**Position Paper**

**Ryan Cheng, Crescent School**

**Republic of Iraq**

**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Introduction

The Republic of Iraq recognizes the significance of climate change and the ramifications that come with it, and treats its role in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change with the utmost respect. However, there are many pressing concerns surrounding the solutions proposed at the COP 21 of the UNFCCC that stopped the participation of Iraq in the signing of the Paris Agreement. The delegation of the Republic of Iraq, during the upcoming conference, plans on addressing said key issues, such as the impact of climate change on the health of Iraqi citizens, the relocation and assistance of climate refugees, and the necessary steps that need to be taken before Iraq can sign the Paris Agreement and begin to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Impact of Climate Change on Human Health

In recent years, the world has begun to experience increasing extreme climate variability as a result of climate change, such as the annual increase of the global average temperatures projected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the rising amount of environmental disasters such as droughts, floods, heat waves, and more. This disturbing climate variability can lead to an increase in thermal stress, infectious diseases, floods, droughts, and more.

Similar to all the countries around the world, Iraq is beginning to experience some of the various impacts that climate change is inflicting on human health. In October 2015, unprecedented torrential rains in Iraq caused floods, which required authorities to declare a state of emergency, as streets began to flood, sewers started to overflow, and dozens of Iraqi citizens were electrocuted when the water came into contact with electrical technology. Almost 84,000 people were internally displaced, 58 people died, and many were injured, homeless, or infected by the various diseases and toxic pollutants found in Iraqi bodies of water. Almost 3,000 people in Iraq reported cases of cholera, an acute diarrheal disease caused primarily by exposure to water contaminated with Vibrio cholerae. The outbreak of cholera was caused in part by the increased chance of infection due to the dense concentrations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from Syria in Iraq. Additionally, 2015 had one of the worst Pacific El Nińo events in history, as recorded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the rains and floods caused by the event led to citizens being easily infected by the water-borne disease.

Most recently, in August 2016, many Middle Eastern and North African countries, including Iraq, experienced record-shattering temperatures. On July 22, Iraq reached a temperature of 129 degrees Fahrenheit, one of the hottest temperatures ever recorded in the Eastern Hemisphere. A university student in Iraq likened walking outside to ‘walking into a fire’, as many citizens were ordered to stay home, and many more reported cases of dehydration and heat exhaustion. Iraqi farmers struggled with dying crops and overall workforce productivity decreased, leading to damage to the economy during the summer heat. Thousands of Iraqi people displaced by the war between the Iraq government forces and Islamic State militants were forced to endure the heat in tents and makeshift shelters, out of reach of humanitarian organizations due to the risks of operating in war zones, budget constraints, and the difficulty in reaching the internally displaced people. Climate scientists predict extremely diminished amounts of annual rainfall and increase salinity in the groundwater due to rising sea levels. The National Climate Change journal warned that similar heat waves and droughts in the region could begin to threaten human survival before the start of the next century.

In order to address the severe impacts on human health that climate change has had in Iraq, many different courses of action must be taken. Primarily, countries like Iraq or Syria, with ongoing military conflicts and limited adaptive capacity, must have accessible support from organizations such as the WHO, WMO, and NAPA, so that international aid can be obtained. This may entail the reduction or elimination of governmental laws and regulations that prevent humanitarian causes and non-governmental organizations from entering Iraq and for the aid of people whose health is affected by climate change, such as the people who were internally displaced by the floods in 2015. Since Iraq is still recovering from the Iraq-Iran war, the rule of Saddam Hussein, and the international trade sanctions imposed by the UN during the late 20th century, the delegation of Iraq calls upon more developed countries such as the United States or China to contribute an appropriate amount of resources to all countries afflicted with political or economical turmoil that have limited adaptive capacity. This may require a further agreement that outlines the mandatory contribution of resources by countries to the adaption and mitigation of climate change effects on human health, and the need for international aid that each country may have, in order to properly allocate international resources to countries in need. With the appropriate resources and support, countries like Iraq may begin to implement strategies for mitigation and adaption.

Climate Refugees

In today’s modern society, most people associate the word ‘refugee’ with a person who has been forced to leave their country to another to escape military conflicts or persecution, such as the most commonly used term ‘the Syrian refugee crisis’. However, many are not aware of this different type of refugee, climate refugees, as this issue gets little media coverage and is a more gradual threat than the imminence of the threat of war refugees. In many countries around the world, people are forced to leave their homes and countries to avoid environmental disasters or climate extremities, such as floods, droughts, heat waves, disease, and more. The biggest issue facing climate refugees is that there is “no international legal protection or agency keeping them safe and upholding their basic human rights”, and as a result, countries to do not have any legal obligation to accept the climate refugees.

The Republic of Iraq is undergoing a tumultuous period of time, as Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants are fighting governmental forces in both Syria and Iraq, citizens are forced to flee their homes in order to survive. Many Syrian refugees have flooded to Iraq, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported over 1.9 million Iraqi people have been displaced internally or into neighboring countries. Due to the fragility and sensitivity of the current situation, Iraqi internally displaced people and Syrian refugees residing in Iraq are much more susceptible to the impacts of climate change in the area. During the Cholera outbreak in Iraq in 2015, the water-borne disease spread much faster due to the dense concentration and close encampments of the Syrian refugees and the internally displaced Iraqi citizens who were forced from their homes as a result of war or the recent flooding in Iraq. Those who had to reside in tents and makeshift shelters were completely unprotected from the scorching heat wave that hit Iraq this summer. The Iraqi citizens who resided in the city and had jobs were forced to migrate to areas with stronger air conditioning, such as their workplaces, while many decided to leave the country altogether.

Considering the challenges that are facing climate refugees, the committee must first redefine the term refugee, with climate refugees included in the definition. Refugees should be defined as people who cross political borders to reach a safe place, in order to escape military conflicts, persecution, or for environmental protection. The committee should work together with the UNHCR to bring this new definition into force and re-evaluate countries’ legal obligation to accept climate refugees in the future. If necessary, a new taskforce or committee may be formed solely with the purpose of aiding, protecting, and relocating climate refugees and climate internally displaced people around the world. As previously stated, all countries should be doing their fair share of contributions to help solve this crisis, such as accepting climate refugees or displaced people and contributing resources such as healthcare, food, water, and money for these people who currently have no one looking out for them.

As important as it is to redefine and re-evaluate the situation with the climate refugees, it is equally important to develop Natural Disaster Emergency Response Plans (NDERP) for countries to have a plan or strategy when coping with natural disasters. The Republic of Iraq would like to call upon other Middle Eastern countries such as Syria or Saudi Arabia to share their NDERPs in order to be able to begin to construct a similar NDERP for the Iraqi people. Currently, Iraq does not have a NDERP and will need to formulate one in order to appropriately respond to the increasing amounts of natural disasters in the region.

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

During the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) last year, the Paris Agreement was formed, with all countries in the UNFCCC signing the document except Syria, Nicaguara, Uzbekistan, and Iraq. The deadline for signatures is in April 2017, so these countries still need to be persuaded to sign the agreement. Many countries have already ratified the agreement, and are beginning to implement the various solutions and strategies to decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

There are various concerns that Iraq has that must be addressed before signing on to the Paris Agreement. Primarily, the largest concern is the effect that signing this agreement may have on Iraq’s economy. 95% of Iraq’s foreign exchange earnings are in oil trade, and Iraq is one of the five most oil-rich countries in the world. One may argue that many other countries that are also major players in the international oil industry have already signed the Paris Agreement and thus means that Iraq should as well. However, Iraq is currently almost $125 trillion in debt, as a result of the Iraq-Iran war, the rule of Saddam Hussein, and the trade sanctions placed by the UN on Iraq in the late 20th century and early 21st century. Iraq’s economy is slowly recovering and decreasing the debt, but the current military conflict against ISIS requires a heavy amount of military expenditure. Iraq spends the second highest percentage of GDP on military and security, second only to South Sudan. Additionally, the heat wave in 2015 led to a major dip in the GDP due to the wilting of crops and the displacement of many workers. As a result of these conflicts, Iraq relies heavily upon the foreign oil trade to recuperate and rebuild the economy. If Iraq were to sign the Paris Agreement, the constraints in greenhouse gas emissions, emissions that are a major part of the oil trade, would impact Iraq’s revenue and GDP significantly, making it much more difficult for the nation to recover from the recent and ongoing turmoil.

Another related concern that arises if Iraq signs the Paris Agreement is the effect that this may have on Iraq citizens. Hundreds of people were forced to leave their jobs in 2015 due to the heat wave and cholera outbreak, and currently there are still thousands of internally displaced people in the country. The unemployment rate in Iraq is historically low, and combined with the civil unrest due to the ongoing war with ISIS, has citizens in a seemingly permanent state of suffering. In signing the Paris agreement and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and as a result the reduction of work in the oil industry, will lead to even more jobs being taken away from the Iraqi citizens, and possible public outrage directed towards the government for the unemployment and the strife. Thus, until further notice, Iraq will not be signing the Paris Agreement, and will work towards adaption strategies more so than mitigation. The delegation of Iraq would like to remind other nations that it is only responsible for less than 1% of the world’s greenhouse gases, unlike the 20% produced by China or 17% by the United States, and unless considered otherwise, will continue to produce greenhouse gas emissions.

Although the Republic of Iraq is currently unwilling to sign the Paris Agreement, this is not set in stone. If other countries are willing to co-operate and find a way to help Iraq with its current military and economic issues, especially those that may arise as a result of the Paris Agreement, then there is a greater chance that Iraq will sign the agreement. Foreign investments in the clean energy industry in Iraq, increased humanitarian aid in the region, and more options may be explored, and such examples of international support are the key to a cohesive, multilateral approach towards unanimous combat against climate change and the effects it has on all humans.

Works Cited

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/an-epic-middle-east-heat-wave-could-be-global-warmings-hellish-curtain-raiser/2016/08/09/c8c717d4-5992-11e6-8b48-0cb344221131_story.html>

<http://www.indexmundi.com/iraq/major_infectious_diseases.html>

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/02/cholera-is-coming-iraq-climate-change-middle-east/>

<http://www.who.int/csr/don/26-november-2015-iraq-cholera/en/> <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=87011>

<http://newsroom.unfccc.int/unfccc-newsroom/iraq-submits-its-climate-action-plan-ahead-of-2015-paris-agreement/>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs107/en/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Iraq>

<http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2015/101515-noaa-strong-el-nino-sets-the-stage-for-2015-2016-winter-weather.html>

<http://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/operations/projects/environment_and_energy/DRR.html>