



Sydney University United Nations Society

MiniMUN 2 Globally Coordinated Response to environmental disasters Briefing Paper

Background

Natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and volcano eruptions can have devastating impacts on human health and the environment. The recent environmental disasters in New Zealand and Japan have emphasized the need for fast and effective globally coordinated response. The 6.3-magnitude earthquake that devastated the New Zealand city of Christchurch in February 2011 required huge humanitarian relief efforts to support survivors and subsequently rebuild the city. Similarly, the massive 8.9-magnitude earthquake and tsunami that occurred in Japan in March 2011 demanded human and financial resources by other states. Thus, it becomes essential to consider a globally coordinated framework that will secure immediate and effective assistance in such difficult environmental emergencies.

Response and Reaction

In situations of natural disasters, the state primarily has the responsibility to protect and promote the human rights of its citizens. When these disasters spread beyond the territorial boundary of a state or are beyond the economic means of a single state to manage, a globally coordinated response from other states is crucial. The numerous environmental disasters encountered in the last decade have provided incentive for the establishment of global response entities which aim to amass and coordinate global resources and elicit universal cooperation in responding to crises. At present, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) ensures that coordination international efforts and mobilizing member states to assist affected states requiring assistance, so that responses to humanitarian crises are as effective as possible.

Issues to Consider

As these disasters are often large and unprecedented, it is important to establish a coherent framework within which state actors can contribute offer a coherent response to emergencies. The issues which must be considered are:

- Responsibility of the state towards its citizens, particularly the promotion and protection of all human rights
- Incentives for member states to provide relief as needed, in the case of unprecedented natural disasters
- The role of NGOs such as the International Red Cross in providing medical aid and food supplies in emergencies
- Effectiveness of OCHA in coordinating responses to humanitarian crises and the potential establishment of a new body that will ensure immediate and effective relief when it's needed
- Collaboration with other UN bodies such as the United Nations Environmental Programme and United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees