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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE,
UNGA79, AGENDA ITEM 86

WORKING GROUP – PROTECTION OF PERSONS IN THE EVENT OF DISASTERS –
CLUSTER 2

7 October 2024

Delivered by Greg Reisman

Check against delivery

1. Thank you chair. The UK will now comment on draft Articles 4, 6 and 9.

Draft Article 4 – Human dignity

2. With respect to draft Article 4, the UK agrees that the reference to the “inherent dignity of the human person” is an important framing principle. However, as raised by a number of states last year, the UK does not consider that there is a standalone legal right to human dignity. We would therefore suggest that the reference to human dignity would be better placed in the preamble to the draft Articles as opposed to the operative provisions. Furthermore, as we noted last year, the draft Article does not give an indication of the actors being addressed and it is unclear how the concept should be enforced in the disaster response context.

Draft Article 6 – Humanitarian principles

3. Regarding draft Article 6, the humanitarian principles are essential to disaster response. The UK notes that ‘independence’ is generally understood to sit alongside ‘neutrality, humanity and impartiality’ as a fourth humanitarian principle, in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 58/114.
4. As noted last year, ‘independence’ as defined by UNGA resolution 58/114 is not included in the draft Article. The UK has concerns about its omission given its importance to the operations of UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, and components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement involved in humanitarian response.

Draft Article 9 – Reduction of the risk of disasters

6. The UK considers that disaster risk reduction is of critical importance and welcomes the holistic approach taken in the draft articles, which seek to address the various phases of a disaster.
7. However, the UK has concerns about the scope of draft Article 9. In particular, as noted earlier in respect of Cluster 1, the wide definition of “disaster” in draft Article 3(a) means that it is unclear how this proposed obligation sits alongside existing obligations contained in specific instruments. The UK is of the view that, in circumstances where states are already addressing issues through separate subject-specific frameworks, it would be unhelpful to develop parallel obligations. The issue of overlapping legal frameworks may therefore merit further consideration.
8. The UK also notes that the commentary makes clear that Article 9 is intended to be an obligation of conduct rather than result and would support proposed textual amendments to make this clear.
9. Thank you chair.