Committee: UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)

Topics: Steps to Enforce the Paris Agreement and Further Reduce Green House Gas Emissions, the impact of Climate Change on Human Health and Climate refugees

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Since the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference of 2009, the world has made great progress in recognizing climate change as a very serious and real threat. From rising food prices to growing health risks and regional instability, the effects of climate change, be they direct or indirect, are becoming increasingly visible. As such, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of this global issue as a leader for climate change reform. Ranked as 3rd worldwide for carbon capture and storage (CCS) research (Energy Technology Institute), the United Kingdom sees that even with the uncertainty of the world’s current situation, innovation and growth can be synonymous with a healthier environment.

Observing past climate change agreements such as the Montreal Protocol leads to one visible fact: proper and binding agreements when it comes to climate change can lead to concrete results. First signed in 1987 by a group of states that saw the adverse effects of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC’S) on the ozone layer, this agreement has led to such positive results that CFC’s are no longer taken into account as one of the main greenhouse gases emitted today. This contrasts with agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol, which, in the absence of binding measures, failed to reach many expectations. Seeing this trend, the United Kingdom has demonstrated its strength as an international leader in terms of climate change by adopting the Climate Change Act in 2008, where it presents many legally binding targets, such as that of reducing its emissions by at least 80% in 2050 when compared to 1990 levels (Committee on Climate Change). And enforcing the Paris Agreement in a similar fashion is an absolute must.

As stated by Amber Rudd, MP and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Climate change in the UK, “For any climate change agreement to be lasting and successful it must result in long-term prosperity for the planet. The move to a green economy offers a great opportunity, but to be fully realised it requires world leaders unite to provide certainty, clarity, and confidence” (HM Government) As such, one of the most pivotal steps to change is global mobilization. Another one of the main solutions proposed to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases is that investments in low-carbon energy alternatives like solar and wind. The United Kingdom recognizes that the price of entry into these new markets is constantly decreasing, which presents an opportunity for developed and developing nations alike. What’s more, the Carbon Trust affirms that the return on investments in energy efficiency are over 40%, which far surpasses return rates of other business endeavours. Finally, the United Kingdom encourages the adoption of a greater amount of support for developing nations, who have to bear the burden of climate change in a far greater manner. This requires developed countries to respect their commitment to jointly mobilise 100 billion dollars a year to help developing countries, as the United Kingdom is doing through its £3.87 billion International Climate Fund (HM Government).

When it comes to the impact of climate change on human health, this is an increasingly important issue that is slowly gaining prominence on the international stage. With the increases of temperatures on a worldwide scale, many new and dangerous threats are surfacing, such as malnutrition stemming from decreased agricultural potential and the increase of thermal stress factors.

Even as an industrialised nation, the United Kingdom is not immune to these health risks. Indeed, the UK has been particularly hit with an increase in food related infections such as food poisoning when in periods of temporary temperature increases. Similar correlations between the effects of climate change and a decrease in health can be witnessed by an augmented amount of mental disorders witnessed within the general population of industrialised nations. For example, one may feel a significant strain when having to live through the damage of his possessions and living environment following a series of floods caused by an increase in average sea levels. All of this comes back to show that the common conception that only developing nations can and will be feeling the impacts of increasing temperatures on their citizens’ health is inherently false: all nations will be affected, albeit by a different range of factors.

This is not to say that concrete measures haven’t been envisioned by the United Kingdom and other nations worldwide. For one, the Paris Agreement, which Prime Minister Theresa May has committed to ratify by this year (The Guardian), both recognizes the great risk that this problem poses on a global scale and provides paths and solutions for nations to take and face it head on. However, this agreement has yet to be signed and ratified by a large number of nations, many of which are some of the largest emitters worldwide, which compromises the implementation of its binding measures. As such, the United Kingdom looks to act as a model and leader in the fight to allow this agreement to reach its full potential and achieve its objectives, for it is in the best interest of all nations to tackle climate change. What’s more, the United Kingdom has been actively engaged in transitioning towards a less carbon intensive society. It seeks to achieve this goal through working on areas such as household energy, urban transport, electricity generation, and food and agriculture. This last domain in particular accounts for 10-12% of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), making it one of the nations’ top concerns.

Finally, yet another major consequence of climate change can be seen in the rise of who we now referred to as climate refugees, or individuals who are forced to move from their countries of origin because of large-scale environmental disasters that are occurring and being amplified by global warming. Though this is becoming a larger problem, its effects are only visible in the long term, and assessing which movements are actually occasioned by climate-related reasons is a very complex and technical task. It thus comes as no surprise that this issue has up until recently been unknown by most, and received little to no international media coverage. But the latest figures from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDCM) 2015 report show that over 19 million individuals needed to leave their households because of natural disaster, showing that this lack of coverage and awareness is unrepresentative of the actual severity of the climate refugee crisis.

The United Kingdom recognizes that countries must work not only on preventing people from being displaced, but also on reducing the factors that are causing this problematic situation to occur in the first place. Because, as is the case with everything climate-related, the effects are always global, even if they may not seem to be so at first sight. For the UK, in particular, a central problem will be the country’s reliance on food imports, which account for 40% of all of the nations’ food (Global Food Security). And as is said by Professor Jeffrey Kargel of the University of Arizona, “Surely it is better for everyone to improve resilience of communities... rather than wait until the situation is worse - we know that preparation and adaptation can help to reduce deaths and losses” (Daily Mail Online).

It is for this reason that the British government has been the largest international donor to countries such as Bangladesh that are affected first-hand by this problematic situation, and has been urging other international powers to follow suit and increase their monetary engagements. Furthermore, though the UK firmly believes that eventual changes in the status of refugees under the UN convention on refugees are necessary, it sides with the position of the UNCHR, that stated in a recent report that "In the current political environment, it could result in a lowering of protection standards for refugees and even undermine the international refugee protection regime altogether" (The Guardian).

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