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**Position Paper for Belgium on United Nations Framework on Climate Change**

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Climate change is a daunting reality that has posed an imminent threat to our future on this planet. Like many other regions of the world Belgium has already had a taste of the rath of climate change. Scientist have recorded a 2°C increase in season temperature in Belgium since the beginning of the industrial revolution.<sup>1</sup> Also the frequency of heat waves has increased significantly since the end of the 20th century. The country is no stranger to the capabilities of climate change and has work for many years to play its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to aid those impacted by climate change.

#### The impacts of climate change on human health

Climate change at its base is affecting our environment, but as we have seem in this past decade, its environmental repercussions have been menacing human health and well being. Physical environmental danger such as floods and droughts have already displaced thousands of individuals, have caused many injuries and casualties across the world. Belgian scientist predict that the country will suffer up to a 30% increase in winter precipitation and up to a 50% decrease in summer precipitation.<sup>1</sup> Meteorologist have also recorded extreme rain falls lasting for several days, occurring many times annually. Sadly due to the operations of the mining industries in Belgium the countries in air pollution levels have not yet been able to comply with european standards and much of the population is still exposed to high concentration of pollutants such as PM, NO<sub>2</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>2</sup> However efforts to reduce energy consumption have been seen quite clearly this past decade, for example the capital region of Brussels has decreased its energy consumption by 18% between the years of 2004 and 2011, despite a 12% population growth.<sup>2</sup>

#### Climate refugee

Climate not only has the power to affect human health, it can force populations to take refuge from its actions. Geographical occurrences such as dried up farm land, water scarcity, food security, earthquakes and tornados, have been displacing residents all over the world. Currently the term climate refugee is not yet recognized internationally as a reason to apply for a refugee status or to be granted asylum. Thus climate related threats are not factored in to a person's claim. The *international organization for migration* defines environmental migrants as:

*“Persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”<sup>3</sup>*

Fortunately the United Nations are creating awareness of this definition, as it is the key to helping climate refugee migrants. In the past Belgium has been very welcoming to refugees

from many crisis and will treat climate refugees the same if they can be internationally recognized.

#### Steps to enforce the Paris agreement and further reduce greenhouse gas emissions

To ensure that climate change is being fought the Paris agreement was put in place to put a cap on greenhouse gas emissions and other contributors to climate change. Reducing the impacts of climate change is a team effort to be brought out internationally. All across the world we can see small niches of innovations fighting against pollution. Municipal, provincial and national governments can learn from each others actions and promote eco friendly innovations. In Belgium, natural resource extracting, industrial refining and livestock grazing are the main contributors to Belgian greenhouse gas emission, as well as polluting most of the country's main rivers. A very good innovation that has recently gotten more attention, shines light on wasted energy lost in fossil fuel power generation. Thermoelectric generators or TEG's have shown to reduce a power plant's fuel consumption by as much as 10%. Commercialised in the past years and now available to the public TEG are compact devices that use a contrast in temperature across a semiconductor to create a voltage. When placed in series they can produce a stable current from the heat produced by the generators and can take up part of a load supported by a power plant.<sup>4</sup>

The environmental stability of our planet will be humanity's greatest ever lasting challenge for the decades and centuries to come. Our actions and the measures we take to prevent climate change will determine the quality of life of our future human generations. It is imperative that we act upon climate change, to reduce its impact on human health, ensure the safety of climate refugees and reduce the greenhouse gas emission and pollution worldwide.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Climate change post, Climate Change Belgium. Consulted on 2016-10-25:

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<sup>3</sup> UNRIC Western Europe, Invisible Climate refugee. Consulted on 2016-11-01:

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<sup>4</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Thermoelectric power generator. Consulted on 2016-11-05:

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