

# Policy Briefing—SOCHUM

## Topic 1: The Question of Self-Governance for Nations

### Without a State

#### Outline

1. Background
2. Current Examples of this Issue
3. Key Players
4. Questions to Consider
5. Useful Links



#### Background

The distinction between a nation and a state is often ambiguous and not completely clear on an international level. In fact, dictionary definitions often fail to capture the nuances between the two. While a nation may refer to any group of people with some assortment of shared features and collective identity, a state most often refers to an internationally recognized, sovereign governing body with the administrative capacity to manage its own affairs. This distinction leads to the category of “stateless nations”—peoples who do not have a state to call their own and are a minority group within the borders of another state. Their minority status often means their views are underrepresented within their home states, and this leads to them often calling for self-governance based on the principles of democratic representation.

Stateless nations’ calls for autonomy are often a point of contention with their countries of residence. The question often revolves around several key issues, such as the legitimacy of their nationhood in the first place, their rights to self-governance, and how such autonomy is to

be granted if an agreement is met. The logistical issues posed by minority groups seeking self-governance can often be significant; some areas often have multiple nations claiming control over the same land within the same state, or across multiple states' borders.

Some states' responses to minority nations within their borders have often been criticized for possible human rights violations. The United Nations has some previous agreements with regards to the treatment of Indigenous peoples—namely, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). UNDRIP provides some principles around minimum standards for the rights of Indigenous peoples, and while it discusses the importance of self-determination for nations, it provides very little guidance on how this is to be achieved in a practical and enforceable manner. Additionally, not all states agree wholeheartedly with the principles behind UNDRIP in the first place, posing an even greater challenge to creating an international framework for stateless nations being given self-sovereignty. Will SOCHUM be able to reach a new agreement on how countries are to deal with the many diverse nations within their borders moving forward?

### Current Examples of this Issue

While the concept of stateless nations is as old as the idea of nationalism itself, there are several key examples in the modern-day that shape the discussions around the issue. The status of Palestinians in Israel is an example due to the ongoing conflict between the Israeli administration and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Palestinians are a minority group within Israel, and they often face persecution at the hands of their government, which is exacerbated by their calls for statehood and self-governance. This has historically been a major point of contention between the Muslim and non-Muslim world. Uyghur Muslims in China face similar conditions due to their distinct culture and calls for autonomy. Western nations have

recently grown more vocal in their opposition to China's treatment of the Uyghurs, which have soured the relations between China and these countries. Two Canadian examples of nations seeking self-governance are the Quebecois and Canada's Indigenous peoples (the latter is also applicable to many other countries in the world, including Australia and the United States). Kurds, the Igbo people, and Tibetan people are yet a few more examples of nations seeking a state to call their own based on the principles of self-governance.

### Key Players

One major group of players in this issue are the countries containing significant minority groups calling for self-governance; that is, countries housing supposed stateless nations. These countries often vary in their stances toward the minority nations within their borders; some make efforts to accommodate minority groups in their calls for self-governance, while others crack down on them in efforts to centralize their government. SOCHUM may be interested in addressing how these countries are to set policy on an international scale.

While the stateless nations themselves are obviously key players when it comes to discussions around the issue, their very statelessness often means they are not present at the U.N. (Palestine is a notable exception to this). This means that other countries present at the U.N. may be the ones to champion the cause of self-governance for stateless nations. This often means democratic nations who value liberty and representation may be interested in defending the rights of minority nations around the world.

### Questions to Consider

1. What are the definitions or qualifications to be considered a nation without a state?
2. How should negotiations between governments and nations without states take place?

- a. Will it cause devastating emotional burdens and trauma for the individuals involved in this process?
3. How can the United Nations ensure fair and proper implementation of self-governance for nations without a state around the world?
  - a. Will self-governance differ between nations and is this acceptable?
  - b. To what extent can a nation achieve increased autonomy within their current state of residence without being given complete self-governance?
4. What role should states without any significant minority nations within their borders have in international discussions around stateless nations?
5. Are there further benefits that extend from granting self-governance to nations without a state that can benefit said nations and the international community?
6. How will judicial and legislative systems address conflicts between nations within the same geographical regions?

### Useful Links

1. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>
2. Indigenous Self-Government in Canada  
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-self-government>
3. House passes motion recognizing Quebecois as nation  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/house-passes-motion-recognizing-quebecois-as-nation-1.574359>

4. Who Are The Kurds?

<https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/who-are-kurds>

5. Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>

6. Respect for Traditional Self-Governance, Informed Consent in Decisions Critical to Upholding Indigenous Peoples' Rights, Mandate Holder Tells Third Committee

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gashc4234.doc.htm>

7. Special Committee on Decolonization Approves Text Calling upon United States to Promote Puerto Rico's Self-Determination, Eventual Independence

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/gacol3346.doc.htm>

## Topic 2: Addressing Non-Refoulement in the Age of Global Warming

### Outline

1. Background
2. Current Examples of this Issue
3. Key Players
4. Questions to Consider
5. Useful Links



### Background

Global warming is one of the most pressing issues of our time and has increasingly become a major cause of displacement and migration. As the global climate crisis worsens, the number of individuals forced to flee their homes due to natural disasters, which deprive them of their basic needs, has been dramatically increasing; these specific types of refugees are called “climate refugees”. From Afghanistan to Central America, extreme weather disasters such as droughts and floods are negatively impacting nations and communities all over the world. The effects of climate change disasters can worsen poverty, increase food insecurity and decrease access to natural resources in ways that stoke instability and violence. In April 2021, the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) released data showing that the number of people displaced due to climate-related disasters since 2010 has risen to 21.5 million.

Due to the high numbers of refugees, there are many questions and issues surrounding where they should go, how they are going to get there etc., one of the biggest issues being refoulement. Refoulement is where refugees are returned to the place they originally fled from, regardless of whether or not the refugees are liable to be subjected to persecution. It is important

to note that although article 33 of the UNHRC prohibits the refoulement of refugees, these terms are only limited based on one's "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." Thus, the refugees of one of the most pertinent issues today, global warming, are unprotected and in a grey area. They do not exist in international refugee law. Therefore, it must be asked of the international community how it can manage these populations? Should states be able to refoul those individuals fleeing environmental concerns when there is a credible threat to their wellbeing in their place of origin?

### Current Examples of this Issue

#### 1. The Middle East and North Africa

In the past century, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have seen their temperature increase by 1.5 °C. MENA is the most water-scarce region in the world, leading to droughts, wildfires, and more intense heat waves. The reduction in rainfall has negatively impacted the agriculture sector in the region leading to food insecurity and has also left about 60% of the population with very limited access to potable water. All of these effects of global warming have been creating unlivable conditions causing an increase in climate refugees from the region.

#### 2. The European Union and its Refugee Crisis

In the refugee crisis in Europe, there has been a much larger influx of asylum-seekers who have fled their home countries; these refugees are no longer solely caused by political-based issues but have also increasingly been due to climate change. However, many countries within the EU have responded to these refugees hostilely (e.g., Greece maintaining detention camps for Syrians in order to send them back (refoulement) to where they came from).

### 3. Island Nations

Many smaller island nations have begun to experience some severe effects of climate change; rising sea levels have led to issues such as flooding and erosion, and can eventually lead to complete submersion. As such, citizens of island nations will then all become climate refugees.

#### Key Players

A group of key players in this issue are countries that don't have the ability to mitigate the effects of global warming while suffering the most from its effects. These countries are more vulnerable to having more displaced people because of the seriousness of the combination of global warming alongside other factors including but not limited to, mass poverty within the country, unstable governments etc. SOCHUM should be interested in the creation of a set of international policies/establishing international agreeance addressing how the international community will manage the growing crisis that is climate refugees.

Another group of key players are the countries that do the majority of polluting and contribute the most to global warming as these nations often have relatively large economies and international influence. Since these nations are responsible for the majority of pollution, what role (and to what extent) should they play in solving the climate refugee crisis?

Another group of key players, specifically in terms of the non-refoulement of refugees, are nations with strict immigration/refugee policies. As these countries tend to be geographically located near countries severely affected by global warming, they tend to have a larger influx of refugees coming to their countries seeking asylum. In the management of climate refugees, every country has handled the crisis differently. However, some nations choose to shut them out for a variety of different reasons or send them back to their country of origin, even through the use of

force. Due to the uniqueness of climate refugees, a legalized set of policies has not yet been allotted to them, which acts as a point of causation for their non-refoulement.

### Questions to Consider

1. How will SOCHUM consider the relationship between countries' levels of pollution output and experiences of the effects of global warming which create disparities between each countries' amount of climate refugees and refugee policy while creating a draft resolution?
2. What is the interaction between state sovereignty and the UN's responsibility to act on behalf of the vulnerable individuals and groups that are climate refugees?
3. What should qualify someone to be protected from refoulement under a new set of regulations?
4. How can the international community distribute responsibility for climate and environmental refugees are given the disparate impacts of climate change?

### Useful Links

1. The Coming Climate Migration Crisis In the Middle East and North Africa  
<https://newlinesinstitute.org/climate-migration/the-coming-climate-migration-crisis-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>
2. UNHCR: World must turn COP26 words into action for forcibly displaced and stateless people  
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/11/618e36334/unhcr-world-must-turn-cop26-words-action-forcibly-displaced-stateless-people.html>

3. COP26: Five Takeaways for Climate Migration and Displacement  
<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2021/11/23/cop26-5-takeaways-for-climate-migration-and-displacement>
4. Climate Change And The Exacerbating Refugee Crisis In Greece And Asia Minor  
<https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/climate-change-and-the-exacerbating-refugee-crisis-in-greece-and-asia-minor>
5. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/statusofrefugees.aspx>
6. The Refugee Convention  
<https://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A1377%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22FitB%22%7D%5D>
7. Climate Change as a Trigger of Non-Refoulement Obligations Under International Human Rights Law  
<https://www.ejiltalk.org/climate-change-as-a-trigger-of-non-refoulement-obligations-under-international-human-rights-law/>
8. Environmental Displacement (Maps)  
[https://atlas-for-the-end-of-the-world.com/world\\_maps/world\\_maps\\_environmental\\_displacement.html](https://atlas-for-the-end-of-the-world.com/world_maps/world_maps_environmental_displacement.html)
9. The U.N. Refugee Convention Is Under Pressure—and Showing Its Age  
<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29869/the-un-refugees-regime-is-under-pressure-and-showing-its-age>
10. The Economist Explains: Who Counts as a Refugee?  
<https://outline.com/L2sRA3>