

within and between countries.<sup>42</sup> The Chernobyl nuclear accident, for example, displaced thousands of the city's and the surrounding area's residents. This is a discreet event with direct cause and effect. More generally, land degradation and desertification have been identified as sources of what may be termed "environmentally motivated population movements."<sup>43</sup> "Throughout the Third World, land degradation has been the main factor in the migration of subsistence farmers into the slums and shantytowns of major cities, producing desperate populations vulnerable to disease and natural disasters and prone to participate in crime and civil strife", according to the United Nations Environment Program.<sup>44</sup> In particular, desertification in the Sahel, in part due to overgrazing of animals and inappropriate farming methods, has been seen as contributing to population movements.

But other examples are less clear with regard to the cause of the population movement. Large numbers of people have emigrated from Bangladesh to the Indian state of Assam, but caution is required in determining motivation. Population growth and not environmental stress *per se* appears to be the major factor contributing to the movement. Looking to the future, environmental stress may play a greater role. With the expectation that Bangladesh's population will grow significantly, at least doubling from its current population of 115 million in the next fifty years, a combination of population growth, and the resource scarcity this implies, and environmental stress factors are likely to result in continued pressure for emigration.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>An historic example of environmental factors playing a significant part in population migration and conflict is the movement of the Norse peoples (centred in what are now Norway, Sweden and Denmark) for a number of centuries before and after 900 A.D. The Norsemen pillaged and eventually settled in a number of regions in Europe, including Normandy, northern England and Sicily. It is less clear, however, to what degree environmental stress as opposed to a more general scarcity of resources contributed to the movement of these people.

<sup>43</sup>The term "environmental refugee", while often used, is misleading. The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines refugees as "persons who are outside their country because of a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." Emigrants motivated by environmental concerns are by definition not refugees.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Jodi L. Jacobson, Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability, Worldwatch Paper 86, November 1988, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup>For a discussion on population growth and resource scarcity as motivators of Bangladesh-Assam population movements, see Sanjoy Hazarika, "Bangladesh and Assam: Land Pressures, Migration, and Ethnic Conflict", Occasional Paper No. 3, Project on Environmental Change and Acute Conflict, A Joint Project of the University of Toronto and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, March 1993.