



# PHILIPPINES

## STATEMENT

Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations

### **Agenda Item - 86: Protection of persons in the event of disasters**

78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

4 October 2023, Trusteeship Council

UN Headquarters New York

**Mr. Chair,**

As it is my first time to take the floor, on behalf of the Philippines, I wish to express full support for you and the members of your Bureau. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank you and your Bureau for the trust reposed on me to chair the Working Group on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters or PPED which will begin its work tomorrow.

The establishment of the Working Group to examine the draft articles on PPED and to consider further the recommendation of the International Law Commission or ILC for the elaboration of a convention by the Assembly or by an international conference of plenipotentiaries on the basis of the draft articles, or any other potential course of action with respect to the draft articles is a **breakthrough**.

It is also long-overdue.

Just last month, we saw the devastation in the wake of an earthquake in Morocco, the strongest recorded in over a century; the storm and massive flooding in Libya; and the consequent loss of lives and destruction of property. We stand in solidarity with their peoples.

With the mandate given to us, we can do more for the protection of persons in the event of such disasters.

**Mr. Chair,**

As an archipelagic state located in the boundary of major tectonic plates, at the center of a typhoon belt, we are no stranger to these disasters. The Philippines ranks high for population exposure and vulnerability to hazards. Almost ten years ago, Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful tropical cyclones in recent memory, made a landfall in our region, devastating portions of Southeast Asia, and claiming lives of at least 6,300 people in my country alone.

Climate change and sea-level rise will only exacerbate these challenges. An Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report has indicated, for instance, that sea-level rise at the end of the century is projected to be faster under all scenarios and that there will be more intense and frequent extreme sea level events and increase of expected annual flood damages absent adaptation.

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The torrential rains which caused significant flooding in parts of New York following a historic rainfall the past days also bring home this point.

As stressed by our Secretary of Foreign Affairs at the High-Level Week: *“We are profoundly concerned over how extreme weather events have caused too much human suffering across the globe.... We need decisive, responsible, just and sustainable solutions that look after populations and protect persons that have contributed the least to global warming, but have the highest vulnerability by their geography.”*

**Mr. Chair,**

The rationale for the Draft Articles, the frequency and severity of natural and human-made disasters and their impact, strongly resonates with the Philippines. The emphasis on human dignity, human rights, especially the right to life, and humanitarian principles, is consistent with the spirit of our national law, the “Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010”.

We therefore welcome this opportunity to examine the draft articles on PPED and to consider further the recommendation of the ILC for the elaboration of a convention by the Assembly or by an international conference of plenipotentiaries on the basis of the draft articles, or any other potential course of action.

The establishment of this Working Group is thanks in large part to the efforts of committed States, and the many delegations that have weighed in on the topic during the previous debates, including at the seventy-sixth session, and come to a consensus on the next step. The points raised by delegations promise a rich basis for further discussions at the various clusters in the coming days, *inter alia*:

For Cluster 1, on the definition of a disaster; on whether or not applying the draft articles to both natural and human-made disasters affect the distinct legal systems that apply to each category; and whether armed conflict should be explicitly excluded in the definition of disaster. Some states have also expressed that pandemic/COVID-19 fits under the definition of disaster, while some asked that the draft articles include epidemics and pandemics within the definition of disasters.

For Cluster 2, some states have asked whether the draft article on disaster risk reduction is sufficient. There are suggestions to include among the measures to reduce the risk of disasters the preparation of the population at risks; a clearer link to the linked to the Sendai Framework for Action for Disaster Risk Reduction; and that related issues may be necessary to consider within the context of the ILC’s work on sea-level rise in relation to international law.

For Cluster 3, states have shared important insights on the duty to cooperate vis a vis principle of sovereignty, as well as whether or not the duty to cooperate must be limited between states and/or separate from duty to cooperate with international governmental organizations; and whether or not the provision which states the States shall expeditiously give due course to the request of the affected State encroaches on the principle of sovereignty of a State.

The Philippines, in its national capacity, will engage constructively within the Working Group on these and related issues, recognizing the urgency of a prevention-focused, forward-looking, and multilateral approach to reducing disaster risks, and the need to collectively move forward in considering these ILC draft articles on PPED.

As the Philippines prepares for its hosting of the 2024 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Manila, the protection of persons in the event of disasters will be a priority in its agenda. END