



PERMANENT MISSION
OF ICELAND TO THE UN

**General Assembly
73rd session**

Sixth Committee

Agenda item 90: Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters

**Statement by
Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden**

**Delivered by
H.E Bergdís Ellertsdóttir, Permanent Representative, Iceland**

1 November 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Iceland.

We once again commend the ILC and the special rapporteur Mr Eduardo Valencia-Ospina for the finalization of the work on the Protection of persons in the event of disasters, and welcome the continued discussions about the draft articles in the sixth committee.

The draft articles deal with an increasingly relevant and topical area of public international law, aiming at further strengthening the international disaster relief and humanitarian assistance system. They constitute a comprehensive framework for the reduction of risks of disasters, including through risk assessments and protection of persons, and set out the duty of the affected state to ensure protection, as well as the role of external assistance in this respect.

Given that this is the first debate on the topic as a subject on the agenda of the General Assembly, the Nordic countries would like to reiterate some of the comments and positions expressed during the discussion on the work of the ILC on the topic at hand:

First – the draft articles highlight human rights and the principles of human dignity and underline that response to disasters shall take place in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. In this context, the Nordic countries would like to recall that integration of a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance is necessary to reach all parts of the population. A gender perspective ensures effective and impartial humanitarian assistance and strengthens protection of individuals during times of natural disasters, through the recognition that women, men, girls and boys may have different needs and vulnerabilities. Ensuring children receive adequate protection is of fundamental importance, since experience shows they are often most vulnerable in the event of disasters, with initial chaos causing displacement. The Nordic countries would also like to once again draw attention to reports by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent highlighting increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence in disasters and other emergencies.

Second - The draft articles provide that external assistance in general requires the consent of the affected state, but that such external assistance shall not be withheld arbitrarily. With these provisions the draft articles strike an adequate balance between the rights and obligations of the affected state and those of assisting actors. This reflects the dual nature of sovereignty as entailing both rights and obligations, which is also stated in the commentary to draft article 13. Arbitrary denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival, can constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. As further stated in the commentary, an offer of assistance that is met with refusal might under certain conditions constitute a violation of the right to life.

The Nordic countries would further like to underline the importance of prevention and in this regard welcomes draft article 9 that reflects the obligations of States to reduce the risk of disasters by taking appropriate measures, including through legislation and regulations, to prevent, mitigate, and prepare for disasters through the conduct of risk assessments, the collection and dissemination of risk and past loss information, and the installation and operation of early warning systems. In this regard, the Nordic countries would like to refer to Sustainable Development Goal no. 13, which requires of us to *Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries*. The work of the ILC on the protection of persons in the event of disasters may contribute to reaching this goal.

The Nordic countries have noted the recommendation by the ILC that an international convention be elaborated on the basis of the draft articles. We are open to discuss this.