4 CHAPTER FOUR
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCTION

The General Assembly is the main deliberative policy-making body of the United Nations (UN) and is empowered to address all international issues covered by the Charter. In many ways, it acts as the central hub of the United Nations. Many UN bodies report to the General Assembly, but not all of these bodies are subsidiary to the GA. For example, the Security Council constantly updates the General Assembly on its work, but it is an independent body; its work does not require the General Assembly's independent approval. In contrast, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and is governed by General Assembly mandates. Other subsidiary bodies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), also have direct reporting relationships with the General Assembly.

The UN Charter assigns each of the main Committees of the General Assembly specific tasks and topics to discuss during each session. Because every Member State has a seat in every Committee, it is important to note that the points of discussion do not overlap; that is, even if two or more Committees are discussing a general topic area, each Committee is responsible for discussing a very specific point or aspect of that topic. For example, the Fourth Committee may discuss the Israeli-Palestine conflict with regard to its political components. However, issues concerning the legal, social, or economic components of the Israeli-Palestine conflict are left to other Committees, the General Assembly Plenary, or the Security Council. Therefore, Representatives in each Committee should take care not to expand the discussion of any topic beyond the limitations set by their Committee's mandate and into another Committee's area of discussion. This is known as the Committee's purview.

A note concerning funding: The Fifth Committee makes financing decisions concerning only the UN's regular, annual budget, not those decisions dealing with voluntary contributions or new outlays. Even though AMUN will not be simulating the Fifth Committee, other Committees generally do not act unless sufficient funds are available for their proposals, thus financial questions should still be considered during the other Committees' deliberations. Therefore, if a Committee creates a new program or initiative, that Committee should specify how the program can or will be funded, and if the program falls within the UN's regular annual budget, that resolution should defer to the Fifth Committee to establish funding.

The purpose of the Combined Plenary session on the final day is to ratify the resolutions which passed in the four Main GA Committees and build consensus. While a small amount of additional debate is typical, it is expected that the work done by each Committee over the first three days of the Conference will be respected. It would thus be rare for significant changes to be made, or for a resolution to fail in the Plenary session after passing in Committee.

The following are brief descriptions of each Committee simulated at AMUN, along with the Committee's agenda, a brief purview of each committee, a brief background and research guide for each agenda topic, and the Committee's website address. Representatives should use this information as the first step in their research on the powers and limitations of their particular Committee in relation to the agenda topics.

PURVIEW OF THE CONCURRENT GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY

The General Assembly Plenary typically considers issues that several Committees would have the power to discuss, but which would best be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Likewise, the General Assembly Plenary is also responsible for coordinating work between the many different bodies of the United Nations. For example, the 60th General Assembly recently established a Peacebuilding Commission that oversees the United Nations' peacebuilding processes and coordinate the work of the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, and Member States emerging from conflict situations. Note that if the Security Council, which is given the primary task of ensuring peace and security by the Charter, is discussing a particular issue, the General Assembly Plenary will cease its own deliberations and defer to the Security Council.

Website: http://www.un.org/ga/

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF NATURAL DISASTERS, FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT

While most governments have emergency planning to deal with disasters when they strike, governments often require outside assistance to fully meet the needs of their people during larger disasters, like the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2010 Haiti Earthquake or the 2011-12 Drought in the Horn of Africa. In the wake of a major disaster, the United Nations offers coordinated international responses and provides on–the-ground assistance. The United Nations also helps countries prepare for disasters and prepare to mitigate their worst effects. Despite its successes, the UN humanitarian relief system is occasionally slow and ineffective, and additional steps are needed to improve its ability to deliver rapid and effective relief.

In 1971, the General Assembly created the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) in Geneva, which was tasked with coordinating United Nations responses to natural disasters. Over time, a greater number of aid agencies, non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and international organizations became involved in relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters. In 1991, the General Assembly reformed the United Nations disaster relief system in order to increase coordination among a wide range of international actors. The UNDRO was merged into the United Nations Secretariat's Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and created the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to disburse funding to international organizations engaged in disaster response.

Member States were also working to improve national efforts to prevent the worst effects of natural disasters. At the 1994 World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, the United Nations approved the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World, a series of guidelines for the prevention of, preparedness for, and mitigation of natural disasters. The Yokohama Strategy also offered recommendations for improving the United Nations' response to disasters in the face of an increasingly complex set of response and fundraising mechanisms. In response, the humanitarian offices were restructured in 1998, consolidating all humanitarian coordination into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which currently directs the United Nations system's humanitarian efforts. The office coordinates inter-agency responses to complex emergencies, including needs assessments, consolidated appeals, field coordination arrangements and the development of system-wide humanitarian policies. In 2005, the Yokohama Strategy was updated and superseded by the Hyogo Framework for Action, which increased the focus on prevention and pushed for a greater emphasis on including medium-term recovery and long-term development as part of disaster response.

Currently, OCHA coordinates over $7 billion in emergency relief funding. It is also responsible for administering an increasingly complex disaster response system. One of the most prominent recent innovations is the cluster system. First implemented during the 2009 United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste, the cluster system creates teams of international organizations and NGOs that are responsible for a specific area of disaster response, such as health, logistics, and camp coordination and management. Each of the 11 clusters is responsible for planning for both immediate humanitarian relief and long-term recovery. Each cluster is headed by the relevant United Nations agency or NGO partner. The system is intended to improve the delivery of related resources by increasing coordination among the involved parties.

Despite this series of structural revisions, humanitarian response to natural disasters remains a complex issue. The response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake was widely criticized as ineffective, and United Nations officials admit that their systems were overwhelmed by it, their largest disaster relief operation to date. The international response to this high-profile crisis was rapid and massive, but severely damaged transit infrastructure and Haitian government institutions that were all but destroyed during the Earthquake both hindered response efforts. Some critics have also argued that the international community's handled the crisis poorly, blaming poor performance on lack of coordination under the cluster system. To critics, the cluster system only increased the bureaucratic layering while disconnecting providers from local and state partners and populations, degrading into a system of sub-clusters that made identifying responsible parties all too difficult. Despite the criticisms, the system successfully oversaw the delivery of emergency aid to millions of Haitians and continues to provide stability and assistance to hundreds of thousands two years later.

Currently, the General Assembly is moving forward on two key areas: improving the UN system's efforts to move countries from relief to recovery, and encouraging Member States to adopt disaster risk reduction measures. As the United Nations has improved its early response to disasters, focus is now turning to how to pivot immediate response into long-term recovery and development. Disaster risk reduction, also known in the UN system under the framework of Strategic Disaster Reduction, includes a number of steps from better city planning and building codes to the development of tsunami warning systems.

Looking forward, the General Assembly will need to consider additional steps to coordinate the wide range of State and non-State actors that now perform direct humanitarian assistance in the wake of disasters. Better coordination mechanisms are needed with organizations that will perform long-term recovery operations. Like many other elements of the United Nation's mission, disaster response requires close coordination not only between United Nations entities and national governments, but also with subnational governments, search and rescue teams from around the globe and NGOs like the International Committee of the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders. The ability of the United Nations and its staff to coordinate and cooperate with these diverse partners in harsh circumstances means the difference between life or death, recovery or ruin. As the world becomes increasingly urban, disaster risk reduction measures will also become more and more important in mitigating the impact of natural disasters. With the cost and frequency of major disasters both increasing, the General Assembly should consider what steps the international community can take to further disaster risk reduction.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:
- What lessons can be learned from the UN experience in Haiti, and how can the UN's coordination system be improved?
- What role should governmental and private organizations play in disaster relief and recovery?
- How effective is the cluster system, and how can it be improved?
- How can the UN encourage States to improve their preparedness for disasters?

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GA/SPD/456
A/64/PV.69
A/66/81–E/2011/117
Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation and its Plan of Action
Hyogo Framework for Action

ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

www.unocha.org – UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
www.un.org/en/humanitarian/ – United Nations Humanitarian Affairs
www.humanitarianresponse.info – Humanitarian Response Portal

STRENGTHENING CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Despite strides made in other aspects of gender equality, one out of every three women worldwide will be beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime. Since its creation, the United Nations and its individual Member States have worked to promote equal standing between men and women and to prevent violence against and abuse of women. Historically, this has been viewed as a human rights issue: the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights both state the importance of equal rights for men and women.

The United Nations has worked to reduce crime against women by focusing on finding regional and international methods of violence reduction and prevention. While there is little that the United Nations can do on a case-by-case basis, international organizations have worked to target factors that have been identified as potential root causes, with varying degrees of success. Among these underlying issues are the exclusion of women from the political process and policy formation of a State, poverty, low levels of education, attitudes concerning violence against women in a society and weak legal sanctions for physical and sexual violence.

The international community has worked to address these issues through regional and international cooperative efforts, as well as through actions by individual Member States. In practice, violence against women has been addressed through three lenses in the United Nations system: gender equality, human rights, and violence prevention. Historically, the General Assembly's role is to coordinate these responses and ensure that the entire system is working together to achieve its shared goals.

In 1993, the United Nations declared its intent to seriously address violence against women during the World Conference on Human Rights. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action states that "the United Nations system and Member States should work towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life." In 1995, the United Nations adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a seminal document that was designed to promote gender empowerment and equality by the year 2000. The Declaration focused on empowering women in the political realm, ensuring healthcare and reproductive rights, and enabling women to pursue education without the fear of discrimination or violence against them.

In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to address the trafficking of persons, particularly women. The Protocol entered into force in 2003. Human trafficking continues to be a major cause of violence against women; the legal instrument compels signatories to take measures to end human trafficking and related crimes. More recently, the United Nations has started to focus on how to best protect rural and migrant women. Migrant women are frequently abused and trafficked, and the combination of lax law enforcement and extreme poverty combine to make rural women vulnerable to abuse. The United Nations system has been working to organize regional and international programs to assist rural women, but the results have been mixed.

Currently, the United Nations is focused on encouraging technical steps by Member States that reduce the rising number of women that are victimized per year. In 2010, the General Assembly adopted the revised Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The revised Model Strategies offer Member States a series of measures to take that can help reduce violence against women. Looking forward, the General Assembly will need to determine how to best encourage States to implement the Model Strategies. The United Nations could promote the use of an internationally-endorsed database on violent crimes and registered perpetrators. Of particular concern are ensuring that measures in the Model Strategies effectively protect the rights of migrant women, regardless of their immigration status. Migrant women face significant risks of sexual violence, exploitation, and human trafficking, These women may have a difficult time pursuing legal remedies due to the cross jurisdictional nature of these crimes.

The General Assembly is also responsible for guiding the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which offers technical support for States implementing the Model Strategy and conducts other follow-up activities. The General Assembly should assess whether the work of the UNODC has been effective and what additional measures the Office might take to improve its work on the topic. The UNODC and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice have offered technical guidance to Member States to create mechanisms for offering psychological care for women after physical violence.

Finally, the General Assembly will need to consider what progress they expect to achieve on this topic before the UN convenes its next major conference on women, currently slated for 2015.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:
- What policies does your country have to prevent crimes against women, and how might these policies assist other countries?
- What actions need to be taken by the United Nations to continue to build upon past work? What are new areas of concern that require attention on national and regional levels?
- How can the United Nations system improve Member State responses to violence targeting migrant women?
- Does the United Nations have the right or responsibility to condemn acts of perceived violence against women even when they are acts of cultural tradition or are socially acceptable norms?

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UNW/2011/9
The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action
United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

www.unwomen.org – UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
www.unodc.org – UN Office on Drugs and Crime