

HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

*Prepared by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR)**

The science is unambiguous: global climate change exists; it is caused largely by the emission of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) derived substantially from human activity; and it looms as a major threat to the worldwide human and natural environment—increasing earth’s lower atmosphere and surface temperatures that in turn provoke glacial retreats, raise sea levels, reduce river flows, change precipitation patterns, heighten extreme weather, accelerate species extinctions, and spread disease. As the climate threat grows in breadth and severity, basic human rights to water, food, health, economic security, culture, and community are at risk for current and future generations. The following data identify some of the human rights implications of climate change if left unabated.

- 3.6-8.1 Degrees Fahrenheit (2.0-4.5 Celsius) of temperature increase expected globally by 2100 if GHG emissions are not reduced 50%–80% within 50 years—the caloric tipping point at which global warming is likely to render life-sustaining resources insufficient to meet world demand equitably (G8 Gleneagles, 2005; EPA, 2006; Greenfacts, 2006; Pew Center on Global Climate Change, 2006; UNFCCC, 2006; IPCC, 2007; UNHCHR, 2007)
- 25 Percent of global GHG emissions currently emanating from the U.S. alone (five times the per capita world average), significantly contributing to global warming, thereby severely disadvantaging the largely agrarian economies of developing countries in their struggle for environments that can secure and sustain adequate standards of living for their people (Royal Society, 2005; World Wildlife Fund, 2005; BBC, 2006; Pew Center on Global Climate Change, 2006; Greenfacts, 2006; EPA, 2006; UNFCCC, 2006)
- 125 Estimated dollars per capita that 39 industrialized economies party to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (the U.S. not among them) must invest annually to meet their commitments to an average 5.2% reduction (below 1990 levels) of their collective GHG emissions by 2008–2012—an impact on economic growth rates of less than

- 0.1% over ten years yet providing substantial relief for the basic subsistence and health of poor populations worldwide (Royal Society, 2005; BBC, 2006; UNHCHR, 2006)
- 1,000** Years before global warming could melt Greenland's ice cap (the world's second largest) completely—a comforting time span but for the fact that, absent a reversal of current trends, only about 50 years remain before the melt becomes irreversible, leading to a potential rise of 21.3 feet (6.5 meters) of average sea levels that would disrupt ecosystems and marine food webs, submerge inhabited islands, intensify flooding, and otherwise subvert the right of present and future generations to diverse, balanced, and sustainable environments essential to habitat, health, and life itself (The Climate Trust, 2005; EPA, 2006; Greenfacts, 2006; Pew Center on Global Climate Change, 2006; Renewable Energy Trust, 2006; IPCC, 2007)
- 22,000** Minimum deaths caused by Europe's summer 2003 heat wave, the hottest in Europe in over 500 years and, because of global warming, likely to be equaled or surpassed by future heat waves projected to increase 100-fold in the next 40 years, bringing with them increased drought, disrupted sanitation systems, polluted air and water, and other environmental hazards that, targeting particularly the elderly and children, will erode rightful access to the highest attainable standards of health and well-being for all (Royal Society, 2005; EPA, 2006; Greenfacts, 2006)
- 150,000,000** People worldwide predicted to become refugees by 2050 (mostly from the global South) due to desertification, exhausted aquifers, and other severe environmental changes provoked by global warming, swelling the “environmental refugees” that already exceed refugees from conflict and war, thus seriously challenging basic rights to subsistence, bodily security, and even to peace because of likely competition over food, water, energy, and other vital resources (Royal Society, 2005; All Africa, 2006; Pew Center on Global Climate Change, 2006; EPA, 2006; Renewable Energy Trust, 2006; UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2002; World Wildlife Fund, 2006, New Economics Foundation, 2007; Countercurrent.org, 2007)

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