

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: COP 22

Position Paper - Slovakia

Topic 1: The Impact of Climate Change on Health

The consensus among Earth's leading scientists is that climate change has been devastating to human health; from rising temperatures leading to increased flooding and drought to an uptick in the transmission of infectious, vector-borne diseases like Cholera and Salmonella, it is evident that human health has been drastically impacted by climate change. The delegation of Slovakia believes that addressing the impacts of climate change on health should absolutely be a priority at this meeting of the UNFCCC. The global community is in an almost complete consensus that climate change has adverse effects on health, and for this reason, Slovakia believes that the debate must be steered towards how we can address climate change, not on the potential impacts on health. We must be able to come to an agreement on how we can help to reduce the impacts of climate change on health before they become too drastic.

Cognizant of the possible impacts of change, Slovakia has taken measures to attempt to mitigate the effects of climate change on health. Being situated in Eastern Europe, Slovakia is at risk of insect-borne diseases and flooding, both of which are increasingly dangerous as the global temperature rises.¹ Higher temperatures can also be very dangerous to the health of the population, especially the elderly. This is why the Slovakian government is currently working on an action plan for the capital city of Bratislava, which will work to mitigate the impacts of hot summer weather by increasing the effectiveness of green areas.² Slovakia was also involved with the adaptation of a general framework for dealing with heatwaves, including the adoption of a Heat-Health Warning System (HHWS), assessing the mortality of heatwaves, educating and communicating the risks of heat to the public and adapting urban infrastructure.³ Urban greening and reducing energy consumption can lead to cities having significantly increased resilience to the forces of climate change.⁴ Evidently, Slovakia has played a leading role in the movement to attempt to counteract the impacts of climate change on health, and the nation will continue to do so.

¹ <http://www.climatechange.org/slovakia/health/>

² *ibid*

³ IPCC, 2012. Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation. A Special Report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Field, C.B., V. Barros, T.F. Stocker, D. Qin, D.J. Dokken, K.L. Ebi, M.D. Mastrandrea, K.J. Mach, G.-K. Plattner, S.K. Allen, M. Tignor, and P.M. Midgley (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, and New York, NY, USA, 582 pp.

⁴ <http://www.climatechange.org/slovakia/health/>

The delegation of Slovakia proposes that to combat the adverse effects of climate change on human health, we must use a three-step approach. Primarily, we must focus on mitigating our greenhouse gas emissions and limit our contributions to the global rising temperatures as much as we can. Only through cutting off carbon emissions at the source will we be able to begin to make progress on eradicating climate change and its impacts. Whether it is through intergovernmental policies like the Paris Agreement or through more localized policies like Slovakia's National Adaptation Policy (NAS), frameworks must be created to lower emissions and to reduce the impact we are having on the environment. Secondly, we must be able to mitigate the effects that climate change has on health. Early-warning systems like HHWSs, which are already being implemented in cities and countries across North America and Europe, as well as in Asia and Oceania.⁵ By being well-prepared to adapt to the disturbances that are caused by climate change, countries are able to save countless lives. Furthermore, by investing in the world's natural forests and in tree-planting, we can help to increase the amount of emissions that are absorbed instead of being released into the atmosphere.⁶ Finally, we must be able to determine which aspects of climate change and its impacts on human health are the most important to focus on. We should be able to do this by identifying the urgency of the issues and the feasibility of resolving them. Following this, we should set out strict guidelines that, along with mitigation and adaptation, should allow us to combat the adverse effects of climate change.

Topic 2: Climate Refugees

Although "climate refugee" is a fairly new term, it is nevertheless one that is extremely controversial. According to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, humans will have to move to protect their basic survival needs, regardless of how much they attempt to adapt to new climates.⁷ These people, who may be escaping anything from drought to flooding to disease, are known as climate refugees. As greenhouse gas emissions rise and climate events become more sporadic, climate migrations will become much more common. The issue with this is that, despite the fact that they are defenseless and have nowhere to go, climate refugees have no agency to protect their rights and to defend them. While their reasons for migration can vary significantly, climate refugees all share this lack of rights in common.

Not much action has been taken in the past to help aid climate refugees. There are many people who are forced to relocate due to climate change who don't fit the definition of climate refugee. These people, who are relocating themselves within their country, are considered to be Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and are generally more capable to relocate. Those forced out of the

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2866620/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/nov/29/planting-trees-climate-change>

⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4a5096.html>

country, however, face numerous issues in finding new homes. For example, the inhabitants of the island nation of Tuvalu are being forced to leave as the island gradually disappears due to rising sea levels.⁸ These people are forced to relocate, and they are considered climate refugees. The issue, however, is that climate refugees are not legally included in the definition of refugee, meaning that they are left defenseless in this situation. According to Marine Franck of the UNHCR, there is a general lack of policies to protect climate refugees, since they aren't included in the 1951 Refugee Convention.⁹ According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's 2015 report, 19.3 million people from 100 countries around the world were displaced by climate change in 2014.¹⁰ Unfortunately, preventative measures aren't being taken to assure that these people aren't forced out of their homes by climate change, and as a result, the equivalent of one person every second is forced to flee their home due to climate change.¹¹ Preventative measures need to be taken against this.

This is a versatile issue that requires a multi-step process to alleviate the pressure on climate refugees. Firstly, climate refugees must be recognized in the global community as real refugees, and we must come together as a global community to redefine the term refugee. In the 1951 Refugee Convention, a "refugee" was defined as somebody who is "outside the country of his nationality...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion and nationality"¹² and has been more recently defined as "a person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence."¹³ These definitions simply are no longer expansive enough to encompass all of the refugees on Earth. There are many refugees fleeing their countries for reasons like drought and natural disaster who need to be considered refugees as well. It is vital that climate refugees are included in the globally accepted definition of refugee moving forward. Secondly, nations must be open to accepting climate refugees. In the past, Slovakia has been unwilling to accept many refugees from Syria on account of the possible dangers that this might entail, but climate refugees are a completely different story. These are people who are often coming from peaceful regions of the world, and it should be the global consensus that these should be people who we accept into our countries. Slovakian citizens have expressed fear of Islamic terror being brought into the country, however, and the delegation of Slovakia believes that people should be relocated into nearby countries, where it will be easier for them to assimilate more easily into their new surroundings. This will ensure that there isn't too much cultural divide between the climate refugees and their new neighbours. Thirdly, we must be able to mitigate the effects of climate change through many of the methods discussed above, including investments in green energy and public transportation. These investments will

⁸ <http://climate.org/archive/topics/environmental-security/climate-refugee-policy.html>

⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/climate-refugees-151125093146088.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2015/global-estimates-2015-people-displaced-by-disasters/>

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² <http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

¹³ <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>

help to ensure that the amount of large-scale climate events is lowered in the future. Finally, having an early response system, or a National Disaster Emergency Response Plan (NDERP), will be vitally important to making sure that citizens of affected areas remain safe and unhurt. By following this plan, we can assure that climate refugees are able to maintain their safety while being able to find a new home that they can assimilate into fairly easily.

Topic 3: Steps to Enforce the Paris Agreement and Further Reduce Green House Gas Emissions

At COP 21 last year in Paris, the assembled countries of the United Nations finally came to a consensus about the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions have been increasing extremely rapidly ever since the industrial revolution. Since then, carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere have increased by 30%.¹⁴ Greenhouse gas emissions are higher now than ever before. In fact, global Carbon emissions from fossil fuels rose from 500 Million metric tonnes in 1900 to more than 9,500 Million metric tonnes in 2011.¹⁵ As is clearly evident, Greenhouse gas emissions have risen drastically since the industrial revolution. What may be less evident, however, is the impact that this increase in emissions has had on the planet. Since 1880, the average global temperature has risen 1.4°C.¹⁶ Some sources say that the average temperature of Earth's lower atmosphere could increase by 4.0°C by the end of the 21st century¹⁷ and sea levels are expected to rise 3-10 feet by 2100.¹⁸ This would wreak havoc on the Earth, and destroy ecosystems across the planet. With only a 1.4°C increase over the course of 135 years, the planet has seen terrible degradation and destruction. Climate change has led directly to sea level rise, warming oceans and ocean acidification, shrinking ice sheets, extreme weather events, droughts, an increase in vector-borne diseases and decreased snow cover, among many other disasters.¹⁹ This is clearly something that has the potential to destroy the planet if temperatures increase by another 4°C by the end of the century. The mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and the enforcement of the Paris Agreement is necessary if we want to maintain a sustainable planet for future generations to live on.

The three step process of adopting an agreement that addresses a global need to reduce carbon emissions was finally kickstarted in Paris, with the passing of the Paris Agreement at COP 21. The next step, which was getting the Heads of State to sign the agreement was accomplished on April 22, 2016 at the United Nations in New York City. This step was mostly accomplished,

¹⁴ <https://climate.dot.gov/about/overview/science.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/global-greenhouse-gas-emissions-data>

¹⁶ http://climate.nasa.gov/climate_resources/28/

¹⁷ <http://www.un.org/climatechange/blog/2015/03/will-weather-like-2050/>

¹⁸ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/climate-refugees-151125093146088.html>

¹⁹ <http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

although there are still some countries who haven't signed the agreement. The deadline for these signatures is scheduled for April 21, 2017. Slovakia, along with three other EU nations, has already signed the agreement. The third step of this process requires at least 55 countries that represent 55% of the world's emissions to take the agreement back home and have it ratified.²⁰ As of September 30, 2016, 61 countries, including Slovakia, combining for 47.79% of global emissions have ratified the Paris Agreement.²¹ Going back to the original Kyoto Protocol, Slovakia pledged to reduce emissions by 8% after the first term. Slovakia strongly believes that reducing emissions is vital to creating a viable world to live in. Slovakia has achieved impressive results in the increase of energy efficiency since the 1990s, mainly due to economic restructuring and increasing the energy sector's capabilities.²² Slovakia also adopted the 'National Sustainable Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic' in 2001 and the 'Low-carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030' in 2014, setting tangible goals for emissions and development moving forward. Slovakia has already ratified the Paris Agreement and is moving forward in its attempts to work towards a green future. The Slovak Republic strongly believes in a sustainable future and has demonstrated its motivation to move forward towards green energy and viable emissions.

The UNFCCC is very close to reaching the 55% goal that is needed to put the Paris Agreement into action. Slovakia believes that we must accomplish this as soon as possible, and that is why Slovakia believes that the European Union, among other states, should be speeding up the process for ratifying the agreement. Through education of the governing bodies that are making the decisions, the delegation of Slovakia believes that these governing bodies will realize that ratifying the agreement is the only viable path to move forward. Once the Paris Agreement is put into place, however, Slovakia believes that there are 3 main areas that must be focused on in order to reduce gas emissions into the atmosphere. The first is energy. Sustainable energy is the only way forward, and that is why the delegation of Slovakia believes investment in hydroelectric, wind, solar, biomass and other renewable energy sources is the only way forward. This will assure that we won't exhaust the planet's resources, and will also limit greenhouse gas emissions. The second area of focus is greenspace. By investing in forestry and reforestation nations can build up a significant resistance to greenhouse gas emissions, as trees are very effective at soaking up greenhouse gases. Finally, the delegation of Slovakia proposes that investments in public transportation, like buses and subways, as well as electric vehicles and non-motorized vehicles, is vitally important to our mitigation efforts. By ratifying the Paris Agreement and mitigating climate emissions, Slovakia believes that the UNFCCC can make strides towards creating a more sustainable planet to inhabit.

²⁰ <http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/articles/the-next-challenge-how-to-make-the-paris-agreement-work/>

²¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/09/30-council-speeds-eu-ratification-paris-agreement/>

²² <http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/legislation/countries/slovakia/>