasters directly linked to climate change are those that have contributed the least to the problem, with some of the lowest levels of greenhouse gas emissions.



Around the world, people have begun to make an effort to try to slow the negative effects of climate change. Although a significant amount of damage has already been done, regulations of fossil fuels and lowering of greenhouse gas emissions could possibly aid the fight against climate change, and by extension help climate refugees. As the debate on how best to help climate refugees continues, it useful to know that simple personal life changes such as less use of electricity, less consumption of goods such as clothing, and decreased fossil fuel usage can help diminish the repercussions of human-induced climate change in the long-term.

Nonetheless, the refugees in search of a home and proper living conditions are a problem of the present that must be addressed immediately as each day thousands suffer. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings have the right to food and shelter, two things that climate refugees currently lack making this a pressing issue for the United

Nations Human Rights Council to tackle.

In upcoming years migration across national borders will likely be a necessity but many want to leave their homes with dignity which the status or label of refugee does not connote. At the same time, the creation of a new label to identify people escaping the effect of climate change would not only reduce certain benefit for refugees of political refugees but also require resources that refugees organizations do not have due to other ongoing conflicts around the world.

## Country Policy

The point of division in terms of each individual country's policy is based upon several factors including: level of displacement and natural changes present, levels of emission standards, and governmental opinions on international solutions in place (i.e. Paris Agreement, SDGs, etc.). Emission standards are usually very important to consider because it represents economic statue: countries with stricter emission



standards are more likely to be able to follow and afford strict regulation to combat climate change, and thus, prevent climate refugees.

Member nations that are part of the European Union (EU) usually set strong goals for reducing current levels of greenhouse gases and have, historically, been pioneers in terms of aiding those displaced by changes in the environment. The EU is also known for placing issues regarding human rights as a priority. In fact, both climate change and human rights topics are issues taken very seriously by the developed nations in the European Union. For this reason, most European countries take an especially progressive stance in terms of the rights of climate refugees. Rising waters, fires, and heatwaves in continental Europe have all led to the displacement of people, further proving the issue at hand to be a priority to European countries.

Eastern Asian nations, such as Japan and South Korea, are very similar to EU members in terms of policy regarding the rights of climate refugees. Countries in this

region have also been subject to changing conditions, most notably strong winds and rains.

The United States of America has recently had a more conservative and tougher stance on policy directed towards climate refugees. For the most part, the US has taken human rights issues very seriously, but it is still important to consider that the country is now the largest producer of oil, withdrew from the Paris Agreement, and has a current lack of political willingness to diversify manners of producing energy. All of this, on top of the fact that the US is one of the largest polluters, could be detrimental to preventing changes in the environment.

Countries in most of Africa are still developing economically and politically. This, alongside several environmental issues, have led to many humanitarian crises regarding climate refugees. Sub-Saharan and Eastern African nations are more likely to currently be receiving aid in the form of technology and resources to combat the issue at hand.

Overall, countries that are large producers of oil are less likely



to be progressive in terms of aiding climate refugees. This is true for countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and Brazil, for example. From an economic perspective, it is not in the best interest for large producers of oil to combat climate change, and thus prevent the issue of climate refugees. On the other hand, there is a general trend of more developed nations being very progressive and lenient on the issue due to their strong economic standing. Simply, they can afford to implement any changes needed. These are general trends, but it is important to know that each country has their individual policy with rights of climate refugees.

## Questions to Consider

What would be the benefits or negatives of possibly creating a new internationally recognized status for environmental refugees?

What actions taken by the United Nations Human Rights Council can help to better the living conditions

of people within their own countries?

What are the links between migration, the environment, and climate change?

Does your government have any programs that address the effects of climate change on climate refugees? Does your country have any policy regarding the rights of climate refugees?

What should be the definition of a climate refugee?

How does this impact both developed and third world countries alike?

How can the United Nations subsidize providing the proper relief and resources needed to help climate refugees around the world?

How is the issue of climate refugees interrelated with other ongoing political conflicts and refugees in general?



## **Topic B: Rights of Journalists in Conflict Zones**

### **Topic History**

Since 1992, there have been more than 1,200 cases of violence against journalists. These cases have been due to organized crime groups, military, and local police and include intimidation, abduction, illegal arrests, torture, and murder. Although freedom of expression is accepted as a human right universally, many governments around the world continue to monitor and harass journalists. This is especially true during times of conflict, in which journalists are most vulnerable to be censored for political reasons. Conflict zones not only include the conventional war, but also scenes of terrorism, political feuds between parties or politicians, and any other scenario in which a journalist is being exposed to danger to inform the international community of what is occurring. Furthermore, the problem for journalists does not stop at the zone of conflict, as many countries are notorious for their lack of response when it comes to violence and censorship of journalists. Countries such as North Korea, in which the censorship of



the press is so prominent that no current major authority can truly aid in the fight for the rights of journalists, exemplify this issue.

A well known example of the rights of journalists being infringed upon is during times of conflict when the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) flagrantly violated human rights. The terrorist organization reached its peak in notoriety in 2014 when James Foley and Steven Scotloff, two American journalists, were beheaded on film. The deeply disturbing images soon went viral and brought the organization into the attention of the international community. Additionally, local journalists began disappearing and being taken hostage as well in order to further promote the group's extremist ideology.

In past years the amount of journalists killed while reported in areas of armed conflict has risen substantially making this a very urgent issue. Although the 42 journalists killed in 2003 may seem like a relatively small statistic, this was the highest amount of journalist deaths since 1995, emphasizing the spike in complete violation of journalist rights. Many

attributed this rise in deaths to the several military campaigns that were taking place in the Middle East during this time, especially in Iraq. However, even as conflict is ongoing, it is critical that awareness be raised that harming journalists is not only wrong from an ethical aspect, but also a fundamental freedom as a part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2003 more journalists were killed than the coalition's own military personal and dozens of other journalists were injured or kidnapped. Additionally between 2002 and 2013 over 1,300 members of the press were killed, this vast amount of murders is accredited to mistreatment of journalists both in and out of conflict zones, but two-thirds of these killings took place in countries with ongoing armed conflict.

Even more astonishing than the harm done to journalists is the fact that in the past they have been directly targeted in conflict zones. For example, in Palestine territories a prominent Serbian State radio and television building was bombed. Furthermore, the United



States has bombed offices of a Qatar-based Al-Jazeera TV network in Kabul and Baghdad. In order to take action against the ongoing violations of journalists' rights, an organization known as Reporters Without Border created a "Declaration on the safety of journalists and media personnel in situations involving armed conflict," in January of 2003. This document was later revised in 2004 but ultimately serves to display the rules of international conduct and humanitarian law which protects the press during conflict. It was also aimed at emphasizing to local authorities that they must take action against the injustices.

Furthermore, in a meeting in Geneva in 1974, diplomats decided that it was time to include a special measure of protection for journalists. Article number 79 of the Geneva Convention classifies journalists as civilians during times of armed conflict and thus asserts that they deserve the full protection that civilians are entitled to. In this Protocol, Protocol I, there is no unique status for journalists since it is believed that creating more

groups for protection weakens the overall strength of this protection.

## Current Situation

There are four major issues journalists across the world are facing: impunity, press freedom, defamation laws, and government surveillance. Firstly, impunity refers to the lack of prosecution of criminals in cases involving journalists. This is crucial when it comes to understanding the discussion of the rights of journalists as it oftentimes sends the idea that it is okay to continue silencing and harassing the press. There is currently no effective way for the international body to persecute all offenders of crimes against journalists if a country is practicing impunity in those cases. Next, press freedom is often used to refer to the idea that journalists should be able to freely report on true events. In many cases, censorship blocks this from occurring, which may halt the international community of truly understanding what is happening in a country. Additionally, many government information given to



the media is simply inaccurate, which leads to censorship or propaganda. NGOs have also often times pushed for the creation of defamation laws. In most countries where journalists are arrested, the reasoning is unclear. There's usually no distinction between arrests due to specific work or due to the career in general. Large fines, arrests, and harassment with no explanation are being used as tactics to seriously disrupt the career of any journalist. Finally, government surveillance is becoming more common as well, with controversial and prominent journalists having more and more conflicts with national governments. An important area to consider is the emergence of digital security. Governments around the world have been proven to hack calls, texts, and emails of journalists, negatively affecting their work and the profession overall as well as violating their rights to privacy.

Although many nations do consider the freedom of the press as an important right for civilians, that is most often not the case in countries that have seen consistent conflict or

have strict political agendas. A recent example of conflict took place in the African country of Ethiopia. A study conducted in the nation concluded that magazines were promoting terrorism, and the effects of this were devastating to the journalist community of the country, as many writers, editors, and publishers were arrested and several others fled due to safety concerns.

## Country Policy / Conclusion

Some of the most dangerous countries for traveling journalists include Mexico, Brazil, Nepal, and Egypt. The majority of journalists that die while reporting abroad do so in areas of medium level political repression, meaning that the country has extensive levels of murder, execution, and political imprisonment. Common misconceptions are that journalists killed are murdered by criminals or gangs when in fact it is often government agents that kill these journalists. This calls into question the major role that foreign states



play in the deaths of journalists around the world and the actions can be done to stop this. A major problem with this injustice is that not only are thousands of innocent press members killed, but their killers are often not brought to justice. Investigators have found that 9 out of 10 times the killers of journalists go free, suggesting that these crimes may be more organized than expected. In general, countries with average or lower level political repression experience much less journalists death. Killing of the press has been found to correlate with greater conflict to come, emphasizing the reasoning for the necessity and importance of protecting journalists.

The protection of journalists more urgent than citizens around the world may deem it to be. The media is responsible for conveying the severity of situations or conflict in foreign countries and as more and more press is kidnapped or killed this could be a way for other nations to prevent the rest of the world from seeing their gross violation of human rights making this issue much bigger than the

journalists themselves but also the citizens that may need help.

Another aspect of this issue rarely considered is the numerous detrimental effects on the mental health of journalists. As countries open their borders to the press, journalists are subjected to ultimate extremes and gruesome scenes of combat which for even the most experienced members of the press can have long lasting impacts. This brings members of the UN to question whether protection of journalists should become more specific to embodying all aspects of journalists health. Although journalists choose to enter these conflict zones, they do so to make information available to the public on a global basis, making some argue that it is our responsibility to aid them following trauma endure and thus properly fulfill the duty of “protecting” journalists fully.



# Questions to Consider

Provide a clear definition of the terms “National Security” and “Extremist activity” (which are often used to justify imprisonment of journalists).

What rights should be given to journalists during time of conflict?

Are journalists imprisoned or attacked due to their individual words or because of their general profession?

How can media industries and other groups better prepare journalists who are reporting in conflict?

How much regulation of the press should there be during times of conflict?

How can regulating bodies ensure that member states are protecting their journalists, investigating attacks, and prosecuting

perpetrators of violence?

As social media becomes more prominent around the world, how should non-professional media workers (who, for example, may be posting videos online of events) be treated and protected?

What could the United Nations do to impact the treatment of journalists around the world beyond the international humanitarian law?

## References

### Topic A

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

<https://www.youthforhumanrights.org/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/articles-16-30.html>

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/10-solutions-for-climate-change/>



<http://climate.org/climate-home/>

<https://www.unhcr.org/596f25467.pdf>

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)621893\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/621893/EPRS_BRI(2018)621893_EN.pdf)

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/oil-producing-countries/>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to>

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/06/lets-talk-about-climate-migrants-not-climate-refugees/>

## **Topic B**

<https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/protection-journalists>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/28/we-examined-more-than-1300-journalist-killings->

[between-2002-and-2013-heres-what-we-learned/](https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/artistic-expression?redirect=free-speech/freedom-expression)

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/artistic-expression?redirect=free-speech/freedom-expression>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

<https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes/International-Declaration>

<https://cpj.org/africa/ethiopia/>

