

## ***Perilous Consequences of Global Climate Change Resulting Climigration***

### **The Reality of Migration:**

Migration, whether permanent or temporary, has always been a traditional response or survival strategy of people confronting the prospect, impact or aftermath of disasters. (Hugo, 1996). Although there had been technological and scientific advances in prediction and mitigation, we have observed serious increase in both mortality and economic losses from disasters since 1960, in particular in the developing countries. Climate induced changes are increasing in impact and scope through the combined effects of economic, social, demographic, ideological and technological factors. Migration is one of the most challenging consequences that residents, as well as local and national governments, face due to climate change. Flooding, deforestation, erosion and a rising sea-level are the primary causes of displacing populations.

“Climigration” is the word that best describes forced migration due to climate change. It results from on-going climate-induced ecological changes in a community’s environment that severely impact infrastructure, such as health clinics and schools, as well as the livelihoods and well-being of the people residing in the community.

Climigration occurs when a community is no longer sustainable for ecological reasons. It differs from migration caused by catastrophic random environmental events. Climigration is forcing communities to permanently relocate, which means there is no ability to return home.

### **Environmentally Displaced Persons and Environmental Migrants:**

A climate refugee is someone displaced by climate change induced environmental disasters. Such disasters are the result of incremental and rapid ecological change and disruption that include increased droughts, desertification, sea level rise, and the more frequent occurrence of extreme weather events.

With the certainty of global warming, the term “climate refugees” is gaining popularity at a global scale. The term climate-refugee implies a mono-causality that one rarely finds in human reality. Climate change impacts will contribute to an increase in forced migration. The impacts depend not only on natural exposure but also on the vulnerability and resilience of the areas and particularly the people in respect to their capacities to adapt. It will have several impacts on the environment, which in turn can impact into conflict. Gradual environmental degradation and slow onset of disasters such as drought are likely to trigger due to climate change. Most vulnerable are developing countries where large sections of the population live directly from agriculture, predominantly in the form of subsistence farming.

## The Guiding Principles

The term “environmentally displaced persons” would be contrary to “climate refugees” and “environmental refugees” not be dependent on location and could be used to describe those that are internally displaced as well as the refugees. “Environmentally displaced persons” has been defined as “persons who are displaced within their own country of habitual residence or who have crossed an international border and for whom environmental degradation, deterioration or destruction is a major cause of their displacement, although not necessarily the sole one.”

The Guiding Principles will also affirm that families and tribes remain together during the relocation process. For indigenous communities, tribal relationships are essential to cultural identity. The relocation process must ensure that socio-cultural institutions remain intact. The Guiding Principles must also ensure that subsistence rights and the customary communal rights to resources are protected and that the relocation process is framed with the intent to improve income strategies.

It will also affirm the human rights principles regarding access to safe and sanitary housing, portable water, education and other basic amenities. The living standards of the affected communities must not be diminished in the relocation process and must implement sustainable development opportunities as part of the relocation process.

### Legal Framework for Climate Refugees:

The right to life is protected in both the UDHR and the ICCPR. Article 3 of the UDHR provides ‘everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person’. The modern human rights system is founded in international law. It traces back to, and is based upon, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. The human rights enshrined in the UDHR have been further articulated in subsequent human rights treaties. Most relevant in this aspect is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). However, as the major human rights treaties were developed before climate change was understood to be a looming threat to human security, the environmental dimension of these rights has not been extensively articulated and the precise connection between climate change and the international human rights law system is as yet inadequately developed. The protection of the environment is ‘a vital part of contemporary human rights doctrine and a sine qua non for numerous human rights, such as the right to health and the right to life’. Current legal instruments and trends in relation to environment law are insufficient to support the existence of a clear and specific right to an environment of a particular quality in international law.

In international law, when a state ratifies an international human rights instrument it undertakes to ensure that the standards contained therein are upheld vis-à-vis those within its territory or subject to its jurisdiction. All organs of the state are responsible for the implementation of international human rights instruments – the executive, the government, the legislature and the judiciary. The failure to

meet its obligations in the climate change context could, for instance, lead to complaints being lodged against that state with the UN treaty monitoring bodies.

Human rights instruments impose broad obligations upon signatory states. By ratifying an international human rights instrument, the State has agreed to respect, protect and fulfill the rights contained within it. The obligation to respect means the country must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights. The obligation to protect requires the country to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses – whether by private or government actors. The obligation to fulfill means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights. Thus irrespective of the cause of a threat to human rights the Signatory still has positive obligations to use all the means within its disposal to uphold the human rights affected. The positive nature of state obligation, in the context of environmental

### **Human Rights Response to Adaptation**

Migration, climate change and environmental degradation are interrelated. Just as environmental degradation and disasters can cause migration, movement of people can also entail significant effects on surrounding ecosystems. This complex nexus needs to be addressed in a holistic manner, taking into account other possible mediating factors including, inter alia, human security, human and economic development, trade, livelihood strategies and conflict. Migration often seems to be misperceived as a failure to adapt to a changing environment. Instead, migration can also be an adaptation strategy to climate and environmental change and is an essential component of the socio-environmental interactions that needs to be managed.

### **Importance for Bangladesh**

Climate induced migration is steadily increasing in Bangladesh. When we say climate, we might essentially refer to not only physical climate but also the political, social and economic climate – much of which has minimal natural and more human intervention. Natural disasters nonetheless are responsible for large scale human migration, but are grossly undermined due to their relative infrequent happening in comparison to human-induced climate change arising from economic activities in Bangladesh are mostly centered in urban areas and lack of best practices in agriculture has also caused the country to gradually lose its average land fertility.

Historically a high number of people, each year, have been involved in cross border job-based migration. Such migrants have either continued renewing annual contracts with their employers, or have permanently left their hometowns because of less rewarding nature of traditional farming jobs. It is clear in plain eyes that these migrants are forced to opt for external economic opportunities predominantly due to the fact that their existing locations do not have the climatic favor that is conducive towards financially rewarding expansionary activities.

The issue of migration and the environment is likely to take on an added gravity in years to come with the recognition that climate change will in all likelihood lead to more natural disasters and freak

weather events. The phenomenon of forced migration caused by climate change is a problem that the world at large and Bangladesh in particular still remains ill prepared to face.

### **Establishment of Social and Environmental Justice:**

Environmental justice also includes providing the opportunity for meaningful participation, recognition or awareness of local and/or cultural issues, and ensuring the capability of people to function fully with society. It seeks to redress inequitable distributions of environmental burdens such as pollution due to "institutionalized racism, unresponsive, unaccountable government policies and regulation and lack of resources and power among affected individuals and communities."

An environmental injustice exists when members of disadvantaged, ethnic, minority or other groups suffer disproportionately at the local, regional (sub-national), or national levels from environmental risks or hazards, and/or suffer disproportionately from violations of fundamental human rights as a result of environmental factors, and/or denied access to environmental investments, benefits, and/or natural resources, and/or are denied access to information; and/or participation in decision making; and/or access to justice in environment-related matters.

### **Environmental Justice through Religious Organizations**

The concept of environmental Justice fits well with the essence of all religions which are justice, equality, care for the Almighty's creations in a rights-based approach. Faith-based environmentalism is a growing trend, with an increasing number of religious leaders and organizations teaching that doing God's will means taking care of the environment. Hence it comes as no surprise that recent years have seen religious groups advocating for cleaner climates and environmental justice. Some examples are given below:

***National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE):*** is committed to "weave the mission of care for God's creation across all areas of organized religion." NRPE has forged relationships with a diverse group of religious organizations, including the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

***The Colorado-based National Association of Evangelicals:*** has been urging its 30 million members to pursue a "biblically balanced agenda" to protect the environment alongside fighting poverty.

***Forum on Religion and Ecology:*** organizes events that bring religious leaders together from all over the world to discuss religion's role in ecological matters.

***The Institute of Hazrat Mohammad SAW:*** promotes peace and enlightenment as the guiding principle of people's lives that Islam teaches and Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) has shown as a living example. By virtue of its location in Bangladesh, one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the

world, the Institute aims to promote and uphold human rights including rights of minorities, disabled, displaced population and environmental governance. Research, academics, documentation and discourses are the modalities of its work.

### **Ethics and Rights-based Approach to Laws on Climigration:**

Climigration is forcing communities to permanently relocate. There is no ability to return home. For these reasons, guiding principles and an institutional framework, based on human rights doctrine, need to be created to address the specific circumstance of climigration and ensure the resilience of communities forced to migrate. If the international community starts to seek solutions to the problem the legal definition of climate refugees will first need to be decided as well as their rights to shelter and food within their own country and in foreign countries, in the case of stateless refugees. Unless progress is made on the international front, national governments in affected countries will feel increasing pressure to plan the relocation of their threatened communities, and developed nations will face growing demands to fund such relocations bilaterally and perhaps even to offer their own land for resettlement.

When crafting laws for dealing with climate refugees, the Madina Charter may serve as indispensable reference points for pluralism and good governance.

**The Medina Charter**, written and promulgated by Prophet Muhammad for the multi-religious ten thousand-strong citizens of the city-state of Medina in 622 A.D is truly a remarkable political-constitutional document for promoting peaceful cohabitation of people from difference races and religion. It promulgated for a plural society, giving equal rights to every citizen as well as giving them a say in governmental matters. It was drawn in an effort to give the existing and the migrants to live side by side with their basic rights taken care of.

The Charter ordained equality to its members and protected them against oppression. (Clause 16). The State proclaimed the brotherhood of believers and gave each one a right and support to give protection to any individual, excepting an enemy. (Clause 15). It also extended help to its members in debt or in financial difficulties in regard to payment of ransom or blood-money. (Clause 12). It prohibited help or refuge to be given to a murderer. (Clause 22). A very important human right is given in Clause 25 where freedom was guaranteed for each community to practice its own religion. Another important principle of statecraft is consultation with the people in all matters. This is stated in Clause 37(a). Another important principle of just governance is that no quarter is given to an injustice or wrong-doing. In the Charter, this is stated in Clause 47.

### **Adaptation Proposals from the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad SAW. Being a research and advocacy**

- Active engagement of the media and key stakeholders
- Advocacy programs taking into account socio-cultural dimensions and human security
- Public Private Partnerships for identification and resolution of climate induced vulnerabilities.

- Review, revision, implementation and monitoring of Legal System.
- Development of global database on climate case studies and sharing of best practices.
- Innovative Disaster Preparedness Programs and Risk Management and Mitigation Plans.
- Other practicalities such as comprehensive urban planning.
- An ethics based approach for humane treatment of climate refugees

### Conclusion:

Lasting changes are spurred by deep-rooted moral imperatives. Religion brings in a human dimension which is grounded on justice, ethics and moralities. It makes a powerful tool for promoting environmental justice for the climate sufferers as it is persuasive and widely held.

Men may progress without being destructive if he decides on the use of religion as a personal path to God guiding us in our quest for advancement. This may be conveyed to policy makers who are driven by their economic agenda and also politicians with their own political interest. If we trigger off this awakening, it will be the most worthwhile strategy that will hold the future for mankind. Together the religions of the world can help mitigate and address issues related to deteriorating climate change and its ensuing ills such as climigration and the sufferings of climate refugees. The needs of environmentally displaced persons should be addressed in a positive spirit reflected in the Holy Quran and Prophet Mohammad SAW's teachings.

We should remember that our Creator has created mankind to live and enjoy the blessings of his creation on earth and around.

***“He Who has spread out the earth for you and threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky: With it have We brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation. Eat and pasture your cattle; verily in this are signs for men endued with understanding.”***

**Holy Quran (20:53:54)**

***“The world is beautiful and verdant, and verily Allah, the Exalted, has made you His stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves.”***

**Prophet Mohammad SAW**

I end my paper with a prayer, **‘O Almighty, enhance our love and respect for mankind and all creations.**