

Climate Injustice

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Human Rights

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The growth of industry in developed countries in an effort to further their own economic success, equates to climate injustice. Countries that continue to grow their industrial sector use excessive resources, negatively impacting the climate. Furthermore, this injustice is exacerbated when developed countries prosper and do not experience the full impact of their actions, as the impact on those less fortunate around the world is greater. The people left behind economically in impoverished communities are the ones whose human rights are being violated. This injustice is going on more and more each day since countries with wealthy economies, such as the United States keep their production levels up and show no signs of slowing down. The United States has high levels of industrial production, both domestically and abroad creating excessive pollution. As a result of this pollution, weather patterns are unpredictable, impacting food production internationally, and island nations are at constant risk of being wiped away. The environment can not keep up with the rapid use of resources by developed countries, and is posing a threat to the earth and to different groups globally.

Climate change can be simply thought of as the way climate patterns, including weather patterns and weather conditions, are altered over a specific period. In 1992, the United Nations signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), an international environmental treaty focused on lowering climate change. The FCCC's definition of climate change is "a change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity, that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and that is in addition to natural climate variability over comparable time periods" (Pielke, Roger)

The climate always altered around in temperature and in conditions, however, climate change began on a larger scale once humans began industrializing which led to an increase in pollution. “Without the increasing greenhouse gases climate would not change” (Pielke, Roger). Humans began polluting during the industrial revolution around the mid 18th century. In America and Europe the switch from rural agricultural societies to industrial urban cities resulted in the heavy reliance on fossil fuels for energy, which gave power to steam engines as well as heat to buildings such as factories (Robinson, Mary). Climate change is brought about when fossil fuels, such as coal, release greenhouse gases which contribute to carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Despite the evidence of current climate change, there is controversy about whether or not it is actually occurring, especially from political leaders. In 2015 the Paris agreement- an United Nations movement towards zero-carbon use as a nation was signed amongst most countries, including the United States. However, when President Trump came into office in 2017, announced his plans to pull the United States out of the Paris Agreement due to his anti-climate change rhetoric (Robinson, Mary). Although President Trump and others might not believe in climate change, but today it is clear that climate change is in effect. The earth is warming more than 1.5° Celsius since 1880; these levels lead to loss of 90% of coral reefs (Robinson, Mary). Loss of coral reefs means a destruction of important marine life on feeding grounds which causes a break in the food chain. This affects coastal communities by leaving them with the risk of an economic disasters since their income is deprived from of a decrease of jobs and food sources that are supplied from the ocean (Dennis, Brady). If warming reaches up to 2° Celsius it will

lead to double water shortages all across the world. Shortages in food, water and shelter affect the underprivileged population the most.

It should be noted that referring to advantaged and disadvantaged countries is referring to the country as a whole and not individual people. When mentioning countries, one can factor in wealth by the level of development in their cities, economies and infrastructures. Compared to disadvantaged ones, who are considered developing countries (Islam, Nazrul) which are less developed in their economy. Countries that are at an advantage include the United States, since overall as a country most of their lands include developed cities with easy access to basic needs; including water, shelter and also have easy access to luxuries. Disadvantaged countries and regions such as South Africa, and Pacific Islands; do not have the same access to basic needs such as the 790 million people with no access to water supply (Global WASH). This also includes the 1.3 billion people that have no access to electricity and 2.6 billion who still cook with open fires (Robinson, Mary). These disadvantaged countries are the communities least responsible for pollution yet most affected by climate change.

As mentioned before, people who are being affected by the changes in their environment mostly include those in disadvantaged countries. For example in Uganda, farmers are seeing the worst effects of climate change. Where drought strikes followed by unpredictable rainfall. In the past, rainy seasons used to include only February through April, but now their rainy seasons includes both February through April as well as July through August. Climate change brings unreliable weather that the outcome leaves farmers with no jobs; “In eastern Uganda there are no seasons anymore. Agriculture is a gamble”(Robinson, Mary). As a result of these changes, the people of Uganda are unable to predict these weather conditions, which puts their houses, crops

and animals in danger when the rain comes unexpectedly. They are facing the consequences of climate change and leaves them with unbearable condition to live with. As temperatures and precipitation increase the production of state crops in African countries are expected to decrease by 50% by 2020 (Hall, Margaux). Africa is not the only place facing these extreme repercussions of climate change; the Pacific Islands are also experiencing great effects. The rise of sea levels contributed by the disappearance of glaciers, which cause water surges in low-lying islands (Robinson, Mary), having presidents and citizens struggle to save their sinking nations. The decrease of coral reefs will also devastate islands since “countries depend on coral reefs as a key barrier to guard against incoming storms and mitigate the damage done by surging seas” (Dennis, Brady). More specifically looking at Tuvalu a small south pacific island with a population of around 11,000, is a nation that is at risk. The island is at an average height of 2 meters above sea level (Goldsmith, Michael), putting it at danger with rising sea levels. The island is small and creates low waste however it is at a constant worry that each day that goes by, is leading to the disappearance of their homes and their culture including their Tuvaluan language.

Each disadvantaged country affected by climate change is getting their human rights violated. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it states “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Robinson, Mary). In a closer look, when it comes to climate change there is an unequal and injustice form for how humans are treated. There is a constant human rights violation especially in small countries which are left unheard, “the natural hazards and increasingly uncertain weather conditions needs to safeguard the rights of vulnerable” (Christoplos, Ian). Their health is at risk every time the unexpected, harsh weather conditions

come in and devastate their daily lives. Climate change impacts their clean air; urban air pollution alone causes an estimate of 1.2 millions deaths per year (Hall, Margaux), safe drinking water, sufficient food and health centers. The unsanitary living conditions, as well as lack of food and shelter, leads to the exposure to diseases such as cholera and diarrhea, with little to no access to medical attention and lack of resilience to various infections (Robinson, Mary). Climate change is leaving a devastating amount of casualties and deaths in impoverished communities. The number of global weather related natural disasters has more than tripled in the past four decades, around 60,000 death occur from natural disasters mostly in developing countries (Hall Margaux). These people are the one's being affect the most with these human right violations, while other countries continue to prosper economically and create climate change.

The United States is an advantage country with a top economy, holding the number one spot with a 21.41 trillion gross domestic product (GDP). It is the leading national emitter of greenhouse gases by historical accumulation, (Odell, John) meaning that taking a look since the 1990's to today amongst all the countries, the United States produces the most. In addition, the United States emits twice as much carbon pollution per person than per person in China, Japan and Europe (Odell, John). The United States uses excessive amounts of fossil fuel and is not cutting back on usage for example, in 2018 the United States generated 64% of its electricity from fossil fuels (Robinson,Mary). However the United States does very little in giving back to the environment or addressing the issue of climate change. President Trump believes the Paris agreement “disadvantages the United States to exclusive benefit of other countries” (Dennis, Brady) and believes the United States is spending too much money on climate change. Studies show that funds will be lower now than if the government waits for the effect of climate change

to worsen. In the United Kingdom a STEM report on the economies of climate change stated that “investing now to limit climate change and to prepare for its effects would cost a fraction of the measure needed if we wait until those adverse impacts make themselves known” (Pielke, Roger). There are no excuses to why the United States government is not taking actions to improve climate change. It is unjust that the advantaged countries get to spend resources while other countries who do not use as much fossil fuels are dealing with harsh living conditions brought by climate change. “Forty-eight of the poorest countries pledged they would receive all their energy from renewable sources”, yet the United States is an example of a country with advanced technology and with the power to use renewable sources, but does not make the change (Robinson, Mary).

Climate change is a serious problem that goes beyond science; it’s about people's lives and their human rights that are in danger due to the climate injustice. Margot Wallström, the European Commissioner for the environment, stated that climate change “is not a simple environmental issue where you can say it is an issue where the scientists are not unanimous. This is about international relations; this is about economy, about trying to create a level playing field for big businesses throughout the world. You have to understand what is at stake and why it is serious” (Pielke, Roger). This climate injustice only allows wealthy countries to continue their growth industrially, while disadvantaged countries can not continue to grow. This imbalance affects countries all across the world because countries like the United States do not take responsibility for their actions. The disadvantaged, especially farmers and common people in Uganda as well as those who live on Pacific islands deal with food and water shortages, unsanitary conditions, and ruined shelters due to the unlivable conditions brought by climate

change. Advantage countries must take responsibility by changing their use of fossil fuels. They must do so through their government, they have to be the ones to enforce laws, and new limitations on the amounts of new resources they use that the country as a whole must follow. It is important for government to make that first step towards only using renewable energy to have less carbon pollution. However, every person should make changes in their life to have a zero carbon footprint. Simply using less of electricity, driving less, buying less fast fashion, and eating less meat which gives off more than 6 pounds of carbon dioxide per serving are all small changes that can help improve the environment (Livia Albeck-Ripka). By making small reductions every day there will be smaller amounts of greenhouse gases and if these small changes are made, fewer people suffer the effects of climate change.

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