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## **STUDENTS PUSH IDEAS IN COPENHAGEN**

By Fiona Smith

Daily Journal Staff Writer

Two Berkeley Law students will push for more awareness of the human rights implications of climate change policy as they join the thousands of people gathered in Copenhagen for the United Nations climate change summit.

By the end of the summit Friday, close to 200 nations hope to forge an agreement that will cut global greenhouse gas emissions and stop the worst effects of climate change.

Second-year law students Zoe Loftus-Farren, 25, and Cáitrí́n McKiernan, 29, will present a paper at the conference tomorrow asking countries to think deeply about how they will handle such issues as the rights of populations relocated due to rising sea levels, biofuel production and its potential conflicts with food production, and dam construction, which may disrupt fishery-dependent communities.

"Climate change policy goals are two-fold - one is to protect the planet and two, it's to protect the people, and if the policy ends up hurting people, that's a problem," said McKiernan.

One of the starkest examples are small islands, such as the Maldives, that scientists say will likely be submerged as sea levels rise, she said.

"If a climate change policy relocates people because their home country is no longer inhabitable, we want to ensure they have access to food, water and health and have a right to citizenship," McKiernan said. "If your country is no longer inhabitable, where are you a citizen of?"

Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland and former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, will speak at the event where the students will present their paper. An enthusiastic supporter of their work, she will also help the pair spread their ideas among delegates at the two-week conference, said Berkeley Law Professor Laurel Fletcher, who advised the students and is accompanying them to Copenhagen.

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Loftus-Farren and McKiernan researched and wrote their paper as a part of Berkeley Law's International Human Rights Law Clinic, which Fletcher directs. Entitled "Protecting People and the Planet," it urges nations to create a long-term working group to clarify existing human rights standards, share information and provide technical assistance to poor nations.

The negotiations in Copenhagen are aimed at forging an agreement to replace the 2005 Kyoto Protocol, a legally binding agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions that expires in 2012.

The issue of human rights intersecting with climate change policy is fairly new and while some non-governmental organizations and U.N. agencies have grappled with it, it still needs to be better dealt with in the overarching U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, Loftus-Farren said.

"There's no centralized place in the convention that addresses human rights efforts," she said. "There's no process within it to bring together NGO and U.N. agency efforts ... so these efforts tend to be disjointed."

The law students have directly sought the support of the U.S. delegation, creating a Facebook page and writing a letter to President Obama on the issue signed by several human rights groups. The U.S. government's response to Hurricane Katrina, the kind of extremely powerful storm that scientists say will become more frequent with climate change, is an example of what governments need to think about, Loftus-Farren said.

"Initial consideration of human rights impacts could have improved response measures - the ways in which the hurricane disproportionately impacted certain groups and impacted their rights to housing, food and economic security," she said. "Those are ultimately human rights issues."