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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE,
UNGA79, AGENDA ITEM 86

PROTECTION OF PERSONS IN THE EVENT OF DISASTERS – DEBATE

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Delivered by Greg Reisman

We welcome the opportunity to have a further substantive discussion on the draft articles on the protection of persons in the event of disasters. Throughout 2024 we have continued to see the impact of disasters in every continent, from flooding, landslides and record-breaking cyclonic storms to wildfires. These are often related to the impact of climate change and, as highlighted by our Foreign Secretary in his recent speech on the climate and nature crisis, they are failures of politics, of regulations, and of international cooperation.

While much is done to mitigate the worst impacts of hazards and to respond effectively when they become disasters, in too many instances the efforts to reduce disaster risk and respond to disasters is weak. Poor and marginalised communities and groups, including women and girls, in countries with lower income or affected by fragility are the worst-affected when disasters destroy homes, communities and economies.

We continue to see affected States and local actors at the forefront of protecting their own populations and leading their own recovery. We pay tribute to the first responders who are often also the people most affected by the disasters. In this discussion it is important to note the principle of sovereignty of States and the primary role of affected States in responding to disasters. We also recognise the continued role played by other States, regional organisations, the UN system, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and international NGOs in striving to reduce disaster risk and assist populations affected by disaster. The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are of enduring relevance.

The UK has a long-standing commitment to providing assistance directly, or through partners, in humanitarian emergencies. We aim to respond in ways that support the needs of the responsible authorities— whether that's providing flood response capacity building to Malawi ahead of the flooding or working through the regional coordination mechanism in the Caribbean to provide aid supplies in the aftermath of hurricane Beryl. Further, as part of our promotion of anticipatory and early action, the UK endorsed the

Getting Ahead of Disasters Charter, launched at COP28, and is championing its principles.

The UK constantly strives to improve responses to disasters and reduction of disaster risk. The focus of the draft articles on key aspects of this is therefore of great interest to the UK, including the emphasis on reducing the risk of disasters and improved coordination, as well as the obligations of the affected state to protect and assist all of the affected population, seek and allow external assistance when required, and facilitate the prompt and effective provision of such external assistance, addressing any barriers.

The Chair of the Working Group helpfully captured the views shared on the draft articles last year. Re-examining these draft articles to build on last year's conclusions, and considering whether an international convention could enhance disaster risk reduction and disaster responses, are critical tasks for this working group. We must keep sight on how to progress this work to best ensure it results in better outcomes for people affected by disasters. The UK will focus our interventions on the most important issues to be addressed in the draft articles and looks forward to engaging on next steps.

Thank you.