

ensures that repatriation for environmental refugees would not be an effective solution. This stands in contrast to the present situation, where voluntary repatriation is regarded as the preferred solution.<sup>5</sup> The entitlement to non-refoulement is also a practical consideration in defining the types of environmental degradation which could legitimately be considered criteria for acquiring refugee status.

Reform of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees could be considered. The UNHCR's mandate is to protect and offer aid for conventional refugees that have been forced to flee their homelands. Its mandate, however, is not responsible for addressing the underlying causes of refugee movements. UNHCR is a relief agency, not a development agency. Yet the prospect of large numbers of environmentally displaced persons requiring some form of assistance reinforces the case for cooperation between the UNHCR and institutions promoting sustainable development. Moreover, the UNHCR normally is a responsive organization, that only acts if invited to do so by governments directly concerned.<sup>6</sup> In addition to considering a formal role for the UNHCR in respect to environmental refugees as defined in this paper, the UNHCR could have a useful role in providing assistance to a broader group of environmentally displaced persons.

A more general question is; "What types of policy responses are required for environmentally displaced persons as opposed to the narrower group of environmental refugees?" The most effective interventions are probably directed at the root causes and would include poverty reduction, technical assistance and population planning assistance. Attention should, however, not only be given to source countries. Many developing countries that accept large numbers of environmentally displaced persons could require international assistance.

This paper suggests that greater international attention to the causes of refugee movements and the movement of environmentally displaced persons is required. Overall, there is a need for international and national institutions to address refugees, environmental refugees, and displaced persons in an integrated manner. The World

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<sup>5</sup>United Nations High Commission on Refugees, The State of the World's Refugees 1993, New York and Geneva, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup>Barbara Kavanagh and Steve Lonergan, "Environmental Degradation, Population Displacement and Global Security: An Overview of the Issues," Report prepare for the Canadian Global Change Program of the Royal Society of Canada, December 1992, p. 50.