

ECOSOC

The question of preparation in case of natural disasters and consequent protection of population and infrastructures.

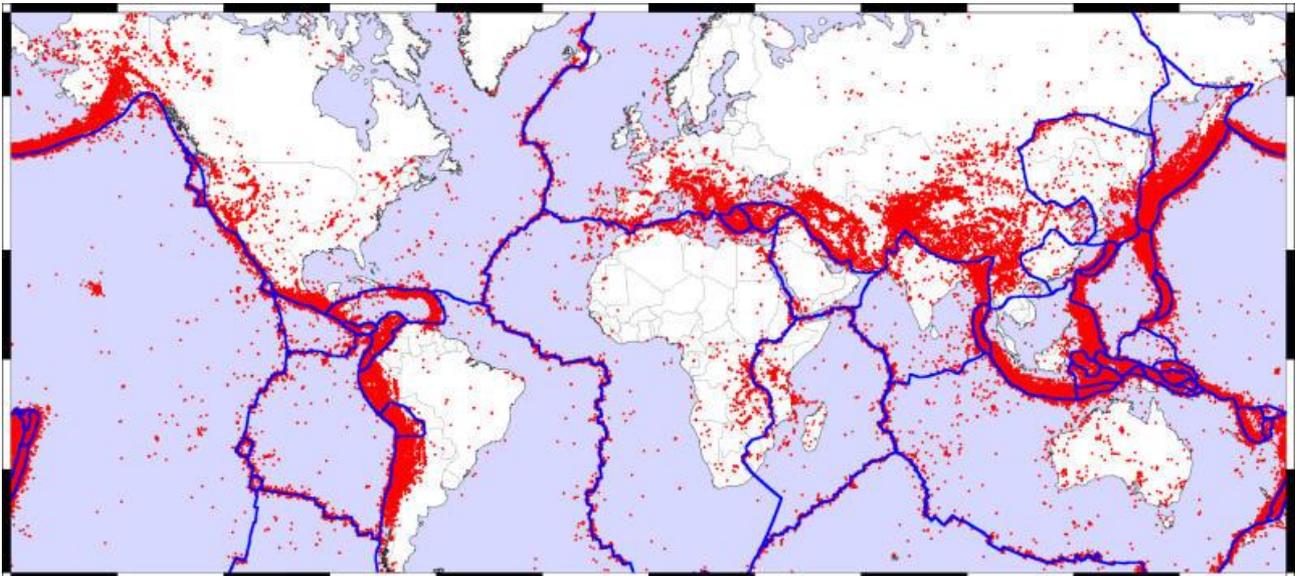
INTRODUCTION

Humanity has been shown to be defenceless in the face of natural disasters various times in the past. However, this is not a question of the past. Just last year, multiple hurricanes wrecked the Atlantic coasts. Hurricane Maria in the Dominican Republic, the Earthquake in Mexico and Hurricane Irma in the USA and Caribbean are just a couple of the numerous natural disasters which we have witnessed recently.

The word *Disaster* has multiple and changing definitions. The essential common element of those definitions is that disasters are unusual public health events that overwhelm the coping capacity of the affected community.

Natural disasters do not always occur at random. Geological hazards (earthquakes and volcanic eruptions) occur mainly along the fault lines between two tectonic plates. Nonetheless, the local population often does not recognize the risks, as shown in the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

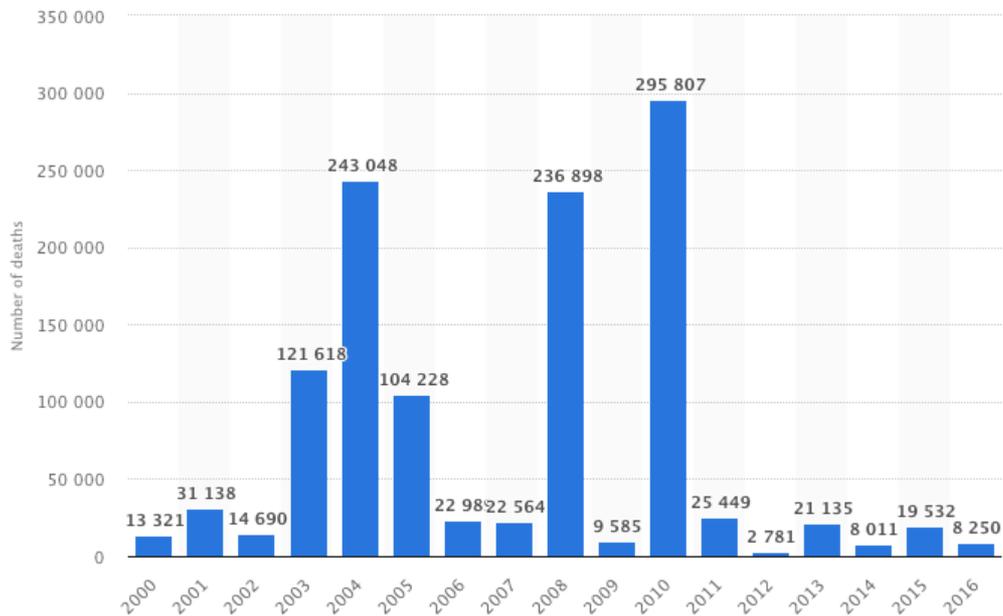
Map of the Earth showing fault lines (blue) and zones of volcanic activity (red).
Image courtesy of www.teachingtravel.com



The job that you are tasked with tackling is the issue of protecting the population and infrastructure from any kind of natural disaster. Delegates should address vulnerable countries and/or areas, proposing viable solutions in order to prevent these disasters from causing extensive damage to the structures and people living within them.

It is up to you, delegate, to save lives of countless civilians who are currently living in state of exposure and vulnerability to the wrath of nature.

A reminder of the death toll caused by natural disasters worldwide between 2000 and 2016, not taking into account for the displacement or damage to the economy and infrastructure, might help to emphasize just how important the issue being debated is.

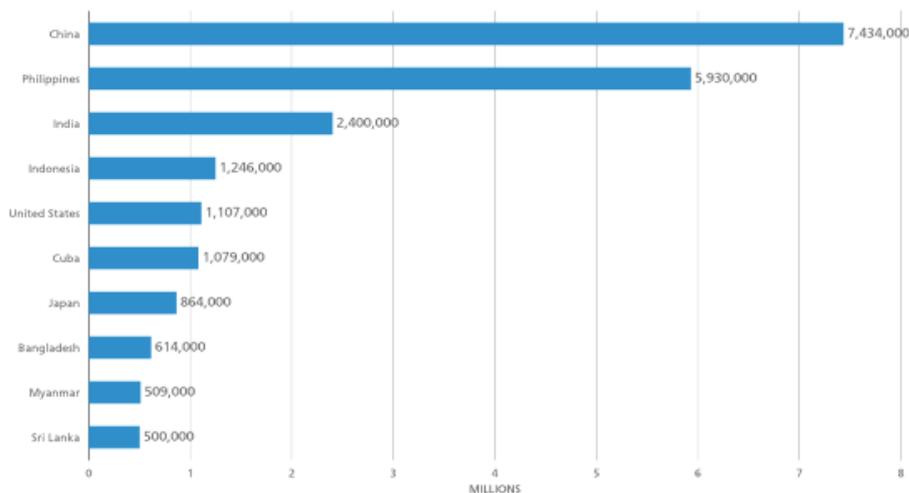


Number of deaths worldwide by natural disasters between 2000 and 2016
Image courtesy of www.statista.com

COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS

Although they do not discriminate between which areas they affect, there are certain places that are more prone to natural disasters.

Countries with the most new displacements by disasters in 2016



SOURCE: IDMC, with UN Population Division data

There were 24.2 million new displacements by natural disasters in 2016. As in previous years, South and East Asia were the regions most affected. China, India and the Philippines have the largest overall figure of people displaced by natural disasters.

The Chinese Government regards the risk of natural disasters as a very important one. The State Council on March 24 issued an emergency response plan for dealing with natural disasters, in order to regulate and improve the relief work and reduce losses. In a speech to the Indonesian Parliament, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated: 'The Chinese people offered their sympathy and assistance in a variety of ways to the Indonesia people hit by the disaster. Likewise, the Indonesian people have extended a helping hand when the Chinese people experienced major natural disasters.'

American President Donald Trump has been known for having the controversial opinion of considering global warming a 'hoax'. He tweeted 'In the 1920's people were worried about global cooling--it never happened. Now it's global warming. Give me a break!'. Nonetheless, Trump has promptly responded to the disasters that have affected the USA, such as Hurricane Irma and the recent snowstorms. While Trump might not believe in global warming, he certainly considers natural disasters to be worthy of attention and funds. Evidence of this may be seen in the American relief efforts on Puerto Rico.

Although various countries are working together in order to improve the situation, there are a multitude of organisations dedicated to the relief and improvement of areas affected by or prone to natural disasters.

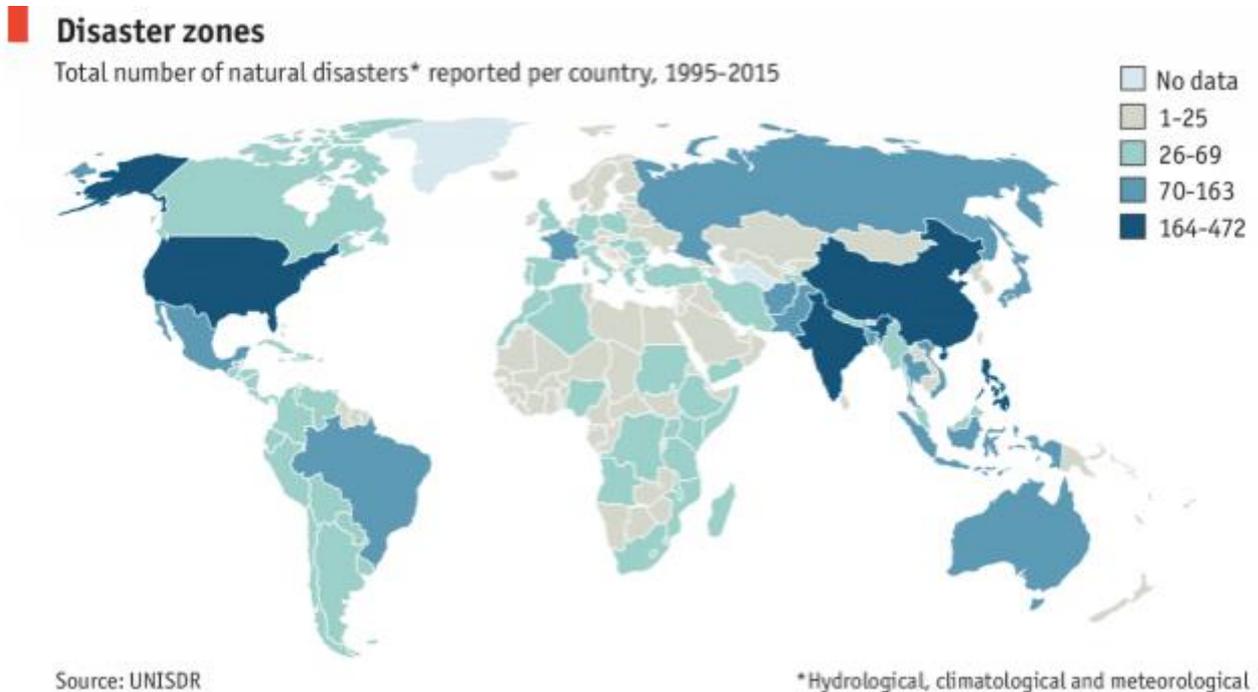
The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the organ of the United Nations responsible for bringing together national and international humanitarian providers to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. It also advocates for people in need, promotes preparedness and prevention and facilitates sustainable solutions. Said providers include, but are not limited to:

- 1) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assists disaster-prone countries in contingency planning and with disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness measures.
- 2) The World Food Programme (WFP) is the principle supplier of relief food aid, organisation that plays a key role in the aftermath of natural disasters.
- 3) The World Health Organization (WHO) provides global public health leadership by setting standards, monitoring health trends, and providing direction on emergency health issues. The WHO's role is to reduce avoidable loss of life and the burden of disease and disability. A range of technical guidelines for health action in crises and pre-deployment training courses are available. A set of technical hazard sheets on earthquakes, drought, floods and landslides, is also available.
- 4) The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a Swiss-based humanitarian organisation and founding member of the International Red Cross. It is mandated by the international community to be the guardian and promoter of international humanitarian law, working around the world to provide assistance to people affected by violence. Its mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity.

Addressing the General Assembly, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres spoke out in favour of the Paris agreement on climate change, saying extreme weather events like Hurricane Irma are becoming 'the new normal of a warming world'. He also said "Millions of people and trillions of assets are at risk from rising seas and other climate disruptions."

OVERVIEW

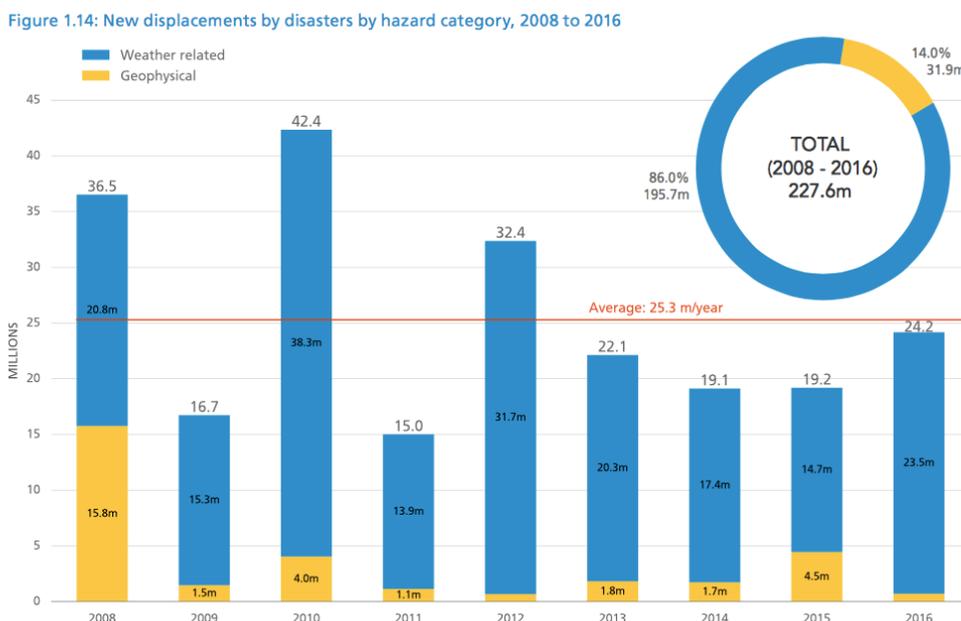
A map is provided delineating ‘Disaster zones’, to better understand which countries are most affected by natural disasters. It is important, however, to recognise that said map does not include readings for geological hazards.



Economist.com

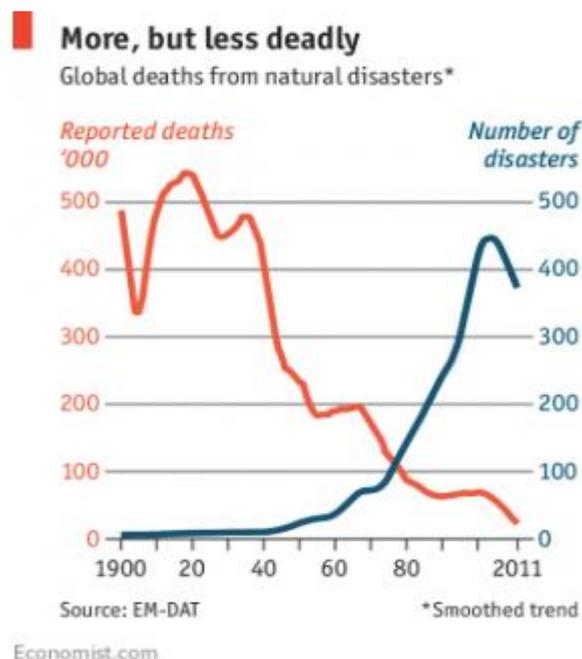
Weather-related hazards, in particular storms, brought on the majority of all new disaster displacements in 2016. They were responsible for 23.5 million displacements, or 97 per cent of all disaster-related displacements. All of the 10 largest disaster displacement events in absolute terms were weather-related. They are, in fact, responsible for 86% of the displacements worldwide caused by natural disasters, between 2008 and 2016.

Image courtesy of <http://www.internal-displacement.org>



Although the number of such disasters keeps rising, far fewer people are dying as a result of them. In 1970, 200,000 people perished annually. That figure has been dramatically reduced, thanks to safety measures such as improved buildings and flood-prevention schemes. To reduce it still further, urban planners may have to operate on the assumption of even more extreme events.

As shown by graph, although the number of disasters has increased exponentially, the number of casualties has decreased exponentially as well. This is testament to the fact that, although we are far from considering the problem solved, the renewed commitment to solving the issue of natural disaster has shown itself to be effective in improving the situation.



PAST RESOLUTIONS, SOLUTIONS AND TREATIES

As previously mentioned, the issue regarding the preparation in case of natural disasters is hardly a new one. The UN has, in fact, already debated it various times, and has created, merged and updated resolutions tackling the problem. Resolution ‘70/204 International Strategy for Disaster Reduction’ can be found here:

<http://www.unisdr.org/files/resolutions/A-RES-70-204.pdf>

In the pre-ambulatory clauses of the resolution, it states: ‘Recalling also the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation), and reaffirming the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, in particular the decisions related to disaster risk reduction’. These are all relevant documents could be considered when researching the topic at hand.

Resolution ‘70/204’ can be considered one of the most effective of its kind, since it takes an active stance and delivers a concrete and realistic plan of action in case of natural disasters. Throughout its operative clauses, the resolution mentions numerous relevant documents, treaties and deals.

One document in particular is referenced multiple times: the ‘Sendai Framework’. Also known as ‘The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030’, the document is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action. It aims for the following outcome:

The substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

The Seven Global Targets:

- (a) Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020-2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
- (b) Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020 -2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
- (c) Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030.
- (d) Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030.
- (e) Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.
- (f) Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of this Framework by 2030.
- (g) Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030.

The Four Priorities for Action:

Priority 1. Understanding disaster risk

Disaster risk management should be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics and the environment. Such knowledge can be used for risk assessment, prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response.

Priority 2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk

Disaster risk governance at the national, regional and global levels is very important for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and rehabilitation. It fosters collaboration and partnership.

Priority 3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience

Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures are essential to enhance the economic, social, health and cultural resilience of persons, communities, countries and their assets, as well as the environment.

Priority 4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction

The growth of disaster risk means there is a need to strengthen disaster preparedness for response, take action in anticipation of events, and ensure capacities are in place for effective response and recovery at all levels. The recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phase is a critical opportunity to build back better, including through integrating disaster risk reduction into development measures.

Although the ‘Sendai Framework’ provides clear guidelines in order to improve disaster response, the problem still persists. This is mostly due to the high unpredictability of natural disasters, the sheer magnitude of some of these events, the lack of people who are adequately educated on how to act in case of a natural disaster and the fact that some of the areas which are vulnerable are still plagued by poverty and underdevelopment. Mankind has taken huge steps towards protecting our world from the destruction of natural events, but the problem must be eradicated once and for all.

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