Report to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on Building resilience to cross-border disasters
Executive Summary

On 22 November 2021, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) discussed the topic of Building Resilience to Cross-Border Disasters. This agenda should be brought forward to the Economic and Social Council to review the deliberations and resolutions made by this commission.

The commission discussed improving mechanisms on avoiding natural disasters, developing sustainable infrastructure, sharing relevant data and research through global weather institutions, addressing vulnerable populations that are affected by cross-border natural disasters, finding ways to finance preventative measures for natural disasters, recognizing the effects that disasters have on international trade and showing how disasters negatively affect the environment, a consequence which will continue to be exacerbated by climate change.

The committee on environment discussed making investments in a Disaster Management Fund. This would reduce economic costs to the Asia-Pacific region from the natural disasters they face. This fund would also contribute to the education of domestic leaders on the nature of climate change and mitigation strategies that can be adapted to each specific country. Educating the domestic leaders of specific countries would illustrate the relationship between climate change and the increase of natural disasters across the world.

The vulnerable populations committee has expressed that they would like larger Member States to consider accepting more refugees, supplying more resources in terms of medicine as well as temporary housing and working with international organizations, form disaster response training, using the UN Relief Fund, making recovery easily accessible for displaced women and children and recognizing that disasters might displace citizens in other States.

The data collection and research committee focused on voluntary sharing of data and information between Member States. These topics of information can include suggestions about tracking software and updates, emergency communication systems, contingency plans and post-disaster reviews of preventative measures. Additionally, this committee emphasized the need for effective early-warning and tracking systems among countries in the Asia-Pacific region, specifically ensuring access to these systems in rural and less developed areas.

The funding committee discussed multiple avenues of financing the various projects that this commission deliberated on. Intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations and State banks are potential vehicles that could be used for financing the development of various projects. The broad funding suggestions are meant to show the options that States have for their unique situations and preferences.

The committee on international trade and finance emphasized free trade and the facilitation of trade and finance both during and in the aftermath of natural disasters. The body reported that any emergency personnel would also assist in trade, any and all essential goods should not be subject to tariffs, increasing sustainable energy development, putting limits on foreign aid to prevent infringement of national sovereignty and private banks offer low-interest loans in times of natural disasters.

The first chapter of this report shows the suggested resolutions on the topic that the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific discussed and asks for those resolutions to be brought to the Economic and Social Committee for voting.

The second chapter details the discussions from the commission on cross-border disasters. The commission worked in several sub-committees to discuss the wide range of issues attached to cross-border disasters. The Commission developed many potential solutions to each of these diverse issues.
Matters calling for action

ESCAP II/1

Acknowledging the advancements in data collection on natural disasters through the World Meteorological Organization, the Typhoon Committee and others global organizations,

Acknowledging also the advancements in data collection on natural disasters through the Asian Pacific Partnership, the Asian and Pacific Center for the Development of Disaster Information Management and other regionally-based, regionally-focused organizations,

Recalling the Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, particularly the dedication to transboundary infrastructure networks,

Bearing in mind the importance of early response to prevent spillover of disasters from local areas to a broader region,

1. Encourages that natural disaster tracking technology be used to follow natural disasters in the region, noting frequency, size, and which countries would be most affected by impending natural disasters:
   (a) Tracking the path of natural disasters along with the area of effect to predict countries are likely to be most affected by these natural disasters and aid with necessary preparations and evacuations;
   (b) Using collected data to determine infrastructure improvements with other aid needed to help the affected regions;
   (c) Ensuring that all natural disaster tracking technology also be applied to rural and impoverished areas;
   (d) Limiting the tracking of data to only climate-related matters to respect national sovereignty;

2. Suggests that more funding be allocated to Member States most affected by impending natural disasters as predicted through tracking technology;

3. Considers the use of past data to shape responses and preparedness:
   (a) Providing resources to countries to create evacuation and contingency plans for promoting citizen safety;
   (b) Post-disaster reviews shared between countries to discuss the effectiveness of plans in use and suggest modifications;
   (c) Countries may consider utilizing the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (RIMES) to share data.

ESCAP II/2

Acknowledging the four priorities of the Sendai Framework with particular emphasis on Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction,

Recognizing that the Asia and Pacific regions are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, sand and dust storms and wildfires,

Alarmed by the hundreds of billions of dollars in economic loss each year as a result of natural disasters,

Noting that cross-border cooperation is essential to protecting the region as a whole but that each state has the right to administer disaster response within their borders,

Recognizing the efforts of the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (RIMES) to alert citizens in low-income areas during cross-border disasters,

Considering the disparity between wealthier Member States regarding existing monitoring technology and smaller, less-developed Member States without the capability to operate technology required to provide accurate and timely information,
1. *Suggests* Member States to undertake infrastructure improvements to facilitate regional databases in which Member States can freely share, of their own accord, information relating to the early response and research of natural disasters;

2. *Supports* Member States to seek funding for and initiate digital and physical city mapping efforts in areas at-risk of experiencing natural disasters to establish and enhance evacuation and emergency relief procedures;

3. *Encourages* Member States to research nuclear energy and other clean alternatives to fossil fuels under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) inspections and regulations:
   
   (a) This would be intended to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and work towards the 2050 carbon neutrality goals in order to help prevent natural disasters;

4. *Recommends* Member States to implement a regional education program to instruct citizens on preparedness and recovery measures;

5. *Advise* Member States within the Asia-Pacific region to support advanced response and alert systems to warn of coming storms that could threaten the entire region following the established precedent of Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (RIMES);

6. *Reminds* Member States to utilize stormwater intervention tunnels to control flooding by changing the speed of water drainage, as well as other effective flood prevention strategies utilized by Member States in the region;

7. *Also Encourages* Asian-Pacific States to share technology, software and education to help lesser-developed nations in the region have access to modern natural disaster detection devices and data.

**ESCAP II/3**

*Affirming* that the Member States in the Asia-Pacific region are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, as it contains a great number of developing nations,

*Recognizing* the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on international trade and global supply chains,

*Alarmed by* the vulnerability of Asian Member States to natural disasters and other destructive acts of nature,

*Noting with concern* that impacted communities in the Asia-Pacific Region do not have adequate access to financial aid and short-term loans during times of crisis,

*Emphasizing* the need for strong economic ties between Member States in the Asia-Pacific region, especially during times of emergency,

*Aware of* the many benefits of free trade and its contributions to economic growth,

1. *Recommends* that Member States prioritize the delivery of emergency supplies, including food, water, medical supplies and construction materials, to ports during times of emergency;

2. *Suggests* Member States to give aid to other member states in need, but to limit that aid to only what is required and to respect that nation’s sovereignty;

3. *Expresses its hope* that domestic banks in Member States will grant low interest temporary loans to communities most impacted by a natural disaster, promoting development among destruction;

4. *Further recommends* that Member States exchange valuable items such as technology and equipment to help prevent future natural disasters and warn local communities of impending acts of nature;

5. *Supports* Member States to form groups of regional dock workers to assist Member State’s ports at times of emergency, ensuring regional cohesion and preventing the disruption of international trade;

6. *Encourages* Member States to lower tariffs on essential goods during temporary natural disaster emergency periods, lasting no more than three weeks, in order to facilitate a free flow of emergency supplies to member states and their communities affected drastically by destructive acts of nature.
Reaffirming the work of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the United Nations Environmental Program,

Acknowledging that climate change exacerbates the intensity and frequency of natural disasters,

Encouraging all Member States to ratify and/or become a signatory to existing UN commitments on climate change adaptation, such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction,

Reiterating that developing States often lack adequate resources for adapting to climate change and preventing the devastating effects caused by natural disasters in the region,

1. Invites the Economic and Social Council to consider the importance of funding and the creation of disaster risk management initiatives when considering the effects of climate change in the Asia-Pacific region;

2. Recommends the establishment of a program in which domestic leaders, as well as citizens of Member States, can be educated on the effects and prevention of climate change:
   (a) This consultative program would provide case-by-case guidance to States seeking to better adapt their disaster prevention systems to climate change;
   (b) This program would also include disaster response training programs for citizens in rural areas;
   (c) This disaster response training would include education on how to identify a possible natural disaster before it strikes and on evasion tactics should one be caught within a natural disaster;

3. Encourages the Economic and Social Council to collaborate with existing regional banks and NGOs when working towards the improvement of disaster risk management systems.

Recognizing the disproportionate effect environmental, economic, social, and political crises have on economically and socially vulnerable populations,

Understanding that humanitarian disasters can cause persons to flee homes and become refugees,

Reaffirming a Member State’s Responsibility to Protect (R2P),

Acknowledging developed Member States with robust industry have heavily contributed to worldwide climate change,

Bearing in mind that Member States with larger area and economy have a greater capability to take refugees from under-developed regions impacted by natural disasters,

1. Appeals that Member States develop robust systems to take refugees;

2. Suggests Member States to take proper response after a humanitarian disaster has occurred:
   (a) Providing training to volunteers or workers to aid and assist in disaster relief;
   (b) The training should include, but not be limited to; medical aid, food aid and infrastructure rebuilding;
   (c) Use of the United Nations Relief Fund to support the economy should be a major source of income;

3. Recommends that Member States attempt to use preventative infrastructure to limit damages inflicted upon communities:
   (a) Implementing previous Bangladeshi policies of;
   (i) Early warning systems;
   (ii) Government preparedness programs;
(b) Building homes and buildings with sustainable materials;

4. Invites Member States funnel resources towards rural communities after humanitarian disasters to make sure such communities get proper support:

   (a) These resources should include, but not be limited to;

   (i) Food, water, medicine, clothes and temporary housing;

   (ii) Government support for permanent housing;

   (iii) Resources from international and domestic non-governmental organizations that provide essential supplies;

5. Calls upon Member States to assist refugees transitioning to normal life after humanitarian disaster:

   (a) Providing temporary shelter to refugees seeking asylum in other countries;

   (i) Ensuring refugee settlements meet the standards of human life;

   (b) Providing income opportunities to refugees;

   (i) Creating programs that address environmental and humanitarian concerns of Member States;

6. Also Recommends Member States to create Income programs similar to Bangladesh’s program for Rohingya Muslim refugees, which provides training and employment opportunities to refugees;

7. Expresses its hope that Member States who cannot provide such settlements to instead ensure safe passage through other Member States.
Consideration of the status

Data Collection Deliberations

Representatives from Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Indonesia, Thailand, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States met to discuss data collection and research relating to cross-border disasters. Consensus was established about the importance and urgency of creating systems to aid in the early-warning and rapid response of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Member States to disasters that cross international borders. For the purposes of this document, the above listed nations will be referred to as “The Research Group.”

The Research Group noted first the importance of maintaining national sovereignty in the context of international cooperation and data sharing. While the sharing of information and technology is key to strategic planning, we must respect each Member State’s sovereignty. It was suggested by some Member States that transparency of funding for cross-border disasters be established in a way that does not infringe upon a State’s self-governance. The Research Group agreed that we must establish frameworks to facilitate the creation of solutions that work for all countries involved in cross-border disasters.

This body deliberated the importance of utilizing storm tracking technology, collection and research of various natural disasters in a similar manner as past global organizations. These global organizations include the Typhoon Committee established in 1968, the World Meteorological Organization established in 1950, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction established in 1999, and the Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network. Tracking of meteorological events and natural disasters allows for countries to better predict the extent of future natural disasters. This has the benefit of creating more accurate predictions across an entire region if neighboring countries choose to share information and data processing.

These deliberations should be considered with the understanding that these are not blanket solutions to cross-border disasters, but are instead relevant discussions on possible suggestions to alleviate the issues. The Research Group noted that many other suggestions do exist, but those iterated above are considered the most attainable and applicable for the disparate needs created by geographical and environmental differences.

Environment Deliberations

There has been a rise in the number and severity of natural disasters worldwide, and this is a direct result of climate change. To address these natural disasters, it is essential to address the effects climate change has on these events. The Asia and Pacific region is at an intersection of the factors related to natural disasters and climate change which all largely increase the damage caused by flooding, limit access to freshwater, increase the severity of climate disasters and cause other deleterious effects on the region. This environmental sub-committee finds it essential to be proactive in mitigating the effects climate change has on the natural disasters that ravage the region.

Member States within the environmental sub-committee shared the particular disasters that often displace their populations and destroy their existing infrastructure. It became clear within this sub-committee’s deliberations that no one type of disaster affects the region. Myanmar, Mongolia, Pakistan, Hong Kong and India shared with the sub-committee that floods are a recurring concern. Member States also shared that dzuds, inter alia, monsoons, cyclones, droughts, landslides, earthquakes and rising sea levels often ravage any existing infrastructure within the Asia-Pacific region. Member States recognized also that developing States often lack adequate resources for adapting to climate change and preventing the devastating effects that natural disasters in the region cause. All Member States in this committee also acknowledged the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its transnational nature. Therefore, any recommendations seeking to better equip Member States to combat cross-border disasters, should also keep this in mind.

Recognizing the increasing threat of climate change and its ability to create an increased number of catastrophic short and long-term natural disasters, Member States are working to create solutions to lessen the impact of said disasters. Investment in a Disaster Management Fund for Asia and the Pacific would prove beneficial to this committee, as it would reduce economic impacts on countries that are largely affected by disasters. Many countries in this committee have been facing an increasing number of natural disasters that often cause a need for a larger amount of financial resources than are previously set aside by said countries. This fund would be a beneficial resource in combating the negative impacts natural disasters have on Member States.
Another possible function of this fund would be the education of domestic leaders on the imperative nature of climate change and possible mitigation strategies they can implement within their own specific countries. The goal of this strategy is to educate leaders on the relationship climate change has with the increase of natural disasters across the world. It is the hope of this fund that upon receiving this education individual countries will be apt to adopt more sustainable operations. Not only that, consultants may be implemented by this fund for countries who are unaware on how to start with this process and be provided with case specific assistance based on their individual needs. In addition, representatives from Viet Nam expressed interest in disaster response training programs for citizens living in rural areas. These programs could serve as one aspect of disaster risk management improvement.

Infrastructure Deliberations

Representatives from China, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Australia, Japan, Sri Lanka and the Republic of Korea, hereby known as the “Infrastructure Group”, met to discuss the infrastructure solutions to cross-border disasters exacerbated by climate change. We discussed infrastructure improvements and solutions that our countries have implemented domestically and considered areas for potential cross-border collaboration.

The Infrastructure Group discussed physical infrastructure, such as disaster-resistant buildings and drainage systems, streamlined evacuation and city-mapping measures. It is also of the utmost importance to provide disaster education to equip citizens with the knowledge to protect themselves and their communities. More sustainable energy alternatives were discussed such as nuclear power, but some countries had concerns about the potential for facility abuse.

The Infrastructure Group also would like to recognize that while there is significant need for cooperation within the region to combat natural disasters, each country has the best information and insight into how they can best support their own citizens and as such would like to reiterate our belief that State sovereignty be firmly protected within any cross-border responses.

The group acknowledges the challenges regarding energy production and consumption that reduce carbon emissions. We encourage the developed nations to lead the way when it comes to clean energy. This group recommends pursuits in cleaner energy options and sees the potential positive long term effects of nuclear energy. Pursuing a future with low carbon emissions as well as a productive global energy sector is the best path forward. With countries like China leading the path, the group encourages developing nations to combine efforts in offering land for developed nations through diplomacy to begin production for cleaner energy that would provide long term benefits for the Asian and Pacific region.

The majority of the Infrastructure Group was in agreement concerning State sovereignty, regional cooperation, climate action, and safe, sustainable nuclear energy. We support efforts to improve both domestic and regional infrastructure to better protect all those who live in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Infrastructure Group acknowledged that there is disparity between developed and developing nations in the necessary technology for disaster prevention. More economically developed countries (MEDCs) are better equipped in acquiring and affording the technology. The idea of a trickle-down system was discussed, which allows developing countries to access up-to-date technology.

Trade and Finance Deliberations

The delegations of Fiji, Hong Kong, Nepal, Singapore and the Philippines extensively discussed international trade and finance in relation to resilience against cross-border natural disasters. Overall, the representatives highlighted the importance of free trade and the facilitation of trade and finance during and in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Initially, the representative of the Philippines stressed the importance of continuing trade and facilitating trade through land and waterways transportation after natural disasters. The representative explained that individual States should encourage their own domestic emergency personnel, such as firefighters, to maintain safe routes for trade to continue in the wake of these disasters.

Likewise, Fiji advocated for free trade within the Asia-Pacific region, placing special attention to essential goods, such as water, food, and construction materials. The delegation suggested that, especially during natural disasters, these goods should not be subject to tariffs or any other limits on trade between States. Because Asia has
many developing economies, delegations in this area all agreed that economic activity should be minimally affected by natural disasters.

Singapore contributed their concerns regarding economic development due to international influence on trade. In less than 50 years, Singapore has transformed itself through heavy emphasis on state sovereignty, echoed by Hong Kong. As an area of only 250 square miles, Hong Kong requires high-density energy importation to support economic, social, and cultural development. Furthermore, Singapore recognizes the importance of increasing sustainable energy development by fomenting trade in the region.

Hong Kong suggested that limits should be placed on foreign aid in order to avoid States with large influence from sending military aid that could infringe upon national sovereignty. As a Member State subject to many foreign influences, Hong Kong expressed concerns of States with larger economies and militaries gaining disproportionate influence when smaller countries found themselves in vulnerable situations.

The representative from Nepal discussed the role of finance in international disasters. The representative suggested that ESCAP recommend to States that private banks offer low-interest loans in times of natural disasters. While this is a domestic policy, all delegates agreed that it should be a globally recognized effort.

The delegate from the Philippines spoke about the progress that the international trade and finance subgroup had focused on. In response, the delegate from Australia brought forth the concern that suspension and temporary decreases in tariffs, specifically on food products, had the potential to negatively affect farmers in rural areas of low income countries. The Philippines expressed that no other countries had voiced this concern and clarified that any changes to tariffs would merely be a temporary measure.

The Philippines and Hong Kong discussed this issue further, noting that a short span in the suspension of tariffs would not have significant effects on rural economies. The delegates also agreed that should any suspensions or limits of tariffs occur, the small harm would not outweigh the gains of providing necessary assistance to those in need.
Adoption of the Report

At its meeting on 23 November 2021, the draft report of the commission was made available for consideration. The commission considered the report, and with no amendments, adopted the report by consensus with no abstentions.

Passed by consensus with no abstentions.

Passed by consensus, with 0 abstentions