

**Statement by Mosammat Shahanara Monica, Minister, Permanent Mission of
Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York at the general debate on “Protection of
Person in the event of Disasters” (Item 86)
04 October 2024, Trusteeship Council, UNHQs**

Madame Chair,

As I speak here now, nearly six million people in eastern Bangladesh are faced with severe floods, worst in their recent memory. The flood has already claimed 71 lives, majority of whom are children; decimated villages, with thousands of homes having been destroyed or submerged under water, causing widespread internal displacement. So far, a reported 500,000 people have been displaced, in more than 3,400 evacuation centers.

This flood has damaged our critical infrastructure, greatly impeding relief efforts by humanitarian organizations. Approximately 50 percent of the flood-affected areas are considered “unreachable” by local authorities and aid personnel. It has also caused significant power outages, aggravating the challenges in accessibility.

Over 7000 schools are now closed due to flooding, which has impacted 1.7 million children and young people. The collapse of the water and sanitation system in many areas has heightened the public health crisis. Approximately 1.3 million farmers are impacted. Crop damage and losses in livestock and fisheries have greatly exacerbated levels of food insecurity of the affected population.

Madame Chair,

I can go on and on explaining how the people of Bangladesh are affected by disasters. As an active delta, floods, tidal surges, cyclones, and river erosion have long been part of our life. However, the intensity and frequency of disasters have risen dramatically due to climate change. Earlier in May this year, a severe tropical storm named Remal flooded dozens of coastal villages in southern Bangladesh.

Madame Chair,

Over the years, we have made remarkable progress in responding to disasters and improving our preparedness, encompassing rescue, recovery, and the protection of affected population. Our national laws and policies are supported by a comprehensive implementation framework and partnership, representing leadership of our national and local responders.

Nevertheless, we cannot over-emphasize the importance of enhancing international cooperation, especially in ensuring protection of persons affected by the primary and secondary implications of disasters. This is particularly relevant as disasters continue to increase in frequency, and their multidimensional impacts are felt by growing number of people around the world.

Against this backdrop, we welcome the International Law Commission's recommendation to elaborate a convention addressing the "Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters." We believe that conclusion of such a convention will facilitate effective and timely response to disasters, disaster risk reduction, and promote the rights and dignity of the affected people as well as address their need for assistance.

We appreciate the discussions being held in the Working Group on the draft articles and support the proposal to convene an International Conference for elaboration of the said convention without any delay.

We believe, the draft ILC articles provide a primary foundation for initiating the process for elaboration of the convention, although we recognize the need to address certain missing and ambiguous elements during the process.

Allow me to share three points in this regard:

First: The draft article encompass critical aspects, such as, the responsibility of affected states to ensure protection of their people in the event of disasters and the role of the international community in providing immediate assistance upon the request of the affected nation.

In this regard, we wish to emphasize the continued relevance of the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance, as embodied in the General Assembly Resolution 46/182. Emergency humanitarian response should be guided by context-specific cooperation framework, founded on nationally determined priorities and aimed at resilience-building through a transition from relief to sustainable development. It is also important to provide capacity building and technical support to the national disaster management institutions and to the local responders to ensure long-term sustainability of the international cooperation.

Second: We believe international cooperation for emergency response needs to be in sync with existing human rights and humanitarian law and address the gaps, if any. Protection of vulnerable groups, such as, women and children, and those who are ‘unreachable’ must be prioritized. In this regard, we see the need for expanding or further fine-tuning certain definitions, including the definition of ‘affected countries’. We also believe that, absence of a definition of ‘affected population’ can lead to gaps in ensuring protection of individuals facing disaster-induced displacement or are affected by the secondary implications of disasters.

Finally: While we recognize that humanitarian emergencies caused by disasters are different from humanitarian emergencies caused by armed conflict, we need to accept that the people affected by armed conflict are not immune from disasters. The impact of disaster can, in most cases, be worse for people living in conflict affected areas.

Therefore, we believe, the Convention also needs to address the issue of humanitarian access, when disaster takes place in a conflict- affected country and access is denied arbitrarily. The instrument also needs to address the safety and security of the humanitarian personnel and convoys, medical and peacekeeping personnel and civilian infrastructure, which are essential to humanitarian operations. Visible negligence of a State or its wilful disregard to the humanitarian needs of affected population should be accounted for through a binding legal provisions.

To conclude Madame Chair, we would like to reiterate our full commitment to support the the ongoing work of the Committee on the ILC draft articles and the future initiatives for conclusion of a legally binding instrument for protection of persons in the event of disasters.

I thank you.