



PEAMUN XV

OCHA - Environmental Emergency Responses

General-Assembly Committee Background Guide

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for PEAMUN 2023. As a member of OCHA, you will be faced with humanitarian crises and the crucial task of establishing a framework of emergency responses for them. This committee aims to improve the help during the most challenging disasters and ensure that the needs of the people affected are met in the most efficient and fair manner. This PEAMUN, OCHA will be a hybrid committee, directed by a chair and a vice-chair. We hope to provide you with all the assistance you need and establish a respectful, diplomatic and engaging environment.

My name is Sonia Soloviova, and I am thrilled to be chairing OCHA along with my amazing Vice Chair, Laura Saldarriaga. This year we decided to let our delegates tackle a timely and challenging topic of mitigating the emergency responses to natural disasters. This pressing issue became more apparent to us last year with the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Cities and towns were left in ruins; collapsed hospitals and schools, damaged critical infrastructure, vehicle shortage and blocked or shattered roads have complicated the process of emergency responses, pointing our attention to the flaws in the current systems of humanitarian aid. During this committee, Laura and I are anticipating various discussions on accessibility and availability of humanitarian assistance, financial components of emergency aid, expectations and priorities in first-response help, and short-term and long-term measures.

In preparation for the committee, we ask our delegates to analyze and navigate the emergency response systems in their assigned countries and get familiar with the current



international frameworks. This background guide contains general information, however delegates should do additional research to further develop their knowledge of their countries' positions and intricacies of the issue.

During the committee, delegates are expected to cooperate with one another, forming blocs that prioritize efficiency of the emergency responses, and the health and safety of the people affected. Alongside other delegates, you will be tasked to assemble a resolution with appropriate changes and improvements that aim towards coordinated, strategic and accountable humanitarian actions.

I am very excited to see all your hard work come to fruition during our conference in fall. We look forward to hearing your creative ideas and innovative solutions and seeing some engaging debate at PEAMUN. We recognize that there may be some delegates new to Model UN and we welcome them alongside our returnees, and we encourage everyone to review the parliamentary procedures prior to the conference to ensure we have a respectful and efficient debate in the committee.

If you have any questions regarding position papers, research, or clarification of the topics please feel free to email either of us at ssoloviova@exeter.edu and lsaldarriaga@exeter.edu.

Sincerely,

Sonia Soloviova



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Introduction

In the realm of the United Nations, natural disasters are defined as the consequences of events triggered by natural hazards that overwhelm local response capacity and seriously affect the social and economic development of a region, and are traditionally seen as situations creating challenges and problems mainly of a humanitarian nature.¹ The scale and effects of environmental emergencies vary greatly around the globe. Whether the countries have had a long enduring history of earthquakes and tsunamis, or faced seasonal wildfires, or indirectly been influenced by trading efficiency, the world is adapting to navigate these disasters efficiently and timely. With the past UN actions and the international recognition of the importance of coordination and cooperation, the emergency response frameworks have significantly improved, ensuring immediate medical assistance in the area, providing necessary humanitarian supplies for the regional or international rescue groups, and bringing charity organizations and volunteers. We have witnessed these advancements throughout the past decade, in areas such Kenya, after the severe droughts in the south, cyclone devastation in Malawi, environmental challenges in the border zone in Dominican Republic and others.

However, any humanitarian crisis including the ones triggered by natural disasters share a set of issues that still remain unaddressed in response systems; some examples include streamlining timely global communication, data access, resource allocation, as well as assessment of long-term impact and recovery. Delegates in this committee will have the opportunity to explore various aspects of emergency response, including preparedness, early warning systems, resource mobilization, coordination mechanisms, and information sharing. By fostering meaningful dialogue, understanding, and cooperation, the committee aims to establish

¹ InterAgency Standing Committee, *Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters*. Washington: Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, June 2006.



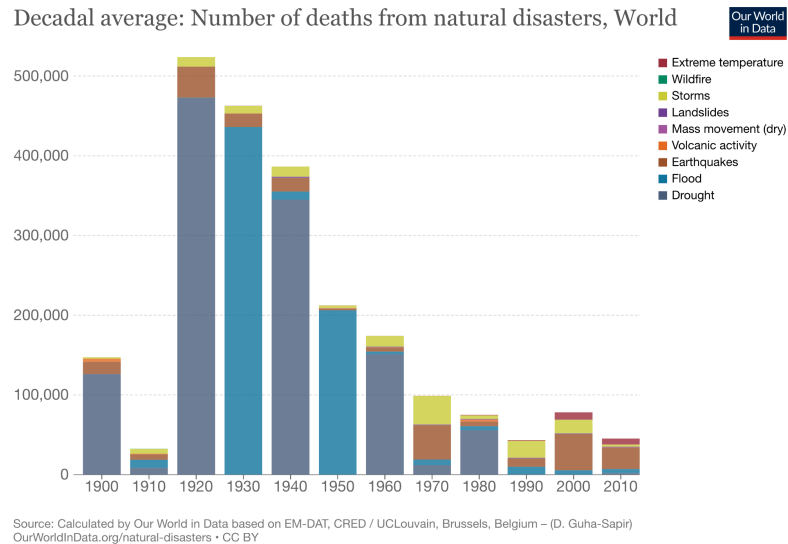
an international framework that bolsters the resilience and efficiency of emergency response efforts. Ultimately, the goal of OCHA and the UN, as always, is to save lives and help those in need.

This guide will address the historical context of international emergency response systems, existing frameworks, challenges faced, and opportunities for improvement. It will highlight significant milestones in the evolution of global response mechanisms and shed light on the existing gaps and limitations that hinder efficient coordination and effective assistance during disasters. Please, familiarize yourself with all the information provided and use it as the foundation for your further research.

History

Emergency responses to natural disasters have evolved significantly over the course of history, as countries recognized the importance of international aid and cooperation during catastrophes. The beginning of organized international response can be traced back to the 1863 founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross, an organization aimed to alleviate human suffering.² Subsequently, the formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and subsequent creation of specialized agencies like the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 1991 formalized processes and streamlined international protocols regarding responses to environmental emergencies.

² International Committee of The Red Cross. *“Who Are We”*



As depicted in the chart there is a steady decrease in the number of deaths around the world caused by natural hazards in the past century. The drop after the 1940s is a great representation of a consequential improvement after the creation of the United Nations. The United Nations became a platform for international cooperation and facilitated a framework for the global community to disseminate information about effective mitigation strategies. Moreover, the founding of OCHA greatly accelerated data sharing as the office collects, analyzes, and spreads timely, accurate information about global disasters. A notable historical example of the cooperated international response is the 1970 Bhola cyclone in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), which saw a massive influx of aid, volunteers, and relief materials from around the world, significantly bolstered by the media attention the disaster attracted. President Richard Nixon allocated \$10 million towards food and relief to the survivors of the storm, while the British government pledged \$7.2 million towards reconstruction efforts.³ The United Nations donated \$2.1 million in food and cash while UNICEF helped to re-establish water supplies in the wake of

³ Londoni, "Londoni Worldwide Limited," Bhola cyclone (1970) - international aid - History of Bangladesh, accessed August 17, 2023, <http://www.londoni.co/index.php/25-history-of-bangladesh/1970-bhola-cyclone/317-bhola-cyclone-1970-international-aid-history-of-bangladesh>.



the storm.⁴ What was notable about this cyclone was that then East Pakistan was the first ever recipient of the International Development Association's (IDA) reconstruction credit of around \$25 million.⁵ It was a dramatic shift from isolated national attempts to combat humanitarian crises towards preparedness and efficient recovery facilitated by the world.

In another, the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 was a crucial event in the history of disaster response. Japan was caught off guard by the magnitude of the disaster that severely damaged infrastructure and social capacities of the nation. The central government's initial response was slow and disorganized, leading to a high death toll and substantial material losses. "The survival rate of the extricated victims was 80.4% on the first day, and 1892 victims were extracted with an overall survival rate of 40%," mostly because medical supplies couldn't be delivered to the impacted areas through collapsed highways and roads.⁶ Furthermore, victims of the earthquake were not evacuated, and remained in the area, which caused the few remaining hospitals (most of them collapsed) to be overwhelmed with patients, unable to treat and provide necessary medical attention to most of them.⁷

Offers of international aid were initially rejected, which exacerbated the crisis. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence: other countries tend to discard international help after natural disasters, for example after the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004), or Hurricane Katrina in the United States (2005). There are many reasons that lead to this response, as international aid can sometimes be viewed as debt. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the local government refused aid due to a lack of administrative capacity and an inability to properly allocate resources. On the

⁴ Richard Halloran, "Pakistan Storm Relief a Vast Problem," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/30/archives/pakistan-storm-relief-a-vast-problem-disaster-in-pakistan-created.html>.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ K TANAKA, "The Kobe Earthquake: The System Response. A Disaster Report from Japan," *European Journal of Emergency Medicine* 3, no. 4 (1996): 263–69, <https://doi.org/10.1097/00063110-199612000-00009>.

⁷ "Earthquakes in Japan" Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. pp. 5–6.



other hand, the Japanese government's refusal to accept aid after a myriad of natural disasters is evidence of the reputational damage that it does to a country's image as the government saw accepting aid as equivalent to taking a surrender and thus, governmental humiliation.

Case Study: Turkey and Syria

Two more notable recent case studies of environmental emergency disaster mitigation includes Turkey and Syria.

On February 6, 2023, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck southern and central Turkey as well as parts of northern and western Syria: this was the largest earthquake in Turkey since the 1939 Erzincan Earthquake.⁸ With countless damage in an area of about 350,000 square kilometer, over 59,000 people died in both Turkey and Syria combined (about 51,000 in Turkey and 8,000 in Syria)⁹; United Nations development experts estimated that around 1.5 million people were left homeless after this earthquake.¹⁰ Moreover, damaged roads, winter storms, as well as a fallen communications network hindered rescue and relief efforts.

The aftermath in Turkey and Syria differed. In Turkey, President Ergogan declared a 3-month state of emergency in affected provinces as well as appealed for international aid. Over 70 countries offered to help in search and rescue efforts.¹¹ Moreover, emergency services in Turkey were activated and looked for survivors trapped under collapsed buildings; an "air aid corridor" was established by the Turkish Armed forces for aid and other personnel. However,

⁸ "ISC-Gem Earthquake Catalogue," ISC-GEM Earthquake Catalogue, n.d., <https://doi.org/10.31905/d808b825>.

⁹ Zeynep Bilginsoy et al., "Rising Toll Makes Quake Deadliest in Turkey's Modern History," NZ Herald, February 14, 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/turkey-earthquake-rising-toll-makes-quake-deadliest-in-turkeys-modern-history/KQHKJKUA TJCZDIJUTQTAILHKJ4/>.

¹⁰ "1.5 Million Now Homeless in Türkiye after Quake Disaster, Warn Un ...," United Nations, February 21, 2023, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2023/02/78128/15-million-now-homeless-turkiye-after-quake-disaster-warn-un>.

¹¹ Al Jazeera, "Turkey Declares 3-Month Emergency in 10 Quake-Hit Provinces," Turkey-Syria Earthquake News | Al Jazeera, February 13, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/7/turkey-declares-3-month-emergency-in-10-quake-hit-provinces>.



poor weather conditions— snow, rain, and low temperatures— hindered search efforts as well as transportation of aid to affected areas. Adding to their struggles, incidents plagued rescue efforts as three inmates were killed during a prison riot which saw prisoners demanding to see their families affected by the earthquake.¹²

In Syria, the search and rescue response met greater difficulty as the government appealed to UN Member states, the Red Cross, and other organizations for international aid. OCHA claimed that damaged roads and logistical issues prevented the mobilization of aid across the border from Turkey as crossings were closed at the time. Critically injured patients were unable to enter Turkey for medical attention, adding on to the casualties in Syria. United States' sanctions against Syria related to the blocking of banks and payment processors led to the banning of international charities and families attempting to send money to those affected in Syria.¹³ The backdrop of the civil war prompted sanctions against Syria, freezing the country's financial assets; these sanctions were requested to be lifted to aid humanitarian efforts following the earthquake. With the contrast in international responses for the two countries, member states should consider whether a common protocol could be agreed upon to ensure that assistance to civilians take priority.

UN Mechanisms

Previously, OCHA has worked on planning and carrying out effective responses and aid to the victims of environmental crises. A critical part of OCHA's strategy is the role of

¹² Duvar English, "Three Inmates Killed in Prison Riot in Turkey's Quake-Hit Hatay," Duvar English, February 9, 2023, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/three-inmates-killed-in-prison-riot-in-turkeys-quake-hit-hatay-news-61801>.

¹³ Issie Lapowsky, "Why GoFundMe Suspended Fundraising for Syria's Earthquake Victims," FastCompany, accessed August 17, 2023, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90851213/why-gofundme-suspended-fundraising-campaigns-for-victims-of-the-earthquake-in-syria-in-turkey>.



Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) or Resident Coordinators (RCs). “In effect, while the primary responsibility for coordinating humanitarian assistance rests with national authorities, if international humanitarian assistance is required the HC or RC is responsible for leading and coordinating the efforts of humanitarian organizations (both UN and non-UN) with a view to ensuring that they are principled, timely, effective and efficient, and contribute to longer-term recovery.”¹⁴ These leaders are grouped into clusters, and both intra- and inter-cluster communication are key to more effective responses.

Furthermore, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), created in 1993, is a large part of the response to sudden crises. According to the official OCHA website, “It is designed to help the United Nations and governments of disaster-affected countries during the first phase of a sudden-onset emergency. UNDAC also assists in the coordination of incoming international relief at national level and/or at the site of the emergency.” UNDAC offers teams of helpers at no charge, ready to aid the people in need at a moment’s notice, focusing on coordination, information, and assessment of the situation. “In response to earthquakes, UNDAC teams set up and manage the On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC) to help coordinate international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams responding to the disaster - essential if USAR assistance is to function effectively. This concept was strongly endorsed in United Nations General Assembly resolution 57/150 of 16 December 2002, on “Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international urban search and rescue assistance.”¹⁵

¹⁴ “Humanitarian Coordination Leadership,” OCHA (United Nations, March 15, 2017), <https://www.unocha.org/our-work/coordination/humanitarian-coordination-leadership>.

¹⁵ “UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC),” OCHA (United Nations, April 16, 2019), <https://www.unocha.org/our-work/coordination/un-disaster-assessment-and-coordination-undac>.



Moreover, In the 45th session of the UN General Assembly in 1991, resolution A/RES/45/185 was passed (titled the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction). This resolution established the Trust Fund for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction which would assist countries affected by natural disasters with reconstruction and recovery efforts. The Resolution states in its first clause:

Urges the international community to implement fully the International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, contained in the annex to resolution 44/236 and, in particular:

- (a) Invites Member States that have not yet done so to establish national committees or suitable focal points;*
- (b) Requests the Secretary-General to expedite his efforts to complete organizational and financial arrangements in accordance with sections D and E of the International Framework of Action;*
- (c) Appeals to the international community, in particular, to donor countries, for financial contributions to the Trust Fund for the Decade;*
- (d) Urges all countries to adopt policies which give priority to disaster mitigation measures;¹⁶*

Issues to Consider

There are persistent issues that keep appearing within the emergency response frameworks and during the crises.

1. Funding for Resource Allocation

Disparities between countries' financial opportunities impact ability to provide timely and efficient humanitarian aid. With advancement in technology this economic divide

¹⁶ UN General Assembly, International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 21 December 1990, A/RES/45/185, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00efe50.html> [accessed 14 August 2023]



becomes more apparent, as third world countries struggle to access the necessary vehicles, communication systems and/or medical equipment because of the monetary deficiencies. Developing nations have limited power over what they can deploy to address crises and the insufficient funding can cost hundreds of lives. Furthermore, when assessing the budget it's important to consider that certain environmental crises receive more media attention and therefore are able to accumulate more financial and physical resources. For example, at the end of 2022, eastern Africa underwent severe droughts. Like its neighbors Somalia and Kenya, Ethiopia faced a humanitarian crisis caused by natural disaster. The emergency response required \$1.66 billion; however only 43% of it was compiled.¹⁷ Whereas the funding for the emergency aid to Turkey after its terrorizing earthquake was fully collected and allocated towards the cause.

2. Coordination and Communication

Strategic planning requires a high level of detailed and fast communication, especially when addressing the concerns of the whole community. Coordinating the efforts of multiple countries, organizations, and agencies continues to be a challenging endeavor in the realm of diplomatic work. One of the common issues are gaps in communicational technology, limitations in information sharing, and variations in operating procedures, all of which can impede efficient collaboration during emergency situations.

3. Infrastructural Capacity

First, adequate infrastructure is key to emergency response because, it facilitates the movement of personnel, resources, and aid to affected areas. This includes

¹⁷ International Rescue Committee. "Crisis in Ethiopia: Drought and conflict put 28 million in need." 2023



transportation infrastructure such as roads, bridges, airports, and seaports, which can be severely damaged or rendered inaccessible during the natural disaster, slowing down or halting relief efforts. For example, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti decimated the capital's port and airport, and left sufficient debris on the roads, making it challenging to get immediate rescue operations and humanitarian aid into the country. Haiti was struggling to accommodate all the arriving volunteers and distribute the influx of necessary supplies.¹⁸

Second, communication infrastructure is vital for coordinating emergency responses, referring to the issue #2 of this section of the background guide. Natural disasters can disrupt phone lines, internet services, and power supplies, hampering efforts to manage the crisis and provide relief. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011 caused severe communication blackouts, affecting both the immediate response and long-term recovery efforts.¹⁹

Third, health and social infrastructure, such as hospitals, shelters, and schools, are crucial for treating the injured, housing the displaced, and providing services during and after a disaster. If these facilities are destroyed, unusable or lack the capacity to deal with affected populations, it can exacerbate the human impact of the disaster. During the 2005 Kashmir earthquake in Pakistan, over 70% of healthcare facilities collapsed or were damaged, creating a humanitarian crisis in the devastated region.²⁰

¹⁸ Adam Hochberg. "Air Traffic Over Haiti Is Crowded, Chaotic." NPR, 2010.

¹⁹ Pradyumna P. Karan. "Japan after 3/11: Global Perspectives on the Earthquake, Tsunami, and Fukushima Meltdown." University Press of Kentucky, 2016

²⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Pakistan. "Impact of the 8 October 2005 earthquake on activities of police, judiciary, hospitals, schools, communication systems, transportation systems; institutions issuing identification documentation; the general situation in affected areas" 16 November 2005



4. Informational Transparency

Transparency is crucial for accountability. When information about funding, resource allocation, and decision-making processes is transparent, it becomes easier to hold those involved in disaster response accountable for their actions. This can help to prevent corruption, misuse of funds, and inequitable distribution of aid. Referring back to the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, resource allocation was disrupted and delayed because of governmental secrecy. A significant portion of the aid money bypassed the Haitian government and went to foreign non-governmental organizations. This resulted in a fragmented and uncoordinated response that did not always align with the country's priorities.

5. Political Barriers and Diplomatic Limits

International law generally respects the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state, meaning foreign nations or international organizations cannot intervene without the permission of the affected state. For instance, following the devastating Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, the military regime initially resisted international aid, sending back multiple ships with relief equipment and supplies for victims causing a delay in relief efforts.²¹

Moreover, geopolitical rivalries and ongoing military conflicts can also impede international assistance, by complicating the coordination and delivery of aid. Organizing humanitarian aid amongst war zones and amongst battlefields requires a special level of volunteering and aid.

²¹Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights. “Myanmar: Dire humanitarian and human rights situation compounded by military’s restrictions on aid.” OHCHR, 2023



Political barriers and disputes shape the scope, efficiency, and effectiveness of the efforts of humanitarian organizations. Diplomatic flexibility, trust-building, and the establishment of robust international protocols are crucial for disaster response.

6. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

According to two General Assembly Resolutions, OCHA and other international humanitarian aid organizations are expected to comply and follow Humanitarian Principles²² that establish the three main virtues of humanitarian aid: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, voluntary actions and independence. While these principles are internal and crucial to OCHA's work, they carry certain implications that impede on the efficiency of the response systems. For example, if the environmental disaster affected an occupied state, the compliance with humanitarian principles affects the ability of humanitarian groups to enter into negotiations with relevant actors and establish safe access to affected people in order to provide necessary aid.

7. Climate Change

According to recent UN Food and Agriculture Organization research “disasters happen three times more often today, than in the 1970s and 1980s.”²³ More frequent confrontation with natural hazards is the evident result of climate change. In the modern world, the emergency response frameworks should account for the regressing state of the environment and attempt to further protect and recover our planet.

²² Marlies Bull, “OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles,” OCHA, July 2022,

²³ UN News. “Natural disasters occurring three times more often than 50 years ago: new FAO report.” 18 March, 2021



Possible Bloc Positions

Various blocs could be formed based on the viewpoints and solutions that countries aim to achieve. One way to create a bloc is based on the issues that have been previously addressed by countries. For instance, Turkey and Syria faced devastating earthquakes in February 2023, with tens of thousands of deaths. Similarly, Haiti has faced frequent earthquakes in the last fifteen years. In 2010, over 300,000 people died as a result of an earthquake, and a more recent one in 2021 killed more than 2,200 people.²⁴ These two nations could find that they could work together to develop solutions for similar issues. Furthermore, these solutions would be mutually beneficial to both nations. On the contrary, dialogue between two countries who have faced different issues, if at all, in the past could provide new insight and ideas.

Another way to form blocs might also be to put developed and developing nations in conversations with one another. Developing nations might be able to provide resources to developing nations when the latter are executing emergency responses. Furthermore, developed nations could gain insight from developing nations who have experienced these disasters and have dealt with them, so that the bloc could work together to perfect a response to different crises.

Possible Solutions

There are many issues to be addressed in respect to emergency responses to environmental crises. One important issue faced is the critical urgency needed to respond to these crises, and the funding required to support it. A possible way to address this issue would be to

²⁴ The Associated Press, “The World’s Deadliest Earthquakes in the Past 25 Years, at a Glance,” NPR, February 9, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/09/1155836898/deadliest-earthquakes-list>.



communicate between nations, agreeing to mutually provide aid to one another in case of a crisis. Additionally, delegations could team up to find common funding from NGOs, governments, and more.

Another issue is the role of nations in response to emergencies in other nations. This role is open to debate, as different nations might have different perspectives on the extent of the responsibility that nations have to aid others. The circumstances required for aid to be provided, the amount of aid, per se and relative to other nations', and the kind of aid needed from specific nations in emergency responses, are all details that could be the subject to discussion. Looking at previous responses, the role other nations have played in them, and their results, is another good option.

Complex issues such as this one often result in different view-points on how to proceed. When discussing what they deem the best course of action to address the issues, delegates should keep in mind the PEAMUN code of conduct. For more information, see [here](#).

Questions to Consider

1. When do nations have an obligation to provide aid in response to environmental disasters?
2. Do some nations have a greater duty than others?
3. What is the role of different nations in order to guarantee a rapid and effective response to environmental disaster?
4. Historically, what has been my country's role in responses to environmental disasters?
5. What are some shortcomings of previous responses to environmental crises?



6. What are some successes of previous responses to environmental disasters?
7. What factors should be prioritized when responding to an environmental disaster?
8. How to equate the response systems between differently resourced countries?
9. How to mitigate the effects of climate change and human-made environmental hazards?
10. What and who should be prioritized during emergency response?

Note about Committee Direction

The goal of this committee is to eventually assemble and pass a comprehensive resolution that addresses all areas of debate. To get there, members of committee will engage in numerous moderated caucuses to debate their stance on various issues and the most effective solutions.

Further Reading

1. ASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters. "*Protecting Persons Affected By Natural Disasters.*"
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<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-03/IASC%20Operational%20Guidelines%20on%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Natural%20Disasters%20-%20Protecting%20Persons%20Affected%20by%20Natural%20Disasters.pdf>.
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