

## **Briefing paper for Climate Change in the Dominican Republic**

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Climate change is a pressing issue of our time, especially since a consensus still fails to be met between prominent figures in society, such as politicians or policy makers and scientists who reproduce research. Climate change refers broadly to the patterns of drastic change in the weather, which can lead to abnormal occurrences such as higher global temperatures, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, droughts, floods, ecological alterations and other weather-related disasters. This is different to the phrase “global warming” which specifically addresses the act of increased greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere that leads to the impacts of climate change. Some human-made activities that have widely contributed to global warming are; fossil fuel and electric companies (49.7%), transportation (28.9%), and land use/agriculture (20.1%), especially that which is used for mass meat production (EPA 2019). These effects will especially prove fatal in areas that are already affected by extreme weather disasters, such as floods and droughts, and countries that are islands. This affects people living in those areas intimately. For example, Labrador is one of the fastest-warming places in Canada and it has large Indigenous Inuit communities. Labrador has had a three degree temperature change since 1990 and locals have reported of extreme mental and emotional effects due to the dramatic shifts in the ice lands they have deep cultural ties to (Vince 2020). This is detrimental to future generations of this population’s families, as well as the families of people all over the world who are not affected yet as drastically as others by climate change. If we should care for the future people of the world, then climate change is something we must combat immediately.

The Dominican Republic is one of the countries that is particularly vulnerable to the imminent threats of climate change, it was even ranked among the 11th most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change. The Dominican Republic is an island country that lies on the equator line so an increase in heat waves and rising sea levels could be a devastating risk to coastal communities, agricultural production, water sources, human health, and rich marine ecologies around the coast (Climatelinks 2017). This is on top of already being prone to frequent climate-related hazards such as floods, mudslides, and severe storms. A large portion of the country’s GDP comes from tourist revenues since many people travel from all over the world to the Dominican Republic to experience the beautiful beaches and the culture of the country. But since the island is already a disaster-prone area, the negative impacts of climate change will intensify the damages caused to hotels, coastal infrastructure, and beaches. Even more so, the damage that will be done to water sources and agricultural fields will lead to a massive food insecurity crisis. This will heavily affect the portion of the population who lives below the poverty line, which is up to 30% and they are currently at high risks of diseases associated with high temperatures and moist conditions (Climatelinks 2017).

There are quite a few intergovernmental entities that are trying to mitigate the risks of climate change in the Dominican Republic, as is stated in Article 194 of the country's Constitution. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources is the lead entity responsible for environmental issues and cooperates with regional and international actors to fund and implement related projects (Climatelinks 2017). The National Council for Climate Change is responsible for formulating, implementing and enforcing climate change policies and projects under the President (Climatelinks 2017). The Dominican Republic also works closely with the United Nations and the frameworks they offer for combating climate change. In 1998, the Dominican Republic ratified the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol in 2002, and signed the Paris Agreement in 2016. They also approved of the Action Plan to implement the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. This Action Plan tries to identify and implement a variety of priorities for the 2019-2021 period in areas of legislation, finance, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity in strengthening climate action (NDC Partnership 2018). In practice, these would include changes in energy efficiency such as shifts to renewable energy, cleaner transportation methods, reduction in climate vulnerability in agriculture, tourist areas, and marine-coastal areas.

While international organizations such as the United Nations try to influence regulation in the amount of greenhouse gas emissions the countries of the world produce, some still prove reluctant to follow these guidelines. This is especially apparent in the United States, as the Trump administration has drawn out of the UN's climate action plans as well as rolled back on 95 environmental legal rules (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka and Pierre-Louis 2019). In fact, a majority of politicians can be found in many countries showing disbelief in the evidence that the Earth's climate is changing at all. This shows the lack of strong scientist-lead voices in the environmental policy-making process. If we were to enforce stronger protocols and education of politicians and the general public, we can have a stronger foundation in the spread of accurate and helpful information regarding the imminent threats of climate change. The urgency that is felt in the Dominican Republic has spiraled off practical measures in mitigating the harmful effects to the country and the people. Even the countries that are not most vulnerable to climate change should follow behind the footsteps of these countries that are taking the matter seriously by putting the citizen's wellbeing over profit of the corporations that contribute to global warming.

## **Briefing Paper for Aiding Refugees in the Dominican Republic**

Refugees and Displaced peoples is a pressing issue of our time. The amount of people who have been forcibly moved from their homes is an unprecedented amount, with reported amounts of 65 to 70.8 million people displaced worldwide (ConcernUSA 2019). It is important to point out that no-one necessarily wants to move from their country of birth and culture but that a variety of negative social, political and economic circumstances force people to leave their homes. Often, the causes are war, persecution, violence, and even disaster/climate-related displacement with the over-coming threat of climate change. The majority of refugees come from developing countries who try to gain asylum, the process of gaining international protection from the danger of their country, in developed countries such as the United States, Germany, France, Turkey, etc. An internally displaced person (IDP) is the classification of someone seeking refuge within their own country (ConcernUSA 2019). This crisis is parallel to the increased anti-immigrant rhetoric in western countries that often deal with a lot of refugees and asylum seekers. This often leads to strict migration policies as well as travel bans and mass deportation. To change these harsh outlooks on refugees and displaced people, there must be a drastic change to humanitarian outlooks on the sufferings of people around the world in the government and its policies.

The issue of refugees and displaced people in the Dominican Republic is both internally troublesome as much as it is externally. According to the CIA World Factbook, The Dominican Republic hosts around 8,119 refugees primarily from Venezuela, and around 3,000 Haitians (Ahmed 2015). People from both of these countries experience dire situations such as food and water insecurity, diseases, economic collapse, and political persecution. They often have a hard time gaining asylum in the Dominican Republic because of the countries strict laws and requirements, and sometimes even result in hostile measures such as mass deportation if they are deemed illegal migrants by the government. While the Dominican Republic does receive a small amount of refugees and immigrants, there are also a large population of Dominican migrants around the world. The International Organization for Migration reports that around 1 million Dominican migrants live around the world, primarily North American regions and some European countries such as Spain and Italy (IOM). While they are usually not entirely refugees or asylum seeking people, there can be cases of internally displaced people due to the disaster prone areas of the countries. Other reasons for migration could also be the high percentage of unemployment and poverty of a large portion of the population who seek better opportunities in more developed Western countries.

The Dominican Republic has increasingly strict policies for immigration, especially to those of Haitian descent. In 2013, the Constitutional Tribunal for the Dominican Republic stripped citizenship from descendants of people who were deemed illegal residents. This left an estimated 200,000 people stateless and essentially, displaced as they were refused any form of identification documents. This denial to documentation left them politically powerless in seeking asylum and created a mass refugee problem (Young 2017). Haitians accounted for 86% of the affected population, even though a majority of Haitians have historically situated themselves in areas of the Dominican since the 1980s, the racism and distrust from the Dominican citizens and the government has led to increased hostility toward them. The Organization of American States

(OAS), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UNHCR, and others all denounced the ruling but the Dominican Republic has yet to repeal it. A Naturalization Law passed in 2014 in the Dominican Republic which made it even more difficult for disenfranchised migrants in the country to reclaim citizenship since the majority of them lacked appropriate registered birth certifications. Haitians were even deliberately denied any consideration in the process, leaving them with denied access to employment, education, healthcare, housing, and other basic necessities that should be offered to refugees/displaced persons (Young 2017). The UN at this time had implemented a Stabilization Mission in Haiti which gained international attention to the situation in the Dominican Republic. It promoted peacekeeping and human rights monitoring in the refugee situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and near the board of the two countries.

While there is still a conflict between the Dominican Republic and the acceptance of refugees, especially those from Haiti, collective work from the international community can go a long way into making the situation more approachable. Because of the Dominican Republic's harsh migration laws, this created a major refugee crisis and displacement of thousands of people who have been living in the country for a long time or originally had the right to be there. To avoid social and political persecutions such as this, there needs to be more productive ways to aid and assist immigrants, migrants (even if illegal), refugees, internally displaced people, and asylum-seekers. If the government remains antagonistic in the face of people in need, the problems of why these issues happen in the first place will remain unsolved. Every country should show humanitarian efforts in the aiding of refugees and displaced people no matter their origins and reasons.

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