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# UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE,  
UNGA78, AGENDA ITEM 86

PROTECTION OF PERSONS IN THE EVENT OF DISASTERS

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Delivered by Jonathan Hollis

*Check against delivery*

Thank you Mr/Madam Chair.

Climatic and geological hazards form part of our common human experience, and an average of over 400 disasters take place each year globally.

**The good news** is that we have many tools to mitigate the worst impacts of these hazards and to respond effectively when they become disasters. Advances in technology and data mean that climate disasters are often predicted and affected populations can be warned and moved to safety. Buildings and infrastructure can be built to withstand earthquakes and severe storms. When disasters happen, affected populations are often rescued and supported by effective local, national, regional and international responses that had been prepared for such an eventuality.

However, this progress is not shared equally. In many places, limited efforts to reduce disaster risk, poor disaster planning and lack of government capacity to respond mean that we often witness disasters where people needlessly die, where peoples' health, homes and livelihoods are severely damaged, and economies are ruined. Poor and marginalised communities and groups, including women and girls, in lower-income and fragile countries are disproportionately affected by disasters. As we heard throughout High Level Week, this is having a significant impact on progress across several of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UK recognises the principle of sovereignty of States and the primary role of affected States in responding to disasters, as well as the role that local actors and people affected by disasters themselves play in disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response. We also recognise the extremely important role that other States, regional organisations, the UN system, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and international non-governmental organisations play in helping States and populations affected by disasters. We also know that this system of international response often faces significant challenges, including poor coordination, insufficient funding, regulatory barriers, and at worst, difficulties in reaching affected populations, despite dire humanitarian needs.

The UK is committed to providing humanitarian assistance that respects the crucial humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. We consistently lead and progress work to improve responses to disasters and proactive approaches to reducing disaster risk.

There is growing evidence on the impact of climate change on the intensity, frequency and duration of disasters. Building from our leadership as COP President, we are continuing to work with other donors to increase the volume of finance available to climate vulnerable countries through the collective commitment to double adaptation finance on 2019 levels by 2025. The UK has also collaborated with humanitarian and private actors on Disaster Risk Financing and we have supported the IFRC's risk transfer mechanism.

The ILC's draft articles on protection of persons in the event of disasters provide a helpful starting point for a discussion on whether and how an international convention can reduce the devastating harm caused by disasters. We commend the ILC for its work. The UK is open to exploring the benefits of a convention and shares the ambition to improve disaster preparedness and risk reduction measures, improve cooperation and coordination, and better address the legal, regulatory and practical problems that arise in disaster response. With this in mind, we look forward to the discussion in the Working Group.

Thank you.