

**The Hague Debates
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**Address by Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary
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I am happy to participate in this series of the Hague Debates.

According to the Brazilian education theorist Paulo Freire, the world is split between those who do not sleep because they are hungry and those who do not sleep because they are afraid of those who are hungry.

At present, this way of looking at the world may reflect common fears more than reality. Nonetheless, most studies of the future social consequences of climate change identify large-scale migration and conflict over scarce resources as a likely consequence of climate change.

So what are some of the impacts that could cause conflict or act as push factors for population movements?

The Fourth Assessment Report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change last year, includes the following projections:

Water security

In the course of the century, water supplies stored in glaciers and snow cover are projected to decline, reducing water availability in regions supplied by melt-water from major mountain ranges, where more than one-sixth of the world population currently lives.

- *Freshwater availability in Central, South, East and Southeast Asia, particularly in large river basins, is projected to decrease due to climate change which, along with population growth and increasing demand arising from higher standards of living, could adversely affect more than a billion people by the 2050s.
- Himalayan glaciers contain the largest store of water outside the polar ice caps and feed seven great Asian rivers, including the Yellow River, the Yangtze, the Mekong and the Ganges rivers. The IPCC projects that these rivers are initially likely to overflow as Himalayan glaciers melt and then recede significantly or dry up.

In regions not supplied by melt water, water resources are also likely to become severely strained due to changed rainfall patterns. By 2020, for example, between 75 and 250 million people in Africa are projected to be exposed to an increase of water stress due to climate change. If coupled with increased demand, this will adversely affect livelihoods and exacerbate water-related problems.

Food security

Increases in temperatures and the frequency of droughts and floods are projected to affect crop yields negatively, especially in subsistence sectors at low latitudes, increasing the risk of hunger.

Sea-level rise

Many millions of people are projected to be flooded every year due to sea-level rise by the 2080s. Those densely-populated and low-lying areas where adaptive capacity is relatively low, and which already face other challenges such as tropical storms or local coastal subsidence, are especially at risk. The numbers affected will be largest in the mega-deltas of Asia and Africa while small islands are especially vulnerable.

Sixteen of the world's nineteen largest cities (population above 10 million) are located on coastlines.

The regions most affected by climate change include Africa, the Asian mega-deltas and Small Island Developing States. Overall, developing countries are most vulnerable to climate change impacts, due to existing stresses such as economic weakness, poverty and political instability, as well as their low adaptive capacity. Concurrently, climate change impacts have the potential to undo economic development gains and to keep countries in the poverty trap.

The IPCC found that increased migration may occur in the most affected regions.

Impacts on biodiversity, agriculture, water supply, and so on, will certainly alter human settlement patterns. Environmental change can contribute directly to migration by pushing people out of uninhabitable areas, turning them into forced migrants, or, more specifically, environmentally displaced persons. If such forced migration pushes across borders, people become undocumented migrants and fall outside of the protection of international law given that they do not have refugee status. The lack of protection of forced migrants is a gap in international law that requires urgent attention especially in view of the projected scale of population movements.

According to the United Nations University, there could be as many as 50 million environmentally displaced persons by 2010 due to climate change impacts, desertification, deforestation and rapid urban development of mega-cities.

With respect to future climate change impacts, estimates and projections for the numbers of environmentally displaced range from 200 million to up to one billion forced migrants.

Climate change impacts add to existing problems

There is a clear link between the numbers of environmentally displaced persons and the level of poverty in their home areas. Environmental pressures are often exacerbated by

issues including economic marginalisation, insecurity, social upheaval and political mismanagement and instability. Climate change impacts in turn exacerbate these issues.

Migration itself can lead to situations of conflict in receiving areas or countries, particularly if the migration in-flow is large and disorderly. The experience of many countries has shown that there is often great difficulty in accepting immigration.

- Problems arise when those who already live in an area feel that newcomers are an unwanted burden.
- This is especially so when communities in search of new livelihood options move to areas that are only just viable. Their presence there can compound social pressures and fuel social tension. One example where this is currently happening is the wave of xenophobic attacks on migrants in South Africa.

Climate change impacts may drive conflict and fuel other drivers of conflict

Potential drivers of conflict include stresses with respect to access to water, food security, access to energy and cultivable land. Climate change impacts may add to existing stresses over these resources, or create new stresses, thereby increasing the potential for conflict, increasing existing political tensions and drive greater global instability.

For people living in unstable states under poor governance and in situations of poverty, climate change impacts will interact with a mix of economic, social and political factors to produce a high risk of serious consequences such as mass migration or violent conflict. According to a study published by the NGO “International Alert”, fragile states thus face a double-headed problem: climate change and violent conflict. Some theorists argue that demographic developments in many developing countries may further increase the likelihood of conflict.

One such demographic development could be “youth bulges”, a phenomenon occurring in numerous developing countries around the globe. A youth bulge refers to a demographic phenomenon in which fighting-age males ranging from 15-29 years of age represent 30 - 40% of the population of a nation. According to the theory, youth bulges have been and continue to be instrumental in the cause of conflict.

A youth bulge creates tension because the formal economy cannot accommodate these people who may well be skilled, depending on the education system. This leads to a high unemployment rate for youths who become demographically superfluous, which leads to increased frustration and adolescent anger. The result is either migration or an increase in crime, rebellion, civil war, revolution, genocide or conquest. (*Gunnar Heinsohn, 2005*)

Other academics support this theory, claiming that throughout history, a very high percentage of males aged 18-35, have caused most wars. Youth bulge societies are most prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific Islands, in other words, in those regions where climate impacts will hit the hardest. The World Bank claims that there are 1.5 billion people world-wide aged between 12 and 24 years, 1.3 billion of whom live in developing countries.

The majority of young people coming of age live in countries in which the basic needs of large parts of the population cannot be adequately met. In combination with the risks, challenges and consequences of climate change impacts, the likelihood of conflict and large-scale migration is significantly increased.

Taking all these issues into account, concerted international efforts are needed in three key areas

1. Migration needs to be managed

Research identifying likely migration flows would do much to reduce the potential of conflict. In this way, destination communities or countries could be identified, problems could be anticipated, benefits identified and the migration process could be managed.

Migration flows tend to raise fears. Under its mission Nautilus III, the EU has recently stepped up efforts to patrol the Mediterranean against illegal immigration, especially from Africa. Such efforts are costly and do not contribute to discouraging migrants from entering a territory illegally. Pushing desperate people back into the sea will not solve the bigger problem.

Responding to the root causes of migration in countries of origin is a more promising avenue to stem the tide of undocumented migrants. Such a response includes support for economic development and support for adaptation.

2. Developing countries need further support in their efforts to grow their economies and eradicate poverty - This needs to be catalyzed through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

In view of climate change abatement, it is crucial that developing countries get support to grow their economies in climate-friendly and climate-proof ways.

- i. Climate-friendly green growth refers to the assistance developing countries need to ensure that their economic development does not compound climate change with the same level of emissions as that of industrialized countries.
- ii. At the same time, economic growth needs to be climate-proof. This refers to the need to strengthen key structures in the economy to make them more resilient to climate change impacts. Sustainable development, involving its social, economic and environmental dimensions, can reduce vulnerability to climate change.

Sustained economic growth and poverty eradication will do much to lessen the potential of conflict and out-migration. It may contribute to job creation, thus lessening youth bulge pressures.

3. Adapting to climate change needs to be an international priority - This should also be catalyzed through the UNFCCC

Failure to help stressed communities with the additional pressure of climate change impacts will mean that existing grievances are intensified. Large-scale adaptation is critical to lessen the potential of conflict and mass out-migration. Adapting refers to minimizing the negative consequences of climate change on peoples' lives, as well as galvanizing the

possible positive consequences. Adaptation is a process through which societies make themselves better able to cope with an uncertain future.

In view of the conflict potential that climate change impacts may introduce, coupled with the political and social realities in many developing countries, it is essential that adaptation and peace-building efforts go hand-in-hand.

Again, sustainable development reduces vulnerability, and adaptation should be implemented in the context of national and international sustainable development priorities and be an integral part of national development plans.

Adaptation needs sustained and sufficient funding and the international community urgently needs to find ways to enable that as part of its response to climate change.

The world needs an enhanced response to climate change

Under the Climate Change Convention, a two-year negotiating phase to enhance the international response to climate change was launched in Bali last year.

The process involves negotiations on how to strengthen on-going work; and how to strengthen the future response to climate change in four key areas: adaptation, mitigation, technology and finance. The assessment and possible enhancement of the Kyoto Protocol beyond the end of its first commitment period in 2012, is also part of this process. The process is set to conclude in an agreed outcome in Copenhagen in 2009.

The process is a real opportunity for countries to step up concerted action on the most global of issues. Concerted action will decrease the cost of action significantly. And the benefits will be greater.

For example, through the flexible mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol, climate-friendly projects that reduce emissions cost-effectively can be implemented, thus contributing to green development in developing countries. Through a small levy on projects, funds can be generated for adaptation. These are good beginnings that countries have agreed should be expanded.

Because climate change is truly a global phenomenon, it impacts every aspect of human life, including issues of migration, conflict and security.

Appropriate climate change abatement will have positive repercussions for all those issues. Appropriate climate change abatement will contribute to easing the pressures associated with each of them, and hopefully also alleviate the fears of those who fear the hungry.

Thank you

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