**United Nations Framework Committee on Climate Change:**

**The Dominican Republic**

By: Niah Vardy

The Dominican Republic, the second largest country in the Caribbean by size and the third largest by population, shares the island of Hispaniola with the Republic of Haiti. The nation’s current form of government, that of a representative democracy, is the fruition of a long, laborious process that faced many obstacles. After three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule, the Dominican Republic obtained independence briefly before being conquered by Haiti. After a brief tenure of Haitian rule, the nation fell once again under the control of Spain. Having gained independence once more in 1865, the Dominican Republic entered a period where military dictatorships were the predominant form of government. As the economy at that time hinged on the unreliable international prices of Dominican primary resource exports, development was too slow to support an expansion of political infrastructure. However, the economic and urban growth of the 1960s stimulated the development of political institutions and facilitated a shift towards representative democracy. As one of the original founders of the United Nations, the Dominican Republic has always been committed to participating in and supporting various international initiatives. In 1945, it was the position of the Dominican Republic that it was vital for the international community to come together to face issues of mutual concern, and this position holds true today, in the face of modern challenges.

Due to its geographic location, the Dominican Republic is highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. Climate change is influencing the severity of tropical storms, landslides, and floods, all of which are issues that have great impact on citizens of the Dominican Republic. In addition, slow-onset conditions spurred by climate change, such as desertification, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and ocean acidification are of great concern. These issues must be confronted in order to address the impact climate change will have on the health of the population of the world. The Dominican Republic agrees that taking a two pronged approach to promoting health is necessary in combating climate change. Mitigation techniques will confront the source of the problem and prevent health-related disasters for future generations, yet such measures would do little to address the here-and-now. Adaptive strategies alone would alleviate some of the adverse effects of climate change, but can not be all encompassing and would fall short of addressing the root of the issue. Comprehensive mitigation techniques must be coupled with adaptive strategies to safeguard the world’s population against the current threats to human health stemming from pre-existing climate change. At COP22, the Dominican Republic hopes to explore innovative ways of mitigating climate change that have health benefits as side effects. Possibilities of such methods would include limiting the use of solid fuels like wood, coal and charcoal in people’s homes, improving the energy efficiency of heating and cooling mechanisms, and comprehensive urban planning that makes allocations for green space and encourages emission-friendly travel methods. However, these practices would have a heightened impact on the issue at hand if they were implemented in collaboration with adaptive strategies. Adaptive strategies should be a collaborative effort between governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, education and health ministries, and research facilities.

Climate change poses a threat to weather patterns and is predicted to increase the frequency and severity of natural disasters. Since 2009, the rate of displacement due to climate related disasters has been one person per second. Climate-related weather conditions are impacting populations in ways that could not have been foreseen in 1951, when the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was implemented. The definition of a refugee provided by this convention and its collective amendments of the past sixty six years is an individual who cannot or will not return to their country because they will be persecuted on the basis of their religion, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, or because they belong to a certain social group. While this definition embodies the perceptions and priorities of the international community at the time of its inception, new developments demand reevaluation. Currently, individuals who have been displaced due to climate-related disasters are afforded none of the rights afforded to refugees under the convention. It is the position of the Dominican Republic that individuals displaced due to climate related issues should be classified as refugees and granted the associated protections. Among other things, those who are forced to flee their homes because of climate-related disasters should not be held accountable for violations of immigration laws and should be protected from being forced to return to dangerous circumstances. Neglecting to take these actions would leave populations vulnerable to threats posed by climate change.

Climate change is a global phenomenon that can largely be attributed to the accumulation of various gaseous chemicals in the atmosphere. Notable examples of these chemicals, which are known as greenhouse gases, include carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. The release of greenhouse gases is largely due to the burning of fossil fuels, a practice conducted to fuel cars, generate electricity, and power industries. Thus, when observing methods of mitigating the effects of climate change, it is the position of the Dominican Republic that cleaner sources of energy as well as reducing reliance on the aforementioned activities be explored. Through investing in alternate energy sources, countries can reduce reliance on fossil fuels, thereby cutting back on greenhouse gas emissions. Likewise, initiatives that seek to lessen the use of cars as a primary method of transportation and that work at eliminating unnecessary uses of electricity would work towards the same goal. In addition, to face the detrimental impacts climate change is currently having on living conditions worldwide, it is vital that methods of adaptation be explored. Some of these measures could include fortifying agricultural sectors against the risks associated with climate change, equipping teachers with the skills they need to facilitate change in the classroom, improving healthcare standards, and addressing wealth disparities. All of the aforementioned initiatives would involve a flow of funds between government ministries, UN bodies, non-governmental organizations, and private enterprises. Thus, the institution of transparency and oversight mechanisms is crucial. Governments should be encouraged to institute independent, unbiased review boards to monitor environment-related actions and monetary transactions should be on the public record. In addition, with the objective of furthering oversight mechanisms and assessing the effectiveness of government efforts, governments should be required to report to all stakeholders on the progress of their environment-related efforts.

Combating climate change is a priority for the Dominican Republic, which is reflected in their Climate Compatible Development Plan and their stanch commitment to the goal of cutting domestic carbon emissions by 25% by the year 2030. The Dominican Republic is eager to participate in the upcoming Conference of Parties to discuss climate change and its ramifications on the world stage.

Bibliography:

World Health organization. “Promoting Health While Mitigating Climate Change.” *Technical Briefing for the World Health Organization Conference on Health and Climate,* August.

Nachmany, M., Fankhauser, S., et al. “Climate Change Legislation in Dominican Republic.” *The 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study.*2015.

“Dominican Republic: Intended Nationally-Determined Contribution.”

“Global Warming Solutions: Prepare for Impacts.” *Union of Concerned Scientists.* Accessed 3 Nov. 2016.

“Government and Politics.” *Facts about the Dominican Republic,* US Library of Congress.

“Cooperation and Support.” *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,* 2014.