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Towards a Legally-Binding Convention on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters

101 Guide to the UN Diplomatic Conference Process by the Women & Gender Stakeholder Group of the UNDRR

Photo: [Long Bà Mũi](#) from [Pexels](#)

What is the process?

After long delays, the international community is finally moving toward the establishment of a legally binding treaty on the protection of persons in the event of disasters, covering the rights, duties, and responsibilities of States before, during, and after disasters strike. The process began with expert legal drafting at the International Law Commission in 2016 and will culminate in a UN Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Manila in early 2027, with the goal of adopting a final convention by the end of that year.

Milestones

2016

The International Law Commission (ILC) adopted [18 draft articles](#) on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters at its 68th session. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) took note ([resolution 71/141](#)) and invited governments to submit comments on the ILC's recommendation to develop a binding convention

2024

In resolution [79/128](#), the UNGA decided to elaborate and conclude a legally binding instrument by the end of 2027 at the latest. It directed the Sixth Committee to convene a working group by April 2026 to produce a consolidated negotiating text, and invited governments to submit proposed amendments to the draft articles no later than 31 December 2025.

*Decides to elaborate and conclude **a legally binding instrument on the protection of persons in the event of disasters**, without prejudice to the legal effects of any particular provisions contained therein, by the end of 2027 at the latest, at the dates and location and in accordance with the modalities to be determined by the General Assembly at its eightieth session;*

Milestones Continued

January 2025

The UN Secretary-General formally invited governments to submit amendment proposals by the 31 December 2025 deadline.

December 2025

Over 25 governments and regional groups, including the EU, African States, Latin American States, and Asian states submitted proposals by the deadline (compiled in document [A/80/610](#)).

April 2026

The Sixth Committee Working Group met 6–10 April 2026 to prepare a [consolidated text based on the ILC draft articles and all government proposals](#) (see interventions during the Committee [here](#)). Additional written proposals accepted until 15 May 2026.

August–September 2026

A Preparatory Committee for the Diplomatic Conference will meet 31 August – 4 September 2026 to transmit the consolidated text to the Conference.

January–February 2027

The UN Conference of Plenipotentiaries on Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters will meet for three weeks (25 January – 12 February 2027) in Manila, Philippines. If needed, a further two weeks are scheduled for August 2027. The convention is to be concluded by the end of 2027.



What do the draft articles cover?

The [18 ILC draft articles from 2016](#) provide the legal foundation for the future convention. Key provisions include:

- A broad definition of "disaster" encompassing events causing widespread loss of life, human suffering, mass displacement, or large-scale material or environmental damage.
- Affirmation that persons affected by disasters retain their human rights, and that the inherent dignity of the human person must be respected.
- The primary responsibility of the affected State to protect persons and provide disaster relief, with sovereignty balanced against a duty to seek external assistance when national capacity is exceeded.
- A framework for international cooperation, including consent requirements, conditions on external assistance, and protections for relief personnel and equipment.
- Humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and non-discrimination, with special attention to the needs of the particularly vulnerable.

Why does it matter?

Despite the frequency and severity of disasters, and decades of international humanitarian response, no globally binding legal framework has existed to govern how States must act to protect affected persons. This convention would:

- Establish clear legal obligations for disaster risk reduction, response, and cooperation;
- Enshrine human rights protections for disaster-affected populations in binding international law;
- Create a predictable, rights-based framework for international assistance, including rules on consent, conditions, and the protection of relief workers.

Where is gender?

Despite general understanding proved by fact that women, girls and marginalized communities are disproportionately and differently affected by disasters, it should be noted that the [draft of the PPED text](#) does not have any mention of gender or women; recognizing the importance of an intersectional approach to gender; other characteristics and identities such as disability, Indigeneity, etc.; nor the importance of age, in terms of highlighting the specific needs and rights of children and/or older persons.

The country-level submissions, however, specifically mention women in the following articles:

Mention 1

Preambular paragraph 5

Stressing the principle of the sovereignty of States and, consequently, reaffirming the primary role of the State affected by a disaster in providing disaster relief assistance,

Proposal submitted by:

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Insert new preambular paragraphs:

“Emphasizing the fundamentally civilian character of disaster relief assistance, recognizing the important role played by local organizations, **women-led organizations**, local authorities and persons affected by disasters themselves, including **women**, in all phases of a disaster, further recognizing that affected populations themselves are often the first responders in disasters”

(emphasis added)



Mention 2

Article 6: Humanitarian principles

Response to disasters shall take place in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and on the basis of non-discrimination, while taking into account the needs of the particularly vulnerable.

Proposal submitted by:

Malaysia

After “vulnerable” add “, including **women**, children, older persons and persons with disabilities”.

Proposal submitted by:

Philippines

Insert new preambular paragraphs:

Replace with: “1. Response to disasters shall take place in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, independence and on the basis of non-discrimination, while taking into account the needs of the particularly vulnerable, including girls, boys, **women**, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV and other debilitating illness, and non-nationals. **Gender** and cultural sensitivity must also be considered in the programming of assistance. Populations in need shall not be exposed to further harm (“do no harm”) in the delivery of response. Assisting actors shall also maintain professionalism and accountability in the conduct of response. (emphasis added)



Mention 3

Article 14: Conditions on the provision of external assistance

The affected State may place conditions on the provision of external assistance. Such conditions shall be in accordance with the present draft articles, applicable rules of international law and the national law of the affected State. Conditions shall take into account the identified needs of the persons affected by disasters and the quality of the assistance. When formulating conditions, the affected State shall indicate the scope and type of assistance sought.

Proposal submitted by:

Germany

After “persons affected by disasters” insert “in a non-discriminatory manner, including the needs of **women**, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons and other persons in vulnerable situations and other disadvantaged groups,”.

(emphasis added)

How to follow the conversation and be engaged in the process

- Whether you are an organization or an individual advocate, [join the UNDRR Women & Gender Stakeholder Group](#) for broader feminist coordination.
- [Sign up for the WEDO newsletter](#) for regular updates.