



Permanent Mission of the Federated States of Micronesia to the UN

300 East 42 Street, Suite 1600
New York, N.Y. 10017

Telephone: (212) 697-8370

Facsimile: (212) 697-8295

e-mail: fsmun@fsmgov.org

<http://www.fsmgov.org/>

78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Sixth Committee

Agenda item 86: Protection of persons in the event of disasters

Statement by: H.E. Jeem S. Lippwe, Permanent Representative

New York, 4 October 2023

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Chair,

As this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor in this Committee this session, I extend to you and the rest of the Bureau our congratulations on your election and assure you of my delegation's full support for the discharge of your work.

Chair,

Micronesia welcomes this Committee's engagement on the topic of protection of persons in the event of disasters. We particularly welcome the establishment of the Working Group to examine the 2016 draft articles from the International Law Commission on the matter. Along with this Committee's work on the Commission's draft articles on crimes against humanity, this represents a long overdue step-up in this Committee's engagement with the outputs of the Commission. Micronesia will participate in the Working Group. For now, we will preview several of the points we will make in the Working Group.

First, Micronesia is open to the elaboration of a new convention that defines a "disaster" to include the adverse impacts of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, including sea-level rise, destructive storms, and Ocean acidification. In line with the definition of "disaster" in the Commission's draft articles, such impacts typically result or could result in widespread loss of life, great human suffering and distress, mass displacement, or large-scale material or environmental damage that causes a serious disruption of societal functioning. This has already happened in many parts of the world, including in the Pacific.

However, in elaborating the convention, care must be taken to avoid establishing a regime for addressing disasters that weakens existing commitments to tackle the climate crisis. Draft article 9 obligates each State to take actions to "prevent, mitigate, and prepare" for disasters, which could include domestic legislation and regulations. However, this is characterized by the draft

article as an effort to reduce the risk of disasters. This implies that such disasters will inevitably happen, and all that remains is to react to them in an appropriate manner. My delegation is concerned that such an approach, in the context of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, will favor adaptation to rather than mitigation of climate change and its impacts. In order to tackle the climate crisis, we must eliminate risks of disasters, not merely reduce them, and mitigation of emissions is central to that effort.

Second, my delegation cautions against an approach under a new convention that prioritizes the offering of external assistance on a voluntary basis, particularly with respect to climate change-related disasters that might be covered by the convention. There are existing obligations under international law that mandate the provision of funding and other forms of assistance by developed countries to developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, including under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement as well as other instruments that address harms from such emissions to the environment, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. A new convention must not weaken those existing obligations if it is to also cover climate change-related disasters.

My delegation looks forward to the Working Group on this matter, where we will raise these and other points for the consideration of delegations.

I thank you.