

## Seeking Safety

In many parts of the world, war, rebellion and natural disasters make life dangerous. Sometimes people are forced to leave their homelands simply to protect themselves and their families from harm. People who flee from one nation to another to avoid danger are called refugees. Refugees may travel from their homeland to temporary camps in nearby countries. They are sometimes accepted to live permanently in those countries or other countries of the world if it continues to be too dangerous for them to return to their homes.

### *Refugees from Strife and Persecution*

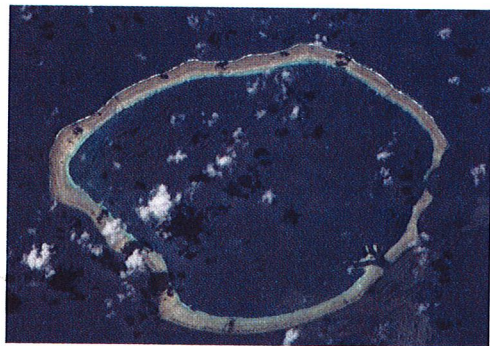
There are many situations which may cause people to escape to other countries until the danger has passed, often due to the political situation in their homeland. Some governments order the arrest, torture and sometimes the death of people who belong to a particular religious group, tribe or political party. People may be arrested, and sometimes killed, simply because they disagree with the government, terrorist organisation or the military.

### *Refugees from Disaster*

Natural or environmental disasters may also force people to travel. Drought, famine, earthquakes, cyclones, floods and fire can all cause large numbers of people to move to another country. People in poorer countries are especially likely to have to move as their governments do not have the money or resources to organise effective relief programs. Environmental change, such as land degradation, can also force people to travel to find new land to farm.

### *Case Study: The Carteret Islands*

One place that is experiencing a natural disaster that will result in people having to seek a new life elsewhere in the world is the Carteret Islands off the north coast of Papua New Guinea. The six islands are slowly being inundated by the sea, and the 1700 people who live there are moving to Bougainville (with a population of around 250 000 people), the nearest large island.



*This photograph shows the Carteret Islands from space. The ring you can see is a mostly submerged reef. The dark spots on the ring are the islands—the parts of the reef that are, for now, above sea level.*



*A storm surge split Huene Island (one of the Carterets) in two. Rising sea levels have since made each of the two islands even smaller. Just two families remain living on Huene Island, but they will soon have to leave.*

There is some disagreement over what is causing the islands to disappear. Some scientists believe that the sea level is rising as a result of global warming. Others point to the fact that the Carteret Islands are situated in an earthquake zone, and the instability of the Earth's crust may be responsible for the islands 'sinking'. Some say it may be a combination of the two events. However, the one fact that all agree on is that the islands are quickly becoming uninhabitable, and as a result, the people of the Carteret Islands are environmental refugees—they are being forced to leave their homeland due to a change in the environment.