



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

STATEMENT

by

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First Secretary**

**To the Sixth Committee of the
United Nations General Assembly**

“Protection of persons in the event of disasters”

Agenda Item 89

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Mr. Chair,

The delegation of Sierra Leone notes the particular significance of the topic: **“Protection of persons in the event of disasters”**, and the Sixth Committee’s continued consideration of this agenda item, including the recommendation of the International Law Commission (ILC) contained in paragraph 46 of its report (A/71/10) on the work of its 68th session – to in particular, elaborate “a convention on the basis of the draft articles”. The General Assembly in resolution A/73/209 noted *“that the subject of the protection of persons in the event of disasters is of major importance in the relations of States”*. We are therefore mindful that we continue our consideration of the recommendation of the Commission in the middle of a debilitating coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, a calamitous disaster in every sense imaginable.

In the previous consideration of this agenda item, the General Assembly has taken note of the draft articles, and inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to invite Governments that have not yet done so to submit comments related to the recommendation of the Commission. In this regard, the delegation of Sierra Leone thanks the Secretary-General for his report A/75/214 containing comments by Governments concerning the ILC’s recommendation. In the debate on “agenda item 81” this session, we expressed our appreciation of the working methods of the ILC and the symbiosis that exist with the Sixth Committee, with States invited to comment on the work of the Commission at various stages, on the one hand underscoring the independence of the ILC, and on the other hand noting the deference to the views of States by the Commission. This is the spirit in which studies are to be initiated recommendations *“for the purpose of encouraging the progressive development of international law and its codification”*, borrowed from article 13 paragraph 1 of the United Nations Charter.

The delegation of Sierra Leone pays tribute to the Special Rapporteur, **Mr. Eduardo Valencia-Ospina**, for his outstanding contribution in the preparation of the draft articles, his devoted work, and for the results achieved. We also thank the Commission for its continuing contribution to the codification and progressive development of international law.

Mr. Chair,

Regrettably, our world continues to face increasing number of disasters with concerning intensity and impact on affected populations. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed major gaps in our rules based international order, and in these moments of crisis the United Nations is expected to lead in its fulfilment of its purposes under its Charter, in particular “*to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character*”. However, the inertia in the Sixth Committee on codification may seem to expose the hesitance of the General Assembly to take action on recommendations from the ILC on hard law, including the recommendation to elaborate a convention on the basis of the draft articles on the protection of persons in the event of disasters.

The question before the Sixth Committee is fundamentally the taking of a decision on the recommendation of the ILC. While we note the delicate balance struck in the content of the draft articles, the views being expressed demonstrate that States will have to take ownership in the elaboration of a convention. What is needed now is the will to take action on the Commission’s recommendation. With the COVID-19 pandemic being a truly global disaster, the General Assembly resolution **74/270**, unanimously adopted on 2 April 2020 and sponsored by all but 5 Member States should provide the inspiration. On our part, we welcome the draft articles and see merit in pursuing the recommendation by the ILC. We note with appreciation the emphasis on human rights and human dignity in the content of the draft articles. As has been said in this Committee before, responses to disasters must be embed in the principles of sovereign independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity. It is on this basis that Sierra Leone expresses support for the recommendation of the ILC for the elaboration of a convention on the basis of the draft articles, noting that States can further strengthen the text to build broad consensus and universality.

In closing, Chair, Sierra Leone hopes the Sixth Committee will give meaning to the continued relevance of the progressive development of international law and its codification, especially on topics of major importance to States. As the ILC has not “*restrict[ed] itself to traditional topics, but [...has] also consider [a topic] that reflect new developments in international law and pressing concerns of the international community as a whole*”, it is now up to the General Assembly to act, in order to address the lacuna in facilitating international cooperation to protect persons in the event of disasters.

I thank you.