5 | PERCEPTIONS OF AND PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE ENGINEERING RESEARCH AND DEPLOYMENT

Solar Radiation Management and Intergenerational Equity

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Due to the feckless response of the global community in the context of climate policy making, climate geoengineering has emerged as an increasingly viable option among commentators and some policymakers. One of the most widely discussed of these options is solar radiation management, or efforts to increase atmospheric albedo through techniques such as sulfur particle injection or cloud brightening. Unfortunately, while such techniques have the potential to avert "climate emergencies," or to serve as a stopgap measure to buy time for effective emissions mitigation responses, they also pose serious risks. Many commentators have focused on intragenerational risks, such as changes in precipitation patterns, or increases in sulfur dioxide loads in the troposphere. However, SRM approaches may also poses grave threats to future generations should their use ultimately cease without concomitant reductions in greenhouse emissions, termed the so-called "rebound effect." This presentation focuses on the implications of the international legal principle of intergenerational equity in terms of potential deployment of SRM technologies. It advances the argument that the potential threat to intergenerational interests that SRM technologies pose may violate international law under most circumstances, and that this must be taken into consideration by policy makers who might contemplate the use of such technologies to address climate change. The presentation will also respond to the argument by some proponents of SRM approaches that deployment of such technologies might, under certain circumstances, actually constitute fulfillment of our responsibilities to future generations.