



# BRINGING LIGHT TO CLIMATE MIGRATION

Drought, famine, floods, sea level rise, wildfires, biodiversity loss, and many other **environmental changes will displace an estimated 200 million people by 2050.**<sup>1</sup>

Although the world's developed countries have largely caused the climate crisis, its consequences—including displacement—will **disproportionately impact historically exploited countries and communities.**

Understanding how climate change drives displacement, and creating legal protections for “**climate migrants**” are critical to addressing migration in a warming world.

This exhibit focuses on various nuances of climate-induced displacement and migration of the Rohingya people, as well as people in the Northern Triangle of Central America, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Syria.

Through interviews with migrants and experts, classroom presentations, and educator guides, this project shares stories of those displaced by climate change, expanding our understanding of climate migration while fostering empathy and action.



# WHO IS A CLIMATE MIGRANT?

A “**climate migrant**” is a person who has been displaced from their home by factors related to climate change. These may be sudden-onset, like hurricanes and floods, or slow-onset, such as sea-level rise, desertification, land and ocean degradation, and loss of biodiversity

Climate change impacts migration indirectly too—**resource scarcity worsened by climate change can exacerbate poverty, food insecurity, and intergroup violence**, which are already potent drivers of migration.

———— In 2020, ————  
internally displaced people forced  
to leave their homes because of  
natural disasters outnumbered  
those fleeing violence by

3 to 1<sup>2</sup>



*Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis*

Climate change acts as a **“threat multiplier,”** making a broad spectrum of pre-existing societal conflicts and inequalities worse.

**95% of all conflict displacements in 2020 occurred in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change.<sup>3</sup>**



**WARNING**  
**NO TRESPASSING**  
Restricted Area  
Keep Out  
Authorized  
Personnel Only

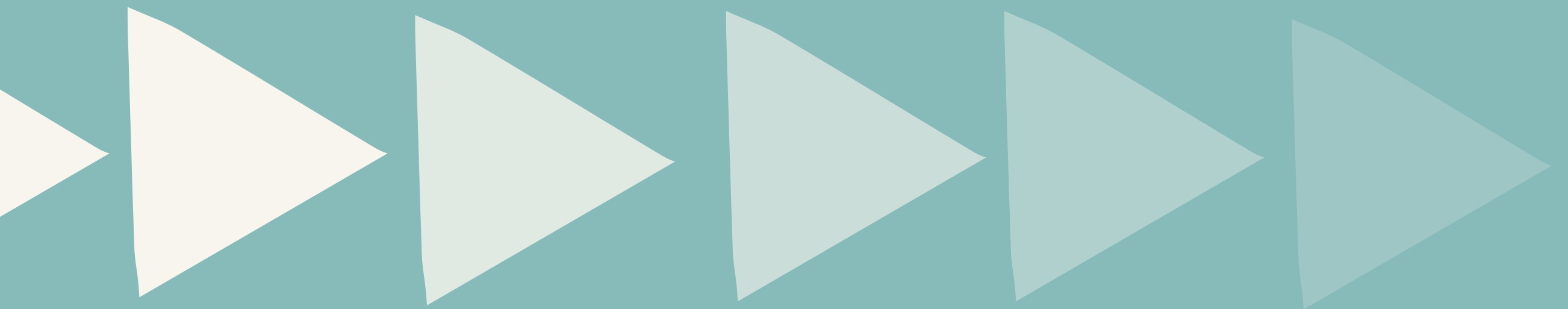
“Disasters don’t simply flatten landscapes, washing them smooth. Rather they deepen and erode the ruts of social difference they encounter.”

– Neil Smith, CUNY professor and geographer

Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis

# INVISIBILITY UNDER THE LAW

Under international law, migrants can be considered refugees only if they face “persecution” in their home country. By this standard, **climate migrants are not legally considered refugees** and do not receive the same protections.<sup>4</sup>



Some migration scholars propose adding a new term—“**Petro-persecution**”—to international asylum laws. This would allow individuals displaced due to the impacts of global dependence on petroleum, coal, natural gas, and other fossil fuels to be eligible for asylum.<sup>5</sup>

# **LAND DISPOSSESSION & EXTRACTION**

**For more than 200 years, global powers—especially the United States—have dispossessed Indigenous people of their land as a precondition for the expansion of extractive industries.**



WATER IS SACRED  
NO PIPELINES

WE EXIST  
WE RESIST

PROTECT OUR MOTHER EARTH

WATER IS LIFE  
WE MAKE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE

UPROSE

UPROSE

LAND BACK

WE ARE HERE TO PROTECT THE WATER IS LIFE

DEFEND THE SACRED

NO PIPELINES!

WATER IS LIFE


DEFEND THE SACRED

NO PIPELINES!  
KEEP IT IN THE GROUND

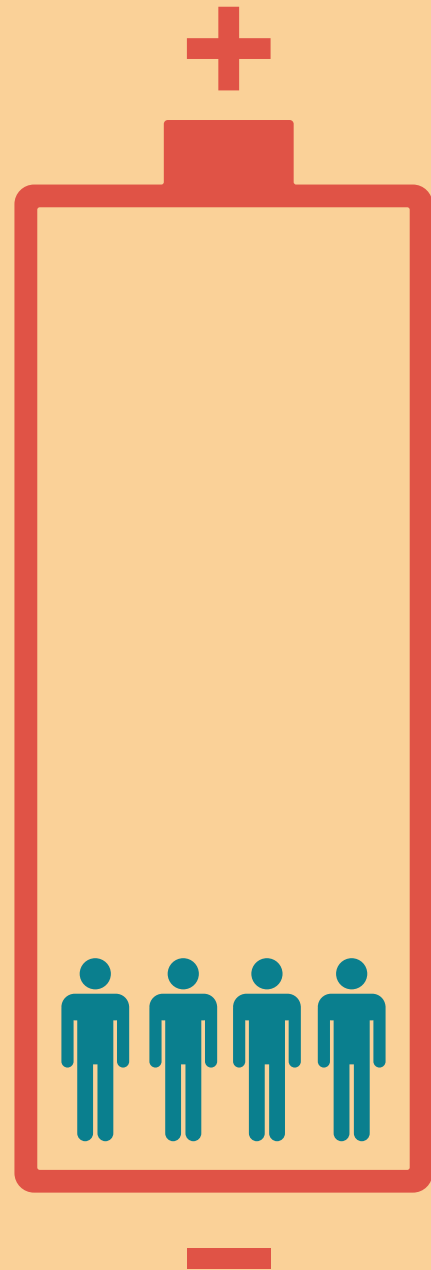
WATER IS LIFE

DEFEND THE SACRED

Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis



From the displacement of the Rohingya by rare earth mineral mining operations, to land dispossession of Guatemalan farmers by the expansion of export-agriculture businesses, to U.S. pipelines that threaten native lands and local ecosystems, corporations around the world have worked hand-in-hand with local governments to extract natural resources while pushing out vulnerable populations.<sup>6</sup>



Even today, “green” energy solutions like hydropower and the mining required for lithium and cobalt batteries are destroying ecosystems and displacing communities. In many parts of the Global South, these industries have led to displacement and must be included in our understanding of climate migration.

— Between —

**2008–2018,  
over**

**253.7  
MILLION  
PEOPLE**

**were displaced  
by natural disasters.<sup>7</sup>**

# NORTHERN TRIANGLE



In the small Guatemalan town of Agua Alegre, the only available source of fresh water is a **single communal tap** available for use only on Wednesdays and Saturdays.<sup>9</sup>

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Intensifying droughts and unpredictable rainfall patterns in the Northern Triangle—a Central American region consisting of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—left **more than a million people hungry** from 2014 to 2018.<sup>8</sup> The severity of these droughts has earned the region an ominous nickname: the “Dry Corridor.”



*Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis*



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Rising temperatures allow for the growth of “coffee rust,” a fungus that damages coffee plants. Coffee rust has decreased farmers’ income, making coffee agriculture an increasingly untenable way of life for many who already struggle with poverty.<sup>10</sup>

So it became a very fruitful business to dam the rivers of our country and divert the flow of the river towards a tunnel that generates energy for a certain number of kilometers. Twenty kilometers of the river were dried up to be able to generate that energy...The coconuts were the first to die. The trees began to dry up because their leaves could not breathe. **Like our lungs they were filled with that soot, that black dust.** It smelled of gasoline on our skin. It destroyed a lot.

—José, a Honduran climate migrant



Photo taken by José outside his home in Honduras

HAITI




Haitian farmers are especially vulnerable because farming is an increasingly unreliable source of income. To provide for their families, many resort to migration to cities or other countries.<sup>12</sup>

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Foreign intervention and corrupt political regimes have destabilized Haiti over the centuries. Haiti is among the ten zones in the world most vulnerable to climate change, and **over 90% of the Haitian population is at risk of environmental disasters.**<sup>11</sup>

In 1804, Haiti was forced to pay a 'debt' to France for its independence, largely in the form of precious woods. By 1905, foreign companies were exploiting Haiti's 'inexhaustible supply' of trees. This process of deforestation and drought was exacerbated by the Duvalier dictatorships and other Haitian governments. **When peasants tried to reforest, the Haitian military uprooted the trees, calling them 'communist trees'.**

—Pierre Laboissiere, Founder of Haiti Emergency Relief Fund



Some displaced Haitians initially seek jobs in Brazil or Chile, but discrimination pushes many to travel through Central America and Mexico to the U.S. border. Many seeking asylum are trapped in border camps, while others are deported back to Haiti. The instability and destruction caused by increasing tropical storms, earthquakes, and political violence means **most Haitians are determined to leave again.**

# GRASSROOTS AGROECOLOGY AND CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

**Agroecology** uses traditional and sustainable growing practices to achieve food sovereignty. In the rural Central Plateau of Haiti, subsistence farmers use agroecology to restore depleted soil and develop more resilient farming practices, which empowers peasant farmers economically and politically.



**US OUT OF HAITI**  
The Black Alliance



Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis

# PUERTO RICO



Decades of U.S. fiscal policy exacerbated Puerto Rican debt and unemployment and cut funds to health care, social services, utilities, and education. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies estimates that due to the failure of the U.S. to provide necessary disaster preparedness and relief, almost **500,000 residents will ultimately leave for hurricane-related reasons.**<sup>13</sup>

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Because Puerto Ricans have U.S. citizenship, many generations of people have moved between the archipelago and the continental U.S., including “**return migration,**” as children move back to the land of their parents and grandparents.





**PUERTO RICO'S  
FUTURE  
DEPENDS ON  
CLIMATE  
JUSTICE!**  
1199SEIU

*Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis*

In 2017, Hurricane Maria pummeled Puerto Rico for over thirty hours, killing thousands and disproportionately impacting low-income people.<sup>14</sup> Overburdened water and electricity infrastructure left Puerto Ricans with **contaminated tap water** and rendered some **without power for almost a year.**<sup>15</sup> Social and natural hazards contributed to a dramatic spike in migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland in the wake of the disaster.<sup>16</sup>

In the days after the hurricane, there was complete devastation everywhere. The streets were littered with wood and metal roofs. All the neighbors worked together—we cleaned, we cooked, and we started rebuilding...Our art gallery, PerlArte, became a community center. This was the place where people could come for a breath.

—Lorel Cubano Santiago, excerpted from the Voice of Witness oral history book *Mi María: Surviving the Storm*.<sup>17</sup>



PERLA

Perla

Colectivo PerlaArte  
Photo from Lorel Cubano Santiago

Welcome

ZAYASART

# ROHINGYA



Resource scarcity from cyclones, floods, and other natural disasters has exacerbated anti-Rohingya sentiment, ethnic tension, and genocide because these disasters are blamed on the Rohingya. **Environmental degradation is a direct cause of Rohingya displacement.**


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The Rohingya are a heavily-persecuted Muslim ethnic minority population who have been violently expelled from their homeland in Myanmar by the military, leaving them **stateless and even more vulnerable to climate-related hardships.**



**Even if you just have a heavy rain during the monsoon, all the camps get flooded, they get submerged in water. It happened recently where people died, many lost their shelter...the Rohingya, they're often seen as being victims of genocide or political violence. It is not just that. They are also victims of climate change.**

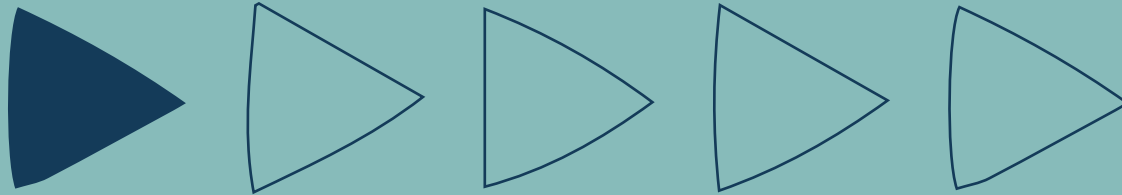
**—Mohammed, a Rohingya refugee now living in the U.S.**



Within refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees live in makeshift shelters composed of tarps, bamboo, and dry leaves, easily blown away by monsoons. Heavy rains bring diseases, compounded by unsanitary conditions in the dense camps.<sup>19</sup>

— By 2050 —

**ONE-FIFTH**



of the

**WORLD'S  
POPULATION**

will be affected by floods  
due to sea level rise.<sup>18</sup>





Camp 16  
by Noor Hossain



*Kutupalong Camp 2E*  
by Noor Hossain



**SYRIA**



Water shortages killed livestock, drove up food and energy prices, and forced 1.5 million rural residents into cities. Combined with corrupt leadership, inequality, and massive population growth, these events helped trigger the 2011 uprisings, which eventually transformed into a civil war.<sup>21</sup> This decade-long conflict has **displaced approximately 13 million people.**<sup>22</sup>

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Rising global temperatures produced a severe drought in Syria from 2006 to 2011, resulting in a series of dust storms between 2001 and 2011 that stripped Syrian land of precious topsoil.<sup>20</sup>



Photo Credit: Nadia Almasalkhi  
Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis

Insufficient international response has left countless Syrians still waiting to resettle or return home.

**Refugee admissions under the Trump and Biden administrations declined significantly,** with annual caps at 18,000 and 62,500 refugees, respectively.<sup>23</sup> The European Union also has restrictive migration policies.

People in urban areas experienced climate-related impacts in the form of more crowded cities and inflation. A Syrian migrant I interviewed shared, ‘When Bashar took over, things started to get worse slowly, slowly, slowly, until the war began. Life completely changed...Corruption increased... The cost of living and poverty increased and the middle class was destroyed...It was apparent that Syria was heading to destruction.

—Nadia Almasalkhi, UC Berkeley  
PhD Candidate



**STOP  
WAR  
STOP  
CLIMATE  
CHAOS**

Stop the War Coalition  
[www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk)

Collage by: Brianna Adia Davis

# WHAT NOW?

## INEQUALITY & RESPONSIBILITY

The hidden figure behind many of these stories is **the U.S.**

From armed intervention in Haiti to the expansion of extractive industries in the Northern Triangle, the U.S. and other countries in the Global North bear responsibility for both climate change and the economic and social conditions that create vulnerable populations. As citizens of a global power that helped to create these conditions, we must help refugees forced to flee their home countries.

## **HOLD POWER ACCOUNTABLE**

In the U.S., policies like Title 42 and Remain in Mexico make it nearly impossible for migrants to apply for asylum. Asylum and other programs like Temporary Protected Status must expand to support a growing influx of refugees driven by the climate crisis. Make your voice heard by contacting your local and state representatives and urging them to expand crucial protections for refugees in the U.S.

# SO WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

## **SUPPORT LOCAL, GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY**

Across the world, communities are advancing grassroots solutions that respond to the effects of climate change. In Haiti and Puerto Rico, peasant movements are fighting for food sovereignty and increasing community resilience through **agroecology**.<sup>24</sup> Indigenous activists in Guatemala and Honduras are organizing to protect their lands and natural resources from extraction. In Myanmar, activists are mobilizing civil society organizations to support internally displaced people and are fighting for democratic reform.<sup>25</sup>

## **LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED**

Many organizations in the Bay Area are involved in research and activism around climate migration, supporting refugees, and amplifying migrants' stories. Several were involved in the creation of this exhibit: East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC), Voice of Witness (VOW), The Othering and Belonging Institute, and the Berkeley Interdisciplinary Migration Initiative (BIMI). Scan the QR code below to learn more about these organizations and get involved.

