Houston Area Model United Nations

Standard Committee

DISEC

Chair | Grace Yetter

Topic B Background Guide

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Note to Delegates

Esteemed Delegates,

Welcome to the Disarmament and International Security Committee! My name is Grace Yetter, and I am your Chair. I am a sophomore at Rice University here in Houston, but I am originally from Maryland, near the Washington, DC area. I am double majoring in Political Science and History, and my particular interests include international politics, nuclear disarmament, the environment, and peace-building. At last year's HAMUN, I served as Vice Chair for DISEC, so I am incredibly excited to return this year as Chair.

As the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, charged with overseeing international security, DISEC serves a truly critical role in the world order at large. As such, the two topics I have chosen deal with some of the greatest existential threats faced by our species today: the weaponization of nuclear energy and the climate crisis. Though these topics are undeniably heavy, I have so much faith in the possibilities stemming from the collaborative, solution-oriented focus of Model UN. MUN offers an invaluable exercise in understanding global perspectives and motivations, which is of utmost importance when it comes to finding solutions to hard-hitting and far-reaching problems. That being said, I am so excited to work with you all and hear about the ideas and solutions you come up with regarding the topics. Until then, I wish you all the best!

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Topic B: Global Security and Preparedness Regarding Climate Change

Introduction

Over the summer of 2022, floods in Pakistan killed 1,717 people and displaced nearly 8 million (Zaidi), drawing global attention to the accelerating impacts of climate change, and serving as an important warning of how climate change might inform international security in the coming decades. The floods come at a time in which Pakistan's geopolitical situation has been characterized by its highly tense relations with India, as both countries have been long engaged in a violent territorial dispute over the status of Kashmir (BBC News). Kashmir is a heavily contested region that was also part of the those affected by the floodings, and over the last half-century, tensions over it have given way to a nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, leading the border between the two countries to be one of the most militarized regions in the world today (ibid).

Because any displacement of people poses a significant threat to border security, the mass displacement of Pakistanis and Kashmiris due to the 2022 floods raises concern about the stability of Indo-Pakistani relations, and it serves as a larger wake-up call for how the climate crisis may shape geopolitical conflicts over the next century. While the situation in Pakistan is a cautionary case, many nations around the world are facing security threats that will only be exacerbated by the escalating effects of climate change. Given this, there is an urgent need for the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly to take action to prepare for the threats climate change poses to international security.

History and Overview of Climate Change

The Industrial Revolution

changed the world humans live in in two crucial yet ironic ways. On the one hand, modernization brought about unprecedented food security and medical knowledge, which raised living standards and caused the global population to skyrocket. But on the other hand, industrialization also marked the beginnings of large-scale human-caused environmental degradation, with greenhouse gas emissions from factories, transportation, and other industrial developments gradually depleting the ozone layer. As global temperatures have risen over the last century, the world has had to acknowledge the impending climate crisis.

With these trends, a number of things are expected to occur by 2050. First, the world population will grow to about 9.7 billion (United Nations). Second, greenhouse gas emissions are projected to increase by 50%, and the world temperature will rise nearly 3 degrees Fahreneit (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). While the anticipated population growth will increase pressure on global food supplies and resources, the accelerating climate crisis will increase instances of drought, natural disaster, and famine around the world, giving way to regional instability and demographic shifts.

Security Risks Posed by Climate Change

International security will be affected by the regional instability and demographic shifts of climate change and population growth in a number of ways. First, food and resource scarcity will inevitably lead to increased fighting by countries over land and resources (Parry). Already, this problem has come about on a small scale in places like Afghanistan, where drought has been driving violent disputes between rural villages over land and irrigation water (Brown et al; Peters). Similarly, in Sudan, ethnic and religious tensions have been magnified by violence between farmers and herders over livestock routes and water sources (Brown et al). As climate change worsens resource scarcity, the tenor of these smaller internal conflicts will be mirrored and magnified by large-scale international conflicts over land and resources (ibid). As put by a Congolese representative during a 2007 UN Security Council debate, “this will not be the first time people have fought over land, water, resources, but this time it will be on a

scale that dwarfs the conflicts of the past" (Parry).

Along with increased fighting over land and resources, climate change will cause a rise in sea levels, natural disasters, and drought, leading to demographic disruptions and displacement that will shape geopolitical conflicts around the world. This problem is illustrated by the previous example of flooding in Pakistan and Kashmir, as well as by the role environmental degradation has played in the Syrian Civil War. From 2006 to 2010, desertification wrought resource and job scarcity which forced 1.5 million Syrians out of the rural countryside, a dramatic demographic shift that gave way to major economic instability and food scarcity (Zurich Magazine). Out of these issues erupted the country's civil war, which has resulted in what is currently the world's worst refugee crisis, with Syrians fleeing the country to both escape conflict and the environmental conditions that have fueled it (ibid).

The Institute for Economics and Peace has predicted the displacement of 1.2 billion people by 2050 due to climate change, with the World Bank estimating nearly 143 million climate migrants being generated from Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia (Podesta). This statistic highlights how the security concerns of climate change are disproportionately threatening the Global South (ibid). In the Global North, population growth has slowed in recent years and environmental variance is generally lesser (ibid). But for developing tropical countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, the risks are much higher, as these places have denser populations, higher levels of industrial pollution, and will experience the impacts of rising sea levels to a greater degree (Cleveland Council on Global Affairs). In Bangladesh, for example, many people were forced to settle on deltas due to population growth, but as deltas have become increasingly affected by rising sea levels and frequent monsoons, many of those settlements have been forced to altogether leave and migrate to India (Zurich Magazine). An additional concern for developing and less developed countries in Southeast Asia and Africa comes with the potential for larger, more powerful states to exploit their insecurity in order to gain influence and infringe on sovereignty (Cleveland Council on Global Affairs).

Broader Discussion and Actions

The number of people projected to be displaced by climate change in the coming years is massive. Yet, migrants forced over borders due to natural disasters and other climate disruptions are not legally considered refugees according to the definition outlined by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (Ida). Consequently, both unilateral and bilateral frameworks meant to deal with refugees are under equipped to properly handle the amounting pressure of climate migrants. As described in a report by the Center for Civil Military Relations at the Naval Postgraduate School, “host countries are often under considerable pressure from donors to abide by international law, norms and standards when accepting refugees.” At the same time, they must grapple with internal challenges such as the safety and security of their own populations, a lack of resources, a lack of political will and the expectations of their citizens” (ibid). Because of these competing factors and a lack of transnational authority on the issue, territorial integrity and global security are under grave threat in the wake of the climate crisis.

International agreements like the Paris Accords have been established to hold countries accountable for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and slow the impacts of climate change (Denchak). Meanwhile, on the humanitarian front, action has also been taken by the UN Human Rights Council to address the need to protect the rights and liberties of climate migrants (Ida). Yet, despite the risks mass displacement from climate change poses to security, little has been done by organizations on the security front to address the problem. DISEC must take action to prepare for climate change-related conflicts and promote security in the face of mass displacement from environmental shifts.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the international community care for climate refugees and provide for their needs, while also ensuring border security and territorial integrity?
2. What has your country done to address the security threats posed by climate change? Are there ways your country’s actions can be applied to international frameworks?

3. How can DISEC apply a climate change-related angle to topics like weapons proliferation and disarmament?
4. What can be done to identify climate change-related kindlings of conflict? How can countries address these kindlings before full-scale conflict erupts?

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