

## Disaster Resilience

Disasters caused by earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis and more can have devastating impacts on people, environments and economies.

But resilience – the ability of people and places to withstand these impacts and recover quickly – remains possible. *Smart choices help us recover from disasters, while poor choices make us more vulnerable.* These choices relate to how we grow our food, where and how we build our homes, how our financial system works, what we teach in schools and more.

With a quickening pace of disasters taking a greater toll on lives and property, and a higher degree of concentration of human settlements, a smart future means planning ahead and staying alert.

### Facts and figures

- ¥ More than 226 million people are affected by disasters every year.
- ¥ From 2000 to 2010, economic damage as a result of disasters amounted to around US\$ 1 trillion.
- ¥ Less than 0.7 per cent of total relief aid goes to disaster risk reduction.
- ¥ Of the 33 cities that will have at least 8 million residents by 2015, 21 are in coastal areas.
- ¥ Women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men during a disaster.
- ¥ Since 1980, drought and associated famine have claimed nearly 558,000 lives and affected more than 1.6 billion people.
- ¥ In East Asia and the Pacific, the risks of dying from floods and cyclones have decreased by two thirds since 1980.
- ¥ On average, 102 million people are affected every year by floods, 37 million people by cyclones, hurricanes or typhoons, and nearly 366,000 by landslides.
- ¥ Most of the 3.3 million deaths from disasters in the last 40 years have been in poorer nations.

### Background

Almost every country has experience some kind of natural disaster sometime in its existence. Before the 1800's a lot of disaster relief programs came from religious organizations. One of the first government sponsored disaster relief programs created was FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). It was founded in 1803 in the United States of America. The first thing that FEMA did was to provide assistance to a town in New Hampshire that had an extensive fire.

Another disaster relief program was created in 1859 called the International Red Cross Movement, which has 186 countries involved in it now. The program was first created to help

out the wounded in the military in Switzerland. The organization was created by Henry Dunant, who helped both Franco-Sardinian and Austrian troops at the Battle of Solferino. The first International Conference of the Red Cross was attended by representatives of nine countries, sixteen national committees, and the international committee. The first conference was in Berlin in 1869. Others followed: Geneva in 1884, Karlsruhe in 1887, Rome in 1892, and Vienna in 1897. During World War I, the Red Cross volunteers and workers took on a bigger role, addressing the needs of war prisoners. During World War II, the Red Cross provided protection for the civilians in France and other countries. The Red Cross won two Nobel Peace Prizes, in 1917 and in 1944. The Red Cross has helped with thousands of natural disasters.

AMURT (Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team) was created in 1965 in India. It is one of the few relief programs formed in a developing countries. It was originally founded to help the victims of disasters on the Indian sub-continent. Over the years it has expanded its services to twenty different countries. AMURT states that; "...development is human exchange: people sharing wisdom, knowledge and experience to build a better world" (AMURT).

In 2002, China and France joined forces to help each other on disaster relief and rescue training. China suffers from natural disasters due to its size and location along active seismic zones. France has three million Euros to help China with disaster preparation and relief programs. (China, France). The French plan to donate computers, telecommunications, and rescue equipment to China.

### **Past UN Actions**

"The United Nations works to save lives and improve the economic and social condition of people around the world" (The Role).

The United Nations is trying to figure out ways to reduce the impact of natural disasters and the loss of life and resources associated with them. The frequency of natural disasters has increased. During disasters, the UN supplies people with food, shelter, medicine, and support. The United Nations created the United Nations Disaster Relief Office in 1971. It was created to coordinate and mobilize disaster relief activities from various organizations in times of disaster. The United Nations created three main groups with subcommittees in each group that deal with Disaster Relief.

The first group is under the UN secretariat, which includes OCHA, Global Compact and UNFIP. OCHA (Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) deals with emergency coordination. Global Compact deals with the principles for corporate citizenship and UNFIP (United Nations Development Program) is the organization that cooperates with business partnerships.

The second group is under the General Assembly, which includes UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNHCR, and UNFPA. The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) takes care of children, women, health, nutrition, water, and sanitation. The WFP (World Food Program) takes care of giving people food and logistics. The UNDP (United Nations Development Program) takes care of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the disaster areas. UNHCR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) give refugees shelter, and makes sure that they are safe and have rights. UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) provides healthcare to the people who suffered from the disaster.

The last group is under the Economics and Social Council, which includes FAO and WHO. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) give the people who were affected by the disaster agricultural supplies and fishery supplies. The WHO (World Health Organization) provides healthcare to the people who suffered from the disaster. (The Role).

Kathleen Cravero, assistant administrator and director for the UNDP, believes that countries must identify their levels of risks as part of setting risk management priorities. She states:

“As of 2006, we are operating disaster reduction programs in over fifty high risk countries with an overall disaster reduction program budget in that year of approximately \$80 million”  
(Crisis Prevention)

## **Conclusion**

Disaster Relief programs today are active and engaged. However, a new awareness that humans may be partially responsible for the accelerating rate of some disasters has brought scientists and disaster relief professionals together, working for common goals. Kathleen Cravero believes there are three factors that must be realized in order to minimize human-caused disasters:

(1) Disaster risk reduction and development are inextricably linked. This means there is a link between the climate change and how many disasters are occurring.

(2) Disaster risk reduction is everyone’s business. People have to try to prevent global warming and save our natural resources.

(3) Disaster reduction requires sustained engagement. Disaster reduction is not going to happen overnight, it takes time and a lot of effort from a lot of people.

(Crisis Prevention)

Disaster Relief programs help countries all over the world when they are in need. In the past few years the number of natural disaster and the need of disaster relief programs has increased. Your committee needs to determine the best way to reduce natural disasters and how to fund all the programs. You also need to identify gaps in disaster reduction policies and programs.

(International Strategy)

## **Questions to Consider**

1. What types of natural disasters have occurred in your MUN country?
2. Does your MUN country’s government support the idea that some natural disasters are related to human activity?
3. How has your MUN country responded to natural disasters in your country, region or in other places? How "resilient" is your country?
4. What are ways to help prevent natural disasters and the loss of human life and resources that result from them? How can communities in high-risk regions become more resilient?
5. What are the best ways of providing disaster relief-resiliency? Do they require funding?
6. How can the United Nations raise enough funds to support disaster relief-resilient programs?

# Your Task

Your task is to research and gather information on this topic and your country's relationship to this topic so you can help resolve the issues related to this topic from your country's perspective. You will be a diplomat representing your country and negotiating solutions that your country can support.

Go to the following link to begin your research:

<http://www.un.org/en/sustainablefuture/disasters.shtml> Consider searching online using your MUN *country's name* and *disaster* as key words.

## Other Sources

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