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The Role of Greenpeace Netherlands in Advocating the Bonaire's Plight amidst the Threat of Climate Change¹

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Abstract

Climate change has grown to become a global threat towards the international community. For that, states have made the move to mitigate and overcome it either through unilateral or multilateral means. One state in particular engages in both means, that being the Netherlands. While it is true that it has taken some strides in facing climate change, it appears to not be adequate as to encompass its special municipality in the Caribbean, that being Bonaire. Recently, a new actor has stepped in to demand the government to make adequate efforts to support Bonaire in facing climate change. Such a feat was done through making a lawsuit against the Dutch state back in early 2024. The new actor is an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) known as Greenpeace, specifically Greenpeace Netherlands. Through employing the qualitative research method, the article seeks to explain the role of Greenpeace Netherlands as an environmental NGO in its recent lawsuit against the Dutch state. Said analysis is further strengthened by the conceptual framework of environmental NGOs strategies by McCormick. The article finds how as an environmental NGO, Greenpeace Netherlands carried out its role, among others, through campaigning and organizing public protests as well as undertaking research.

Key words: Bonaire, Climate change, Greenpeace Netherlands, Netherlands, Security.

Introduction

Among the many global challenges that have come to fruition, climate change has come to be a prominent one. As a non-traditional security threat, climate change has far reaching implications that could permeate more than one security dimension. Such is the case once an account is taken of the many climate change related events that have occurred in the last decade, from rising temperature, the melting of glaciers, the rising sea levels, and many more. The implication is not exclusive to the environment alone as it strongly affects the livelihood and wellbeing of communities across the globe. Despite its global scope, climate change has stronger or more felt implications for some states. Small island states, like Tuvalu, are faced with the ever-encroaching sea that could sink their land (Prete, 2024).

States across the globe have taken the initiatives to bring to light the importance to mitigate and face the growing threat that climate change can bring to the table. In this regard, states have realized the importance of working together or to approach this global problem multilaterally. As a result,

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numerous initiatives and agreements have emerged to facilitate the effort. Examples of this can be witnessed in the creation of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) where members would meet in the Conference of the Parties (COP).

While others have demonstrated a varying degree of commitment, some states have deemed it as nothing but a tempest in a teacup. It is also no surprise to see the issue being used as a political tool to hound other states. Such an example is present in some interactions exchanged between the US and China on their respective pledge in combating climate change (IER, 2022). Beyond the state actors, non-state actors have also come to do their cut of work on the issue. Numerous environmental NGOs have emerged over the years, from the likes of Greenpeace with their international presence to local ones rooted to their home state. In their relation with the state actor, they could work side by side or criticize the government for their inadequate measure on environmental issues, including climate change.

The varying degree of commitment or response has brought about their share of reactions, especially from environmental NGOs. One particular case of reactions coming from non-state actors can be looked into given its uniqueness. The aforementioned case is present in the recent lawsuit made by Greenpeace Netherlands against the Dutch state back in January 2024. The environmental NGO did so as a result of the immense threat of climate change that Bonaire, the Netherlands' special municipality in the Caribbean, is facing. However, the intensity of the threat is not paired with an adequate set of measures to address and mitigate them which lead them to this very stride.

With the aforementioned case in mind, the writer seeks to understand Greenpeace Netherlands' role as an environmental NGO in its climate justice endeavor. The writers will do so by incorporating the theoretical framework from McCormick's environmental NGOs strategies. The paper would utilize qualitative research methods in its undertaking with primary and secondary data pertaining to the matter from the internet. Moreover, given the recent nature of the case, there has been few to none undertaking that address Greenpeace Netherlands' endeavor. The existing gap would allow the writers to contribute to the existing study on environmental NGOs and the Netherlands' effort to combat climate change.

Environmental NGOs and their Strategies

Non-state actors have come in numerous forms, one of which is environmental NGOs. Their role and influence in the international system is not one to be ignored with how they have interacted with state and non-state actors alike. In pursuing their interests on environmental affairs, they can do so through resorting to some means or strategies. In his work titled "The Role of Environmental NGOs in

International Regimes”, John McCormick lays out some strategies that environmental NGOs can utilize. He divides the role of environmental NGOs into 9 practical methods, which are working with elected officials, bureaucrats, and employees of corporations, raising and spending money, campaigning and organizing public protests, promoting media coverage of environmental issues, litigating and monitoring the implementation of environmental law, exchanging information, undertaking research, acquiring and managing property, and generating local community involvement in environmental protection.

A side topic that should be brought to the table with McCormick’s theory is how he acknowledged the different approach between Northern and Southern NGOs approach with the methods. He believes that Northern countries NGOs are more focusing on the environmental consequences of industrial development, while also arguing that the curbing of the free market through greater regulation of industry, conservation of investment in pollution control, and the changing nature of consumerism are needed. This, however, was from how the North countries have gaps in the field of technological and industries compared with the Southern countries (McCormick, 2010, p. 101). Being said that there is a gap in the tech and industrial aspect, the Southern countries’ NGOs believe that many environmental problems are the result of poverty, the North that using the international regime’s mechanism to dump their “garbage” into the South, and the demands of wealthy consumers, which bring the inequalities in the global economic system (McCormick, 2010, p. 101). All in all, this particular framework will be the one that guides the writers in understanding the means Greenpeace Netherlands use in their effort in advocating for more support to help Bonaire in facing climate change.

No Tempest in a Teacup: Climate Change and Bonaire

The immense threat that climate change poses is not one that should be trifled with. Climate change encompasses far reaching repercussions that could threaten more than one security dimension. As a whole, the Caribbean region is one of the regions vulnerable to climate change (Roy, 2024). It is also important to note that Bonaire is a low-lying island. Hence, for the People of Bonaire, climate change can be deemed as an existential threat given how it could jeopardize both the people and their means of livelihood.

In regard to their livelihood, climate change could affect the very land they reside on as well as their capacity to produce food. In understanding the impact on that matter, it is important to remember the many events that climate change worsen. Such events range from deteriorating water quality, sea water intrusion, and increasing periods of heat and drought (Kennisportaal Klimaatadaptatie, n.d.).

Such a landscape could jeopardize Bonaire's food security in both physical and economic access. For the former, the aforementioned factors could reduce the capacity of Bonaire's agriculture sector which could drive down its production capacity. Such a condition could lead to a drop in production or crop failure which in turn would lead to the issues on economic access. The low food supply or food scarcity could in turn drive up the prices which make it more inaccessible for some people. Aside from focusing on the capacity to produce food, it is clear that such a condition would also affect the people of Bonaire as they could find it more difficult to procure adequate food for their daily lives.

Another important problem to note is the rising sea level. to note. Bonaire is at risk of losing a 1/5th of its land to said threat (Meeldijk, 2023). This way, among other affected security dimensions, Bonaire's economic sector is also at risk. Said problem has a negative implication for Bonaire's coral reefs, one of its tourism attractions, which have suffered from coral bleaching (Elliott, 2024). Therefore, the deterioration of its coral reefs could be another hit to its tourism sector as well as its local biodiversity. The rising sea level also paves the way for sea water intrusion that could ruin Bonaire's freshwater supply through climate change induced salinization. Moreover, there are also other problems that can not be glossed over, like more frequent extreme weathers that could lead to changing rainfall and drought periods (Bes Reporter, 2022). The former could bring about coastal flooding which adds more stress to the already plenty of issues in that area. With the potential and already inflicted repercussions in mind, it is no surprise that the demand for a stronger commitment to combat climate change was made by environmental NGO like Greenpeace Netherlands.

The Role of Greenpeace Netherlands as an Environmental NGO

In the face of climate change, Greenpeace Netherlands, as an environmental NGO, has carried out numerous initiatives to voice out its concerns, notably campaigning and organizing public protests and undertaking research. The former can be clearly seen in its move to sue the Dutch state at the start of 2024. Recently the lawsuit has witnessed some developments, notably how Greenpeace Netherlands is deemed admissible to represent the interest of Bonaire (Greenpeace Nederland, 2024). One of the things that the plaintiffs demanded in the lawsuit is for the Netherlands to cut its greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2040 which is 10 years earlier than its set target (Reuters, 2024). Moreover, a climate change adaptation plan for Bonaire is also demanded as a means to protect Bonaire and its people.

The lawsuit for better protection of the people of Bonaire is not one that is made with no preparation. Back in 2023, the environmental NGO already sent its pre-litigation letter to the then Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte (Greenpeace International, 2023). This particular stride was also followed by a

field action through putting out a banner demanding justice for Bonaire at the then prime minister's office. Greenpeace Netherlands also took note of the inadequateness of the existing measures by the government. For example, the existing climate change adaptation strategy is still limited to the Netherlands in the form of the National Climate Adaptation Strategy. However, in this regard, the government announced in November 2023 that it would work together with its special municipalities (Bonaire, Saba, and Sint-Eustatius) to formulate their respective climate change plans (Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, 2023). In the end, Greenpeace Netherlands still set out with its lawsuit given the urgency of the issue at hand along with how the measures to date have been inadequate (Dutchnews, 2024).

Aside from the lawsuit, Greenpeace Netherlands also supports organizing some protests pertaining to Bonaire in the past. The use of this strategy could contribute to the bigger goal of the Bonaire cause through bringing more attention or eyes to the aforementioned issue. In doing so, Greenpeace Netherlands can accentuate the intensity of the threat of climate change and the need for climate justice to be fulfilled by the government. Aside from bringing the issue to the attention of those in power, it is also important to note its contribution in spreading awareness to the general population, especially the people of Bonaire. Such an awareness could not only open the door for behavioral change, but also societal support to combat the threat as a whole (WHO, n.d.). The latter could lead to the people demanding their government to take the adequate stride to combat the threat the state, and the world, is facing.

In regard to research, Greenpeace Netherlands also worked together with other institutes to carry out research pertaining to how climate change would affect Bonaire. In this case, Greenpeace Netherlands commissioned the Institute for Environmental Studies of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam some research undertakings on the impact of climate change on Bonaire, one of them is on its public health sector. The study would lay out the detrimental repercussions that climate change would bring to Bonaire's public health, specifically by worsening mental health, heat-related stress, vector-borne diseases, food insecurity, and many more. The floodgate to those repercussions are opened by events accompanying climate change, i.e. ocean warming and acidification, rising heat waves, as well as air pollution. Another study was also done to assess the impact of climate change on Bonaire's environment (Beukering et. al., 2022). In this one, the study lays out the many sectors affected in Bonaire that run the gamut from fisheries, cultural heritage, critical infrastructures, and others.

The two aforementioned strides play the role in highlighting the issue along with the plight that the people of Bonaire would suffer from should the issue of climate change not receive adequate attention. Such a feat is all the more important given how despite being located away from Europe,

Bonaire is still part of the Netherlands. As a result, it should also receive the adequate attention from the government, especially in the face of a global threat that could endanger the people's security.

Conclusion

The contemporary international system is not one that is solely filled by state actors alone as non-state actors have emerged to engage with the former as well. Such interactions between the two have filled the dynamics of the system, for example in the climate change issue. In the face of climate change, Bonaire is in need of an adequate effort to mitigate and adapt to it. Failure to provide such means could further jeopardize their security given the immense threat and its far reaching implications climate change has. As an environmental NGO, Greenpeace Netherlands have sought to bring attention to the plight of Bonaire amidst climate change through some strategies, among them are campaigning and organizing public protests along with undertaking research. The role that Greenpeace Netherlands played in its recent strides shows how non-state actors are not one to be ignored. More importantly, it can also be noted how environmental NGO can support the effort to combat climate change through bringing to light the repercussions of climate change or demanding more commitment from the governments. Future studies that could be done to enrich the topic could explore other perspectives, for example the national interests of the Netherlands on the matter.

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