

Climate Change: We need to guarantee the right to not migrate

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Climate related events have always been a cause for migration in the history of humanity. This was the story of Egypt, Mesopotamia and other ancient societies. But in modern times the scale has been unprecedented. In 1995 there were at least 25 million climate refugees. Only 15 years later, in 2010, 50 million were displaced. In 2050 the estimations are between 200 million to one billion people that can be forced to migrate.

Some will have to migrate because of direct impacts of natural disasters like floods, droughts, water shortage, health and others, and some because of indirect impacts that can happen thousand of miles away due to, for example, the scarcity in food and increase in food prices.

Forced migration due to climate change will increase the pressure on infrastructure and urban services, especially in sanitation, education and social sectors, as a result increasing also the risk of conflicts even among migrants.

As we have seen recently in Haiti with hurricane Sandy, climate change will impact more the poor and what the United Nations calls the developing countries. Asia will be the region with the majority of climate migrants. The countries that have least contributed green house gas emissions like Bangladesh will be probably the ones that will be most affected.

The “Peoples World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights” held in 2010 in Cochabamba Bolivia said: “There is a close relation between the occidental development model and ecology and consequently with migration, and this is why developed countries are the ones that have to assume a responsibility according to what they have done.”

The first measure that developed countries have to adopt is to reduce their GHG emissions by at least 40 to 50 percent of the levels of 1990 until 2020. If the historical emitters don't do this, we are going to face series of increasing calamities. We must try to reduce as much as possible the increase in temperature to ease climate forced migration.

But also, emerging economies have to follow a different path of development. If governments in developing countries keep promoting the unsustainable model of consumption and production of capitalism, there will be no way to reduce the impact of this new wave of migration.

The approach to address climate migration has to be first focused on mitigation and the reduction of emissions of green house gases. Proposals like the ones from the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants in the 2012 General Assembly (Report A/67/299) are a resignation to calamity.

In his report he said that “migration may in fact be an important adaptation strategy” under a whole chapter that has the title: “Migration as a solution: recognizing the opportunities of migration as adaptation to global environmental change.”

The first right of a future climate migrant is the right to not migrate, is the right to stay where

he/she lives, and it is the obligation of the global community to do everything so that he/she is not obliged to migrate.

Developed countries have to pay their “ecological debt,” “eliminate their restrictive immigration policies,” “welcome climate migrants into their territories,” and “offer them a decent life with full human rights guarantees in their countries” as it has been said in Peoples World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights.

If I burned your house the least I can do is welcome you into my house... and if I’m burning it right now I should try to stop the fire now.

Pablo Solon

P.S.

* From Focus on the Global South Newsletter November 2012:

<http://focusweb.org/content/climate-change-we-need-guarantee-right-not-migrate>