

No Option Except Escape

A Role Play on the Struggles of Climate Refugees

By members of WorldOregon's Young Leaders in Action program:

Leah Alper (11th grade), Jasleen Bhu (12th grade), Benjamin Connor (11th grade), Pearl Cook (12th grade), Lizzi Flumo (12th grade), Charlie Hatcher (11th grade), Ragheeb Hoque (10th grade), Liyu Huang (11th grade), Yousif Ibrahim (11th grade), Mahmood Jawad (11th grade), Maya Joiner (11th grade), Ashley Lin (11th grade), Amanda Rau (11th grade), Tasneem Sarkez (12th grade), Ella Shin (11th grade), Maya Sonpatki (12th grade), Sophia Stedman (10th grade), Nathan Stein (12th grade), Kiran Weasel (12th grade), and Jessica Woolfolk (12th grade)

THIS ROLE PLAY AIMS TO ILLUMINATE THE struggles faced by climate refugees and the uphill battle they fight to receive recognition and protection. Students will learn about the current legal definition of refugee and a variety of situations of climate refugees all over the world, and will be driven to action by reading about corporate greed and exploring suggested next steps. Through the stories of six different people whose lives have been changed by the climate refugee crisis, students will try to imagine what it is like for a person to have *No Option Except Escape*.

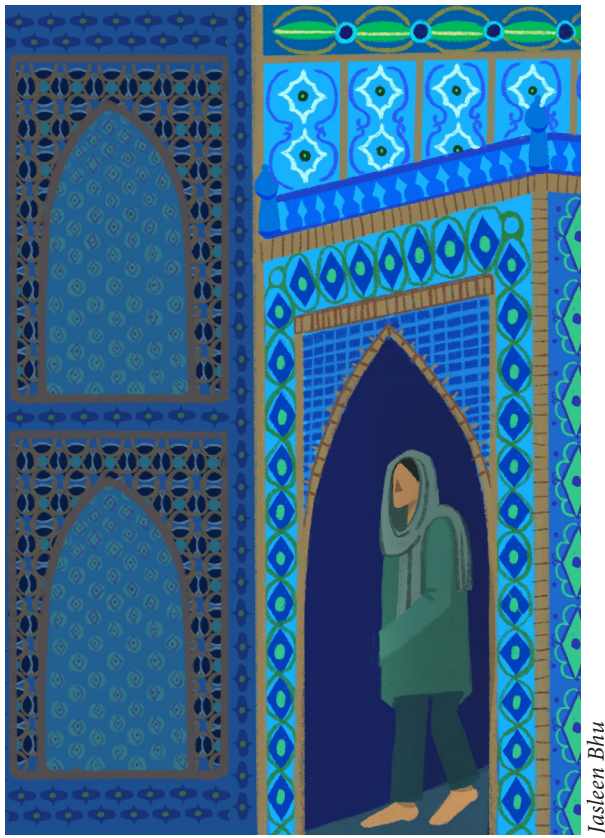
Handouts

- No Option Except Escape handout
- Fact Sheet handout (double-sided), one for each student
- Climate Refugee Roles, divide six roles in even groups among the class:
 1. Ainanani Teitiota, Kiribati
 2. Agnes Sanchez, Puerto Rico
 3. Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez, Guatemala
 4. Kamal Hussein, Myanmar
 5. Sadiq, Somalia (Sadiq's last name is unknown)
 6. Zeinab, Afghanistan (Zeinab's last name is unknown)
- International Summit of Business Leaders Proposal handout, one for each student



Materials

- Paper for placards for each group and markers to write name of climate refugee on placard
- Each student should have two pieces of paper — one to write their thoughts on, and one to write their interior monologue on.



- *Expect and accept non-closure:* We are not going to solve the problem of climate refugees today, but talking about the issue is important.
- *Stay engaged:* If everyone stays engaged throughout the class, there will be more of an awareness about climate refugees, a group of people often neglected when talking about climate change.
- *Enter into the emotional landscape of your character respectfully:* Try not to generalize these people's thoughts and feelings.
- *Listen with an open heart:* These people have different lived experiences, so please stay open-minded about each person's experience.
- *Don't victimize the refugees:* Celebrate the resilience and strength in every person and perspective. These roles are based on and inspired by real people so listen with respect.

Classroom Setup

- Six separate tables for groups of equal numbers with enough chairs for 1/6 of the students
- Blank placards placed in the center of the table

Expectations

These expectations are explained in order to give people equal footing during the activity. To underscore the activity's "ground rules," it's helpful if these are read out loud to students or by students.

- *No accents:* Don't use accents or impressions to try to authenticate a person who is from a particular culture or country. This enforces stereotypes and divides rather than aids in understanding someone's position.
- *Speak your truth responsibly:* Attempt to put yourself in the shoes of the other person, be aware of your own experience, and be ready to take on a new one.

Procedure

Part 1: Pre-Convention Discussion

Goal: To gauge what the class already knows on the topic and provide baseline information for all students to be successful in the activity.

- Begin by asking the class to discuss the definition of a refugee to assess students' previous knowledge on refugees.
 1. As a class, brainstorm a list of requirements to be considered a refugee.
 2. Who is a refugee?
 3. What does it mean to be a refugee?
- Read out the definitions of these two terms to the students. They come from the Othering & Belonging Institute's 2019 report [*Climate Refugees: The Climate Crisis and Rights Denied*](#).

(1) **Refugees:** *Individuals who, as a result of events occurring before Jan. 1, 1951, and owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail oneself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.*

(2) **Climate refugees:** *Individuals who are forcibly displaced (within or beyond their nation-state boundaries) by short- and long-term natural disasters and environmental degradation precipitated or exacerbated by the climate crisis. Such short-term disasters consist of typhoons, hurricanes, wildfires, and tsunamis, while long-term environmental changes include desertification, deforestation, rising temperatures, and rising sea levels, among others.*

- Distribute and read aloud “No Option Except Escape.” Have students read the Fact Sheet and highlight or write down a question or something that they found interesting, surprising, powerful, or upsetting for each category. Then, ask them to turn to a partner and share.

Part 2: Interior Monologue

Goal: To have students connect with roles in a respectful and empathetic way, putting them in an open mindset to participate in the activity.

- Form six groups of roughly equal size and have students sit with their groups at one of the six tables for each of the Climate Refugee roles. Distribute the corresponding roles to each member of the group, making sure each student has a role. Students in the same group should have the same role.

Ask members of each role group to work together to create a simple name tag with the name of their climate refugee and their country. These name tags will be put on the role groups’ table. (Note: Some of these roles draw information from the valuable website Migrant Child Storytelling: migrantchildstorytelling.org.)

- Have students read their Climate Refugee roles individually. Ask students to annotate the roles, looking for the hopes, worries, and emotions of the person and interacting with the text empathetically. Specifically, ask students to look for connections between the person’s displacement and climate change.
- After students read and annotate the Climate Refugee roles individually, ask students to consider these questions as they write their interior monologue, a personal narrative from the perspective of their climate refugee role:
 1. How did you become a refugee?
 2. What was the moment you realized you might have to leave your home?
 3. How has being in a different country/new environment affected you?
- Ask students to write from the “I” perspective to attempt to put themselves in the shoes of the climate refugee, and to imagine the emotions, worries, hopes, fears, and memories of this person beyond what they have read in the Climate Refugee roles. Remind students to be thoughtful and consider that the role they are reading is based on a real person.
- Before having students write, read a short example interior monologue aloud to give students an expectation/baseline of what they should be writing and to encourage creativity and imagination beyond what they’ve read. Here are two examples the teacher could read that were written by students doing a similar activity:



(1) *I still feel myself drifting back to that one singular night. The night before everything changed. Before, sure, like anyone, my life was not perfect. But it was good. I lived in a small unit in a house completely filled with low- or mid-income tenants. I was low-income, and unfortunately, low to the ground. It wasn't great, but it was mine and I lived in comfort. The day before the hurricane hit, I remember wishing, in what now is a perpetual cruel irony, that I would have a change to my life. Now, all I can do is wish for the past. That night I woke up to the sound of rain, soon followed by the walls of my tiny room I slept in beginning to shake. That moment was the most scared I had been up to that point in my life. At that moment, all I could think is "What now? What?" My only reprieve is a line from Hamilton that kept repeating over and over in my mind: "In the eye of the hurricane there is quiet." The moment came and for just one moment there was quiet. I remember feeling brief relief before bracing myself*

as the distant wind began to blow ever louder and the rain returned.

(2) *I used to be a younger brother. When I was growing up, I followed my two older brothers everywhere, even when they didn't want me to. Now, it's been nine years since I've seen either of their faces, since I've heard them laugh, since I kicked a soccer ball with them through the dusty roads in front of the house we used to live in. Now, instead of hearing their voices when I wake up, I hear the sound of cars, voices of strangers in a strange language above and below me and all around me, in the apartment my mother and I share with two other families whose last names I don't know. When I left behind my home country, everyone expected me to be relieved, to be grateful. I was only 7 years old and all I wanted was to go home and have my family back together again.*

- After students write their own interior monologues, have students share these in their small groups of the same role. You may ask them to write one full page or for a set amount of time.
- Students should listen for and discuss:
 1. What signs of culture were apparent in your life before you were a refugee?
 2. What was it like leaving your home?
 3. What was a "normal" day in your life before you became a refugee?
 4. In what ways did climate affect your life? Why do you consider yourself a climate refugee?
 5. What do you need from the global community?

Part 3: Climate Refugee Convention

Goal: To have students explore the similarities and differences between the climate refugees.

- Tell students that they will be participating in a climate refugee convention activity where they will move through stations to

meet other climate refugees from around the world. Remind students that throughout their conversations they should stay in their first-person refugee role. You may have to continue to remind them to do so throughout the role play.

- After students have discussed the questions in their small role groups, provide the following directions for the activity:

1. Students will split up their small groups into two groups. For example, if there were five students in a small group (with the same refugee role), the small group would split into a group of two and a group of three.
2. Choose one of the two groups to be the “travel” group. The other group will be the “home” group.
3. When the activity starts, the “travel” group will get up and move in a clockwise direction to another group. The “home” group will stay in their location and greet the “travel” delegation from a different role.
4. Give students seven minutes in each rotation. Then, ask the “travel” group to move to the next group. Here are questions that should prompt their conversations:
 - Why did you become a refugee?
 - Who or what is responsible for your situation?
 - What is your life like since you migrated?
 - How is it different?
 - How can the international community support you and your situation?

It might be helpful to have these on a note-taking sheet, as they will need to report back to their groups about what they have learned.

5. Repeat this process two more times. Each “travel” delegation should

have met with three other groups. The “home” delegation should also have met with three different groups. This will ensure that all six climate refugees will meet each other.

- Ask the original small role groups to come back together. Have the “travel” group share what they have learned with the “home” group, and vice versa, focusing especially on similarities and differences between their role and other roles.
- Discuss the following questions as a whole class about what the groups learned as they “met” other climate refugees around the world. Students should stay in their climate refugee roles. The teacher could lead the discussion or let the students take the lead as climate refugees. Questions they should consider:
 1. What are some common themes regarding why people are forced out of their homes?
 2. What were some of the most surprising things you learned from the other climate refugees?
 3. What do you need to live a life of dignity?
 4. What demands do you have of the international community?

Part 4: Push Back

Goal: To spark anger for the inadequacy of the proposal, to critically think about who/what causes the situation of climate refugees, and to brainstorm possible solutions.

- Pass out the International Summit of Business Leaders Proposal handout. Have students read the proposal by themselves then write a reflection about their thoughts, still remaining in their roles. As an alternative, the teacher might do a dramatic reading of the proposal or ask for a student volunteer to read it. Note that this proposal from business leaders is not an actual document. It was written as a summary statement to

represent positions of fossil fuel industry executives and others tied to the status quo of extraction for private profit.

- After students write their reflections, have the class come back together for a large group discussion. Have the students talk about their thoughts on the proposal.
- Ask students:
 1. How do you feel about this proposal?
 2. Do you agree with the statements that were made?
 3. Does it fulfill your need for change?
 4. What do you feel is lacking from this proposal?
 5. Who is responsible and who is to blame for the struggles of climate refugees?
 6. What assumptions do the business leaders make that may not be accurate?
 7. What are some things that you would change or demands that you would make to counter this proposal?

About YLA

Young Leaders in Action (YLA) is a program where high school students from around the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area sharpen their leadership skills to take action on local, national, and global issues. Students in YLA work to expand their global perspective by meeting youth leaders from around the globe, as well as build leadership skills in monthly meetings. Toward the end of the program, students work to make an action project that benefits the community and that can potentially reduce or solve a local, national, or global issue. This year, students in YLA worked to make a role play on climate refugees with the hope that people who participate would become more aware of climate refugees, and feel inspired to take action. (2020)

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No Option Except Escape

Everyone on this planet relies on the environment. We use it, but we also abuse it. As we endlessly barrage nature with our bullets of pollution, it weakens, slowly crumbling into nothing. With every plastic bag floating in the ocean and every puff of CO₂ released into our atmosphere, the world around us dies, taking the lives of countless people. As the natural world changes, it rarely disturbs the wealthy and the privileged, who can afford to put up walls and insulate themselves from the damage. The effects are felt by the farmers whose crops are failing, the fishers whose fish are disappearing, and herders whose livestock are falling ill. The effects are felt when devastating hurricanes and cyclones kill hundreds of thousands of people, destroying their homes and the lives of millions of others. Earthquakes split families apart, forcing entire countries to struggle to build bridges and bring their communities back together. Wildfires race through forests and farms, reducing all forms of life to ashes and leaving nothing in its wake. Droughts and famines tear through communities and turn them against each other, inciting conflict over ever scarcer resources hoarded only by a select few. Sea level rise threatens to inundate entire nations and bury them beneath the ocean. And yet, it's the underprivileged majority who lack the money to buy themselves out of consequences. In some situations, there is *No Option Except Escape*.

Even though some people have no possible way to live, eat, or survive in their homelands, there are barriers holding them back from leaving. Currently, climate refugees do not exist, in the legal sense, because a set of outdated refugee laws, written when environmental displacement was not a concern, exclude them from legal protection. This leaves countless people trapped with nowhere to go, leaving them as prisoners in their own home. This role play on the climate refugee crisis showcases the struggle of those who can't escape when the environment around them fights back. Through six different roles that narrate the struggles of those around the world fighting for climate refugee status, a new perspective is offered on what it means to be a climate refugee. We aim to increase awareness and give voice to climate refugees around the world. For those with *No Option Except Escape*, we want to help build the road to safety.

Fact Sheet

Definitions

- **Environmental Change:** Changes or disturbances in the environment, frequently caused indirectly by humans.
- **Forced migration:** Involuntary or coerced movement of a person away from their homeland due to various causes out of their control.
- **Internally Displaced Person:** Someone who is forced to leave the region they live in, but remains within the borders of their country.
- **Natural disaster:** A natural event that causes great damage to a group's physical, economic, and environmental well-being, be it in minutes or in decades. It's important to note that the disasters referenced in this role play often occur as a result of human influence, and so are not strictly "natural."

Migrant Facts and Statistics

- There is currently no international legislation about the protection of climate refugees.
- As of June 2019, there were 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, 41.3 million of whom were internally displaced.
- 28 million people were newly displaced in 2018, at a rate of one person forcibly displaced every two seconds.
- In 2018, 17.2 million people were displaced due to natural disasters, both short and long term
- More than 253.7 million people were displaced by natural disasters from 2008 to 2018, which is three to 10 times more people than war/conflict worldwide.
- At this rate, climate-induced migration is projected to increase to as much as 1 billion people by 2050.
- In 2017, 80 percent of international migrants in Africa and Asia remained in Africa and Asia, and 60 percent of international migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean stayed in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Migrants currently represent about 3.4 percent of the world's population, but only 0.3 percent of the world's population are designated as refugees.

Country Specific Statistics

- Sea levels in the island nation of Kiribati are expected to rise at least 9 centimeters by 2055, even in a low-emission scenario.
- In Guatemala, temperatures will increase by up to 4 degrees Celsius by 2050, leading to less predictable rainfall, harming agricultural production.

- In April 2018 alone, 300,000 people in Somalia were displaced due to flash flooding.
- More people in Afghanistan were displaced by climate-related disasters than military conflict in 2018.
- The frequency of cyclones in Myanmar is expected to increase, displacing a projected 560,000 people per year.

Climate Change

- Natural disasters have increased by more than 200 percent since 1960.
- Sea levels worldwide are rising at an annual rate of 3.2 millimeters per year.
- About 38 percent of the world's population, or roughly 2.5 billion people, live in coastal areas. Seventy-five percent of these people live in so-called less developed countries, which contain more than 90 percent of the world's low-elevation coastal zones that affect the rural poor.

Relation to Socioeconomic Status

- As of 2015, 79 percent of those experiencing poverty lived in rural areas, where most people rely on food production and moderate seasonal changes to survive.
- 34 percent of the rural population in countries in the Global South are classified as extremely poor (living on less than \$1.90 in 2015 dollars).

Sources:

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/climaterefugees>

<https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/migration-myths-and-the-global-south/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/climate-change/how-to-live-with-it/weather.html>

http://world.350.org/pacific/files/2014/01/11_PCCSP_Kiribati_8pp.pdf

https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2017_USAID%20ATLAS_Climate%20Change%20Risk%20Profile_Guatemala.pdf

Climate Refugee Roles

Ainanani Teitiota, Age 9 Kiribati

My skin constantly burns, the rising sun roasts me alive as my parched throat aches for just a sip of fresh rainwater. This is Kiribati. I am a New Zealander, I am i-Kiribati, I am Ainanani Teitiota, and I am a climate refugee. My father is Ioane (YO-an-nay) Teitiota and my mother is Angua Erika. Even though both my parents are i-Kiribati, my siblings and I were all born in New Zealand. My family was among the 2,000 i-Kiribati who migrated to New Zealand, but, facing deportation, my father tried to gain legal recognition as a climate refugee. The New Zealand courts rejected our request, stating that we weren't actually refugees because what we were escaping wasn't war, persecution, or violence. They deported my entire family back to Kiribati, even though it was the exact place we were trying to escape from. Here, our wells are dirty, our homes are flooding, and our crops are failing. Although we are surrounded by water, we still cannot get enough of it to quench our thirst. My skin itches and burns, but there's nothing I can do now except to hope for a better life. My name means "Beautiful Land," something that Kiribati is no longer.

Ignorant people wonder why we would ever want to leave this country where our situation is absolutely dismal. Kiribati relies on fishing, farming, and rainwater to survive. However, that rainwater is hard to come by. Sometimes it is much too dry outside and I feel so thirsty that I could empty an entire river, something that we don't even have in Kiribati. Other times, like in 2015 when tropical cyclone Pam hit our country, we watched from afar as Kiribati was destroyed and 45 percent of our people were forced to leave their homes. These types of events shouldn't be happening in Kiribati, but they are, because far-too-rich people in faraway lands are destroying us. Us i-Kiribati are not contributing much of anything to the climate crisis, yet our homeland is being destroyed right before our eyes because of it. As the climate crisis grows, events like droughts and rising sea levels intensify, putting everyone in danger. People in "developed" countries can afford to ignore this crisis, while only a quarter of my people can even think about leaving Kiribati with the money that they have, even though staying in Kiribati at this rate is practically a death sentence. That is because our country is only 1.8 meters above sea level at its highest point and by 2100, most of our land will sink beneath the ocean if climate change is not stopped. Rich oil barons — who have reaped huge profits from the burning of fossil fuels, filling the atmosphere with greenhouse gases — are making our country disappear and poisoning it along the way. We are the first to see the sun rise every day and we will be the first ones to never see it again.

I was a refugee and I still am. This small strip of land, constantly assaulted by the ocean and beaten by winds and storms, is no longer Kiribati. I am in a foreign country that is no longer my own. Legally, I am unable to escape this wasteland, unable to even be shunned and looked down upon in another foreign country. My siblings and I still have a future, but for now, we are trapped. All we want is safety. All we hope to do is become recognized as climate refugees so we can live a peaceful life back in New Zealand. Climate change has ravaged our country and it is now practically uninhabitable. I am Ainanani Teitiota, and I am a climate refugee. I just need the law to see me as such and recognize that I need to be safe now.

Agnes Sanchez, Age 23
Puerto Rico

I've been working toward my master's degree at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. This was not my dream, this was not my plan. I am from Puerto Rico, from the beaches, from the sofritos and adobo flavors of my hometown. Don't get me wrong, I'm not ungrateful that I have the chance to study and receive an education. My grandmother always told me that was the most important thing. But I never thought I'd have to choose my education over my home, my beautiful Puerto Rico.

I remember the day I knew I had to leave. We had been hit by hurricanes before, but Hurricane Maria was particularly devastating. Climate change had worsened the effects of these storms, making the normally brutal weather even more destructive. Later I would find out that Hurricane Maria and storms like it are almost five times more likely to happen today than half a century ago because of the warmer air and seawater. The hurricane destroyed homes, bridges, and roads, knocking out power to the entire island in the process. In the aftermath, I found myself having to drive more than two hours every day to a place where I could get Wi-Fi, electricity, and charge my laptop. When I eventually ran out of gas, I had to write 17 pages of my thesis by hand. I lived at home with my two brothers and parents, but we began sharing the house with my aunt and cousins after the hurricane destroyed their house. My aunt is one of the strongest people I know. She survived the hurricane and carried her children and pets to safety, before ending up stranded on the top of her car for three days.

I knew I had to leave Puerto Rico when my advisor told me she was worried I wasn't going to finish graduate school. She knew of my situation and handed me a brochure for a college in Connecticut where she thought I could be accepted and could finish my degree. I'd never heard of Connecticut before. Two months later, I bought a plane ticket and the first winter jacket I'd ever owned.

There are thousands of people in situations like mine or worse. Through the organization Chispa Connecticut, I've been able to help many of the people who fled after Hurricane Maria. Many of these folks live in hotels and feel lost trying to settle into the United States. We've helped people look for homes, translate their résumés from Spanish to English, and conducted practice interviews to help them with jobs. We've worked to build community and raise money for aiding Puerto Rico, especially after Hurricanes Irma and Harvey. It seems impossible to go back to our home, with the continuous blackouts that make it difficult to cook, clean, sleep, and go about our lives. We cannot go back to our homes after entire neighborhoods have been flattened.

The Environmental Protection Agency in 2017 put limits on U.S. factories and companies burning fossil fuels, in order to limit the release of greenhouse gases, but this isn't nearly enough. Greenhouse gas emissions are accelerating climate change at an unprecedented rate, and as the world's climate changes, we will see more disasters like Hurricane Maria requiring more expensive help.

We have received help, but the truth is that the United States isn't doing enough. Puerto Rico has \$80 billion in damages, and the U.S. government has contributed only \$11.2 billion (though President Trump claims they have given \$91 billion). We don't just need relief funds, but access to clean energy and drinking water. We need a sustainable future and we need opportunities for our people to be seen. We need to be seen as climate refugees, fleeing a country we don't want to leave because of the damage amplified by climate change.

**Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez, Age 16
Guatemala**

I used to be happy. I remember those days when I was a child, and I played the marimba. I enjoyed playing it and I was famous for being the best marimba player at my school. I used to eat dinner with all of my family, my parents, and my eight siblings. We talked not only about how school was, and teachers who we like and dislike, but we also talked about social issues such as how we have a shortage of water that causes a lot of problems with crop production. All around the world people are fleeing their homes as climate change forces them out of their communities.

My parents fled due to the drastic impact that droughts had on the agricultural production of key cash crops like coffee and beans. Fossil fuel companies had been filling the air with unprecedented amounts of greenhouse gases, accelerating the climate change that was causing the droughts. To make things worse, these same unregulated companies have polluted our water, making it harder for us to grow our vital crops. In addition, Guatemala was suffering from rising temperatures, floods, and food insecurity, which have all been made more common by climate change. Forty-seven percent of families in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are food insecure, and water availability is expected to decrease in Guatemala by 82 percent. All of these environmental factors drove my parents to seek refuge in the United States, even though that country has horrendous policies for immigrants from Central America, which negatively impacts migrants who don't have enough money to seek refuge. The stereotypes and xenophobia toward migrant groups from Central America only makes it harder. My uncle was barely able to get into the United States, and was able to work only menial jobs making 69 percent of what his white co-workers make. Even though climate change is caused mostly by the rich countries, Guatemala doesn't have enough support from the international community to mitigate climate change and thus reduce the amount of climate refugees.

But things changed when I was 16. I left home by boat to support my eight siblings and meet my parents in the United States. When I got to the United States, I started to feel hot and cold at the same time, and I knew something wasn't right because I felt so sick. My time in the United States was cut short though, when everyone was forced off of the boat and was taken to a detention center. When I was taken to the detention center in Texas, the nurse there checked my temperature and I was diagnosed with the flu. "If your condition gets any worse you will go to the hospital," she said. But my condition was already bad enough and I was confused as to why I was in the detention center. *A mal tiempo buena cara*, my mother always says to me. It's a Guatemalan saying that translates to "At bad times, have a good face." However, I could not have a good face when something this bad was happening to me. I started to feel sorry for my family and wondered if I would ever reunite with them at their house.

I tried to walk to the small, unsanitary bathroom in my cell, but I noticed that I couldn't even walk straight anymore. I cupped my hands on my mouth to stop myself from gagging, but I saw that there was a puddle of blood falling from my hands. I thanked God for my family, hopefully all happy in Texas, with enough resources to stay as a family full of love, peace, and happiness. I smiled before I fell on the floor, because I wanted to show my mother that I had a *buena cara* during the *mal tiempo*.

Carlos died, becoming one of the 214 people who have died while detained in U.S. immigration centers since 2004.

Kamal Hussein, Age 20
Myanmar

My whole life I have been living in fear. Fear of going to school, being outside, and leaving my house to support my family. The majority of my neighbors and friends are farmers and rely on agriculture to provide for their families. The impact of climate change has not only had a disastrous effect on our economy and resources, but also on the stability of our government. As rising waters compress people even closer together, my government of Myanmar (Burma) has slowly taken a turn for the worse, turning its people against each other as scarcity becomes an ever-growing fear. The Buddhist leaders of Myanmar claim that we, the Muslim Rohingya minority, are taking up their resources and need to be removed. Many people are ignorant of how cruel some countries can be to their own people, especially with the threat of worsening monsoons destroying our agriculture. Since we as a country are running out of good land and food for our people, the government treats the Rohingya minority as outcasts and creatures who need to be cleansed and, worst of all, exterminated.

I lived through this reality while growing up and will always have the scars still ingrained in my skin from the prejudice I faced as a youth and still do today. Going to school, I was barred, beaten, and stripped of my humanity by a military projecting their climate change-induced hardships on us. 560,000 people, including myself, had to leave our families as we fled to Bangladesh, the location of the largest refugee camp in the world, in an attempt to survive. Not knowing whether my parents were still with me or departed to the next life, I trudged forward, not looking back at the explosions, bullets, and storms ripping through my people.

There are more than a million Rohingya refugees who have fled Myanmar into Bangladesh. My life here was difficult at first, not having parents or a place to officially call home, just a cramped refugee camp overflowing with us climate refugees. However, I found people in the U.N. who helped me achieve my dream of saving climate refugee children like myself who were lost or separated from their parents. I set up a booth and since then, have reunited more than 784 lost children with their parents in this maze of a refugee camp. I hope to become the parent figure that I never had for kids who themselves do not have parents.

My story as a minority in Myanmar is just one of thousands of stories of people who like me, have also faced the brutal realities of climate change and the struggle of being a climate refugee. I feel that many people are unaware of the fact that climate change causes wars, and not everyone flees their country because of the immediate effects of climate change, but instead because of how the government handles the fear of losing resources. As fossil fuel companies control governments like ours and developed countries pollute and destroy all of our resources with their consumption, we are pushed out. Just like thousands of my people, when our countries turned against us, we had no choice except escape.

Sadiq, Age 16
Somalia

I lived in Somalia with my siblings until I was 7 years old, which is when the fighting started. I remember when we could come home after a long day of school, my mother had prepared *anjero*, and the smell of *uunsi* filled the home. Then everything changed. My beloved homeland of Somalia, a land of rich history and cultural heritage, began to become a poor eastern African nation. With my family and many others relying on the weather to allow us to grow our food and provide for ourselves, the warming earth started to chip away at the arable land, until the desertification was too much to handle.

Famine and drought swept through the nation, affecting many and causing conflicts over basic necessities. The elders told us that the climate was changing; droughts were now more intense, and the rainy season has more flooding. Our livelihood was being destroyed, and the government stood by and did nothing. While many have benefited from our resources, we have been left with barely anything. I saw that drastic change in the eruption of violence, violence over the vital resources rendered rare because of the environmental changes. These changes to our climate are the result of the continued use of fossil fuels by corporations who care more about profit than human life.

My family and I left for a nearby village to escape the conflict after our house was bombed. While we were escaping, we lost two of my brothers, and through all of the commotion, my family didn't even have time to mourn them. The fighting did not cease, and I lost my father. We think he was killed over food and supplies. As the fighting continued, I had to run, fleeing in fear and following other fleeing people, not knowing where to go. I wound up in Jijiga, Ethiopia, where I found myself lost, hungry, tired, and scared. For the next few months I slept on the streets, accepting food from those who were kind enough to help. I found work cleaning shoes and cleaning cars, living on the streets for almost a year. But by the time I turned 8 years old, things began to look up for me. I was able to contact my mother, who I hadn't seen in more than a year. Two years later, my aunt came to live with me. She told me the news about my family, and how many family members I had lost. While the passing of my family stunned me, I was grateful to have my aunt with me, and to know that I was no longer alone. Later, three youth from Somalia who were refugees as well arrived in Ethiopia and lived with my aunt and me. The four of us worked every day, hoping to save money so we could make our way to Europe.

On my journey I faced many hardships, yet in the end safely made it to Italy. Here I work and try to save up to send money to my family back home. Although things are better for me, there are still millions of people in situations similar to mine, and much worse. Around the world people are being affected every day by the changing climate, with little knowledge on how to sustain their current lives. The topic of climate refugees is more pressing than ever with little attention given to it. My home and thousands of others are withering away due to the rising temperatures and it is an issue larger than any one of us can handle.

**Zeinab, Age unknown
Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has been ravaged by natural disasters my whole life. I remember the earthquakes that took the farms of my neighbors one month, while flooding took their lives the next. There was no protection, so we lived in fear. In Afghanistan, 85 percent of people rely on agriculture, making it hard for most families to stay alive. If you were lucky, your family might have the resources to leave, but many were forced to stay. My name is Zeinab and I have become a climate refugee because of the instability caused by natural disasters, a direct effect of climate change.

According to the United Nations and Afghanistan’s Environmental Protection Agency, our climate could warm by 5 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. In some places, the heat has already led to a dramatic melting of glaciers, resulting in devastating floods. Because of climate change, this is what we can expect: more extreme weather, more floods, more avalanches and landslides, and more drought.

Growing up, my father dreamed of providing me not just a roof over my head, but a good education. Not all things in Afghanistan were bad and I was content in the house we lived in. I spent my days playing in the field next to my house and swimming in the lake close by. I was young and knew little about the hardships my family faced. The family farm that once produced wheat was forced to surrender to the increasing temperatures, which led to frequent outbreaks of pests and diseases. Friends and family became poor and anxious, living between disasters. With two-thirds of Afghans affected by natural disasters, the odds were against us, so my parents decided to leave. I was devastated to leave my country, filled with rich culture and memories. I hoped one day I could return home safely.

My family fled to Turkey hoping to receive refugee status that would give us the opportunity to start a new life. But the authorities claimed that we were not true refugees because we were fleeing climate change. However, we weren’t the only ones. In 2018, 435,000 Afghans were displaced due to natural disasters. Refusing to give up hope, my father decided we would continue by boat to Greece, but in the middle of the Mediterranean, our boat broke down. Stranded in the sea, we waited for three hours until Greek police arrived and took us to a camp in Samos. It was overcrowded, six people sharing one small tent. Originally intended to hold 640 refugees, the camp now housed almost 4,000. Hundreds of refugees were forced to wait in long food lines, drink dirty water, and we were ignored by local authorities.

My mother told me not to complain. She told me to be thankful that we were safe, that dozens of refugees had died on the boats to Greece. But how could I be thankful when climate change had forced me to eat raw food, to exist in a community without my culture, and to live without a permanent home? It felt like my life was filled with waiting — for escape, for a home, for recognition that climate change has forced me and thousands of others to flee.

We stayed at the refugee camp for months, wishing to be home. Without refugee status we were vulnerable. I want to be recognized as a climate refugee. I want protection for Afghanistan and the hardworking farmers who live off its land. But I also want safety, security, and to live a life without the fear that I could lose everything in the blink of an eye.

International Summit of Business Leaders Proposal

We are hearing more talk these days about “climate refugees.” We feel it’s appropriate to discuss the severity of the actual problem, to cut through some of the climate hysteria that can cloud our vision. While the Summit certainly acknowledges the reality of climate change, the fact is that it may well be out of our hands. Throughout centuries, the burning of carbon-based fuels by billions of people may have caused a gradual increase in carbon dioxide levels, but has also lifted billions out of poverty and dramatically raised the standard of living for everyone in the world. The energy industry has provided millions of jobs and created unmatched prosperity, benefits that the global community should be mindful of shunning or denying. In addition, it’s important to keep in mind that a world with low levels of carbon dioxide does not mean we need to totally abandon fossil fuels — carbon-capture technology has flourished in recent years, and the Summit is confident that a world where the benefits of a thriving energy industry and the safety of a healthy environment can coexist.

Protecting and recognizing refugees is something we take seriously. All persons persecuted in their country should *always* be granted refugee status and have access to the many protections afforded by that status. Unfortunately, in this situation, cases regarding persons who have left their country due to natural disasters or “climate change” should not be granted refugee status. As stated in Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is defined as a person who flees their home country and cannot return due to fear of persecution because of *race, religion, nationality, or a membership in a social or political group*. We cannot afford to grant this important and necessary status to anyone who feels unsafe or fearful in their country. There must be a definitive and specific cause to that person’s persecution, and the argument of climate change does not meet that standard. Natural disasters happen all the time; they are destructive yet natural forces that we cannot blame for problems created in vulnerable countries. The companies of this Summit take our influence in the world terribly seriously and we make it a priority to help the most vulnerable in our communities, even when we are not responsible for their situations. However, precedent was set recently for how to determine refugee status. A court case decided that a man fleeing the Pacific island nation of Kiribati because of climate change was not eligible to be given refugee status in New Zealand. Based on our commitment to the 1951 Refugee Convention and international law, we cannot support granting refugee status to those displaced by environmental factors.

Needless to say, we will mobilize our extensive and robust force of experts to address this issue. Our experts will conduct more research so that we can locate the true source of these problems and help resolve them as soon as possible. We also plan to make substantial investments, including donating to a relief fund to help fix your problems while we determine who is at fault for your circumstances. In the future, however, we trust that your governments can find the funding to help their own citizens. We take these investigative actions because we truly care about those impacted by climate change, and although we are confident that you will pour your hearts into whatever policy proposals you may create, we doubt that you can generate the kind of real and tangible change that we hope to create. Displaced people, and, more specifically, displaced youth, simply don’t have the knowledge or understanding to create adequate change. We, however, the International Summit of Business Leaders, can take a truly neutral and holistic view, which will lead to the best possible approach. Remember our mission statement: We are committed to work for a livable future for everyone and prosperity for all.

We appreciate your understanding,
The International Summit of Business Leaders