

Background Guide



WAMUNC XXVI

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the UNEP at WAMUNC 2024! My name is Tess Rosler, and I am excited to witness your collaboration and hear your ideas on how to tackle one of the world's biggest crises - all aspects of disaster relief - this weekend. I am a first-year student at The George Washington University, double majoring in International Affairs and Women's Studies with a minor in French. In addition to being a member of GW's Model UN competition team, I also compete with GW debate, participate in the GW Pre-Law Student Association, and run the technical theater program at the GW Shakespeare Company. As a student hoping to pursue a law career helping international refugees, I find the conversation on both preventative and retroactive disaster relief imperative for the security of all migrants and refugees. In order to ensure a sustainable future, we need to address what to do to prepare for disaster, and what to do when disaster strikes. I love the complex conversations that can develop throughout Model UN conferences and appreciate seeing inclusion, empathy, and understanding despite the contention that can often arise in a competitive environment. Hopefully, you are all just as excited as I am!

Best Regards,

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Committee Description

Both disaster risk reduction and disaster relief have been topics debated by all societies for generations. From the earliest civilizations, it is evident that communities developed early forms of preparedness, and response strategies to cope with the possibility of a life-altering disaster. Preparing for the worst possible scenarios, whether that be through preventative or restorative measures, is essential for a thriving society. Every region, nation, and city has different needs when it comes to disaster reduction and relief, making research into your assigned country necessary to develop strong solutions that will effectively save millions of lives. Good luck!

Topic A: Disaster Risk Reduction

To create a sustainable future, it is imperative to acknowledge and prepare for potential environmental disasters. Developing social and industrial infrastructure that allows countries, regions, and the larger international community to prepare for unimaginable circumstances is necessary for survival. Making building codes more compliant with natural disaster safety measures, instilling infrastructure that protects victims of natural disasters, adapting natural resource management, and controlling for factors that make some groups more susceptible to environmental harm than others are all notable recommendations for this topic. Channel your inner doomsday prepper and consider all possibilities regarding risk reduction.

Lack of Disaster-Proof Infrastructure and Possible Solutions

Climate change activists and climate scientists alike agree that we are entering the Pyrocene, a new incendiary age that is marked by a sudden uptick in extreme wildfires due to an increasingly dry environment. In July, wildfires raged across the north of Algeria, with the Algerian interior ministry reporting 97 blazes across 16 provinces including Bejaia, Bouira, and Jijel. Those who weren't directly impacted by the flames suffered extreme damage to their health from the overbearing heat, with temperatures reaching well over 118 degrees Fahrenheit. In 2023 alone nations like Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Tunisia, and Canada experienced disastrous wildfires that harmed local environments, communities, and economies. Neither nations nor those who live in our world are brutally unprepared for these environmental changes.

Climate change has continued to increase the rates of unpredictable extreme weather conditions in all forms. Between January and March, Argentina experienced ravaging wildfires that destroyed over one million hectares of land, and cost the nation millions of dollars. Not just a month later, the rainy season began, with poor drainage in rural farm towns causing extreme flooding. Farmers unaffected by the wildfires had crops destroyed and cattle drowned by the severe flooding, eliminating both a vital food source and a necessary job market. The whiplash of an ever-changing environment makes it difficult for current buildings, power lines, and roads to remain intact.

Different regions of the world experience different disasters, making addressing the issue of disaster prevention a collaborative effort, there is no one-stop solution to this crisis. Arab nations (including but not limited to) Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen are frequently exposed to earthquakes, flooding,

drought, forest fires, landslides, locust swarms, and potential tsunamis. Nations located in the Caribbean (including but not limited to) Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Haiti, and Jamaica are at risk for hurricanes and flooding, which for small island nations can often prove disastrous for the entire community. When Hurricane Irma hit Antigua and Barbuda in 2017, for example, 90% of all buildings including homes, schools, and Barbuda's only hospital were destroyed.

When analyzing the complex issue of disaster risk reduction, sustainable infrastructure must be built in all places, to withstand increasingly brutal natural disasters.

Healing the Environment and Possible Solutions

One of the most effective ways to prevent natural disasters is to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower. China's primary method of decarbonizing its economy has been through the implementation of hydropower. Technologies developed by China can generate 540 GW of maximum power. Nations like France have taken a vastly different approach, by investing in budding technologies such as nuclear energy. France is currently in possession of 56 nuclear reactors, that have the capability of generating 68-72% of the nation's annual electricity generation. The burning of fossil fuels for energy production is a major contributor to climate change, which in turn can lead to more frequent and severe natural disasters. By investing in renewable energy infrastructure, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Another crucial aspect of using renewable resources to prevent natural disasters involves sustainable land management practices. Deforestation, soil erosion, and unsustainable agricultural practices can increase the risk of landslides, flooding, and other catastrophic events. By promoting reforestation efforts, implementing erosion control measures, and adopting sustainable farming techniques, we can enhance the resilience of ecosystems and reduce the likelihood of natural disasters. Healthy forests and robust ecosystems act as natural buffers against extreme weather events and contribute to overall environmental stability. The nation of Brazil has made great efforts in the past few decades to restore the sanctity of the Amazon rainforest. Pledging to regrow 73 million trees, the plan launched by Conservation International in Brazil in 2017 has already accomplished 20% of its goal. More Latin American countries are taking note, vowing to further appreciation for the rainforests surrounding the Amazon. One of the most important aspects of disaster risk reduction is recognizing the causes of increased natural disasters. By tackling human impacts on the environment that continuously fuel natural disasters, the global community is taking major steps in the right direction.

Underprivileged Populations, Disaster Risk, and Possible Solutions

Underprivileged communities often lack the resources and infrastructure necessary to withstand the impact of natural disasters. This includes substandard housing that is more susceptible to damage, limited access to healthcare facilities, and inadequate transportation systems. When a natural disaster strikes, these communities are at a higher risk of experiencing significant loss and damage due to their lack of resources and infrastructure. There is a severe infrastructure gap between rich and poor countries, with poor countries struggling with both the greatest magnitude

of natural disasters as well as the inability to protect themselves from these disasters. Many believe that foreign intervention is necessary in such scenarios, stating that richer nations have a moral obligation to protect the lives of those in the developed world. The opposition may state that rich countries deserve to protect their citizens before extending aid to others, or that the disturbing history of colonialism proves why developed nations should have no involvement in the developing world.

Underprivileged communities may have limited access to information and warning systems that could help them prepare for natural disasters. This can be due to factors such as language barriers, lack of internet access, or unreliable communication networks. As a result, residents in these communities may not receive timely warnings or instructions on how to protect themselves, leading to greater vulnerability during disasters. Finding ways to make information on potential disasters more accessible to all communities is imperative when creating a more equitable society. Further, when disaster inevitably strikes, economic disparities play a significant role in exacerbating the impact of natural disasters on underprivileged communities. Many residents in these communities may not have the financial means to evacuate or seek shelter in safer areas. Additionally, they may lack insurance coverage or savings to recover from the financial losses incurred during a disaster. The economic strain caused by natural disasters can further perpetuate poverty in these communities.

Natural disasters can have profound effects on the health and well-being of underprivileged communities. Limited access to healthcare services means that residents may struggle to receive medical attention for injuries sustained during a disaster or for ongoing health conditions exacerbated by the event. Furthermore, the stress and trauma of experiencing a natural disaster can have long-term impacts on mental health, particularly in communities already facing social and economic challenges. It has been proven that both natural and man-made disasters can heavily increase rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and large-scale mental instability, let alone the physical injuries that are often the result of such disasters. Finding ways to provide all communities, regardless of income, with the physical and mental healthcare they need is a necessity.

When considering solutions to the problem of disaster risk reduction, the most marginalized and most impacted communities must be the greatest consideration. Those most impacted by disasters deserve to have their needs recognized, discussed, and met.

Investments Needed for Solutions

When investing millions, if not billions, of dollars into developing expensive public infrastructure, proper research must be conducted to ensure that a nation's efforts will be effective at addressing potential problems. It is impossible to predict the future, but that does not make forming predictions any less important. The United States, through the University of Hawaii, has funded and developed the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC), an organization that researches and provides recommendations for all nations facing disaster. Nations should take advantage of these resources, take Argentina for example, which hosted a National Disaster Preparedness Baseline Assessment with the PDC, bringing together experts from all facets of disaster relief to ensure that the Argentinian government infrastructure developments would be

perfectly designed to target long-term sustainability far into the future. Considering the existing funding mechanisms in place, and what funding is still needed to ensure proper risk reduction globally, it is necessary to evaluate where funding should come from, who should oversee funding, and how funding should be delegated.

In the words of Jessie J, it's all about the money. Where do nations turn when they don't have the money needed to protect their states and the citizens that reside there? Organizations like the World Bank Group have launched programs like the Armenia Natural Disaster Risk Management Program to provide \$1.75 million designated for disaster prevention. Although programs such as those launched by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have seen some successes when it comes to placing money in the hands of those who need it, these programs are often viewed negatively by underprivileged nations who often feel taken advantage of and controlled by larger, developed countries that operate these organizations.

Ideas are good, but they can not go anywhere without proper funding. When researching and deciding on potential solutions, evaluating potential sources of funding is of the utmost importance.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some strong examples of “disaster-proof” infrastructure, and how can we implement these infrastructure plans globally?
2. How can the international community build protective infrastructure in disaster-prone areas?
3. How can we better manage natural resources to ensure they are protected in the case of environmental disaster?
4. How can underprivileged groups be protected from environmental harm?
5. What resources and materials should be stored in the case of potential disaster?
6. What are the plans for the distribution of these resources in the event of a disaster?

Topic B: Disaster Relief and Recovery

What can we do when the unimaginable happens? It is impossible to prepare for every unexpected calamity the international world may face, making it imperative to provide sanctuary and relief for those who fall victim to environmental disasters. Providing resources to victims of environmental emergencies, revising international laws to protect climate refugees, supporting policies that help immigrants forced to find a new home, and funding rehabilitation efforts for wrecked communities are all recommendations for this topic. Remember the human impact of natural disasters, using empathy to create policies that could help real people, families, and communities struggling with the weight of tragedy.

Climate Refugee Crisis and Possible Solutions

As disasters continue to increase in both magnitude and quantity, the human impact of these disasters continues to take a toll on our world. The majority of climate refugees are emigrating from nations in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, due to the variety of natural

disasters likely to face these areas, and often a lack of investment in disaster protection. International Displaced People (IDPs) are often forced to flee their nations, leaving their homes, families, culture, and ordinary life behind. India, a nation faced with mudslides, flooding, and torrential rain accounts for the largest number of disaster-related IDPs. Pakistan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Yemen, Kenya, and Vietnam account for a combined total of over 4 million IDPs. Recovering IDPs and providing them with the necessary resources until they are able to return home is perhaps the most important aspect of disaster relief, as it targets the human impact behind natural disasters.

Addressing the climate refugee crisis requires strong international cooperation and the development of robust policy frameworks. This includes establishing mechanisms for burden-sharing among countries to support displaced populations, creating legal frameworks for the protection of climate refugees, and integrating climate change considerations into existing migration policies. Furthermore, providing financial assistance and technology transfer to developing countries can help them build resilience and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Nations need to be encouraged to support refugees displaced from natural disasters through financial aid, recovery aid, and the willingness to open their borders. Another crucial aspect of addressing the climate refugee crisis is building adaptive capacity and resilience in vulnerable communities. This includes investing in infrastructure that can withstand extreme weather events, implementing early warning systems for natural disasters, and developing sustainable agricultural practices that are resilient to changing climatic conditions. Furthermore, providing access to education and resources for vulnerable communities can empower them to adapt to environmental changes and reduce their susceptibility to displacement.

Rehabilitation Efforts for Post-Disaster Infrastructure and Possible Solutions

The first step in rebuilding infrastructure after a natural disaster is to conduct a thorough assessment of the damage. This involves evaluating the extent of destruction to roads, bridges, buildings, power lines, and other critical infrastructure. Engineers and disaster response teams need to assess the structural integrity of buildings and infrastructure to determine what can be salvaged and what needs to be rebuilt. Simultaneously, it is crucial to assess the immediate needs of the affected population, such as access to clean water, shelter, and medical facilities. Access to as much information as possible is needed in any disaster scenario, and finding ways to easily determine levels of destruction, individuals that require the most aid, and infrastructure that must be rebuilt are necessary before proper rehabilitation can begin.

Rebuilding infrastructure after a natural disaster requires significant resources. Governments often play a central role in mobilizing these resources, which may include funding from national budgets, international aid, or loans from financial institutions. Additionally, partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector entities, and international agencies can provide expertise, funding, and technical assistance for the reconstruction efforts. When rebuilding infrastructure after a natural disaster, it is crucial to incorporate resilience and innovation into the design and construction processes. This involves using advanced engineering techniques and materials that can withstand future disasters. For example, earthquake-resistant building designs or flood-resistant infrastructure can help mitigate the impact of similar events in

the future. Furthermore, integrating innovative technologies such as smart infrastructure systems can enhance the overall resilience of rebuilt structures.

Community engagement is vital throughout the reconstruction process. Involving local communities in decision-making ensures that their needs and concerns are addressed. It also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among the affected population. Community input can provide valuable insights into local conditions, cultural considerations, and traditional building practices that should be taken into account during the rebuilding process.

Acceptance of Immigrants and Possible Solutions

Unfortunately, the culture of accepting immigrants has begun to change, especially as large-scale disasters continue to increase. Once accepting European nations have begun enforcing policies that show a growing opposition to aiding fleeing refugees. The Sweden Democrats, after sweeping parliamentary elections in September of 2022, introduced the Tido Agreement, which in addition to outlining many of the party's policy ideas, advocated for increasing the requirements for Swedish citizenship and making family reunification across refugee families and children more difficult. Italy, a nation once willing to host thousands of climate and disaster refugees in nations (including but not limited to) Nigeria, Pakistan, Mali, Somalia, and the Gambia, has also increased restrictions on the number of refugees allowed within their borders, and the ease at which these refugees are allowed to achieve citizenship status. Most stereotypically "developed nations", many a part of the European Union, including (but not limited to) Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, and Turkey have been faced with increased debates on how easy it should be for disaster refugees to enter their respective countries.

Another crucial aspect of fostering acceptance is promoting the integration of migrants into their new communities. This involves providing access to language classes, job training, and support services that facilitate their participation in society. When migrants are given the tools to succeed and feel welcomed in their new environment, it benefits not only them but also the broader community. Integration efforts should also focus on creating opportunities for social interaction between migrants and local residents, as this can help break down barriers and build connections.

Policy changes at local, national, and international levels play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards migrants. Governments can implement inclusive policies that protect the rights of migrants, provide pathways to legal residency or citizenship, and address issues such as discrimination and xenophobia. Additionally, advocating for fair immigration laws and refugee resettlement programs can demonstrate a commitment to upholding humanitarian values and promoting acceptance within society.

One of the most effective ways to encourage acceptance of migrants is through education and awareness campaigns. These initiatives can help dispel myths and misconceptions about migration, providing factual information about the reasons people migrate, the challenges they face, and their potential contributions to society. Educational programs in schools, workplaces, and community centers can promote understanding and empathy toward migrants, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect. Empathy is a powerful tool in promoting acceptance of

migrants. Encouraging individuals to put themselves in the shoes of migrants, understand their experiences, and recognize their humanity can lead to more compassionate attitudes. Personal stories and testimonies from migrants can be particularly impactful in fostering empathy and breaking down stereotypes.

Questions to Consider

1. What can be done to encourage nations to support climate refugees?
2. How can immigrants be best integrated into a new society, while still allowing these individuals to maintain critical aspects of their culture?
3. How can climate refugees best be supported in attaining jobs, allocating resources, and maintaining an education?
4. How can the international community work together to build up destroyed communities?
5. How can underprivileged nations best receive the environmental aid they need?



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