

Background Guide

World Health Organization

Topic: International Crisis Response to Natural Disasters



**World Health
Organization**

I. Introduction to the Committee

The World Health Organization (WHO) was founded in 1948 and is the primary specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and has six regional offices and 150 field offices worldwide. The organization connects nations and partners to promote health and keep the world safe. WHO has undertaken global efforts to expand universal health coverage. Over the years, many priorities have remained on the WHO's agenda, such as the issues of malaria, maternal health, and nutrition which all remain relevant to this day. In more recent years, the WHO has also taken on new public health challenges, such as mental health and HIV/AIDS.

The WHO is comprised of three primary organs. The World Health Assembly is its decision-making body. The Executive Board, which adopts resolutions and was created by the World Health Assembly, deals with the administrative functions of the organizations. The third organ is the Secretariat, which is comprised of experts and other staff who work to coordinate the WHO's global programs. In addition, conducting research is also a large part of the WHO's crucial functions. Research topics include: both communicable and chronic diseases as well as data analysis of numerous health care indicators and various public health care policies around the world.

The WHO is governed by its constitution, which is a founding document. The constitution was adopted at the International Health Conference held in New York in 1946 and entered into force in 1948. Guidelines approved by WHO govern its work and are aimed at improving Member States' national health policies. The WHO's constitution also places a special emphasis on cooperation with similar organizations and agencies. This cooperation is aimed at promoting preventive health measures, such as sanitation, nutrition, and shelter. In addition, the WHO helps facilitate academic, private, and public sector researchers and experts—all with a goal of advancing global health equity, affordability, and accessibility. Finally, the World Health Organization may adopt resolutions on agenda topics.

II. Statement of the Problem

Emergency situations, including those due to natural hazards (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, landslides, wildfires and droughts), technological hazards (e.g., chemical spills, disruption to infrastructure), complex situations (produced by conflict) and outbreaks, lead to health-related diseases and affect populations in all contexts (WHO). Disasters resulting from natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis and floods, are increasing in intensity, frequency and impact, in part due to climate change (WHO).

In the last decade, more than 2.6 billion people have been affected by natural phenomena (WHO). These disasters lead to mass casualty (e.g., blunt trauma, crush-related injuries, drowning) that can overwhelm local medical resources and prevent them from delivering comprehensive and definitive medical care. Often, people in developing countries and those who are of lower socioeconomic status in developed countries are the most negatively impacted by natural disasters and therefore suffer a disproportionate burden in poor healthcare outcomes.

III. History/Past UN Action

The World Health Organization has taken several steps to implement and accelerate change in countries most susceptible to these disasters. There are three key steps that WHO goes through to aid countries. First, the WHO has championed data-based situation assessments and setting priority areas for action. The Scorecards on Health and Environment present a compilation of key data on exposures, associated health impacts and the policy situation in a member country (WHO). Assessing the country's current situation as it relates to the environment, climate change and health helps to identify key priority areas for action and achieve tangible health and environmental impacts. Second, there is a selection of key interventions and definition of targets. The Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and the environment provides a menu of 500 interventions to be prioritized and tailored according to the country's needs (WHO). Over 200 of those interventions also contribute to achieving Universal Health Coverage (WHO). Lastly, there is implementation and monitoring to be designed according to the identified priority areas.

The United Nations also oversees crisis relief programs such as providing substantial humanitarian funds. More specifically, CERF is a global fund that provides immediate aid when disasters strike (UN Crisis Relief). Each fund's main goals are to support lifesaving activities, fill critical funding gaps, and expand assistance in harder to reach areas.

Another program is the WHO SAC program. The WHO, with its private, public, and academic partners, has worked in the arena of disaster preparedness and response by creating the *WHO Disaster Management Guidelines: Emergency Surgical Care in Disaster Situations*. This document is a comprehensive manual that provides guidance regarding the management of common injuries encountered in disaster situations (WHO).

Natural disasters can strike at any given time, and when they do, it can impact a country beyond repair. There are some Sustainable Development Goals for natural disasters. These SDG goals are aiding countries in different ways, including health and global climate change for the SDGs 3.9 on Mortality from pollution, 6 on Water, sanitation, and hygiene, 7.1.2 on Household energy, and 11.6.2 on Air pollution (WHO).

IV. Latest Developments

In 2023, 339 million people are facing humanitarian crises with severe health impacts (WHO). Given this unprecedented number, the WHO decided in 2023 to create the Health Emergency Appeal, which included an appeal for 2.5 billion dollars.

Fully resourcing this fund will enable the development and implementation of high-impact solutions that protect health, lives and livelihoods during a time of significant intersecting humanitarian emergencies (WHO). With the rise in climate change related disasters, there are even more numerous threats to global health. With increased funding and urgent action, WHO can ensure that health is protected during emergencies.

With this funding, WHO can establish operations and logistics among local partners, strengthen healthcare systems, and build the capacity of the healthcare-workforce to minimize the impact of global health emergencies (WHO). In addition to funds raised by the Health Emergency Appeal, the WHO's Contingency Fund for Emergencies (CFE) was created to save time, resources and lives by enabling WHO to respond rapidly to disease outbreaks and Health emergencies (WHO).

V. Problems a Resolution Should Address

Natural disasters have taken the lives of many, impacted health all over the world, and destroyed countries. Planning and taking action to aid countries in slowing spread of disease, preventing natural disasters, and slowing climate change is crucial to stopping international crises.

In developing your position paper and preparing for the conference, delegates are encouraged to consider the following issues and questions:

- What types of natural disasters impact your country the most?
- How difficult is it to get disaster relief in your country?
- What types of medical issues often arise during disasters?
- How is global warming contributing to more natural disasters?
- What partners does the WHO often work with to provide disaster assistance?
- How do natural disasters impact infrastructure?

VI. Helpful Sources

The World Health Organization, about WHO: <https://www.who.int/about>

The World Health Organization, WHO's Health Emergency Appeal:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/funding/outbreak-and-crisis-response-appeal/2023>

UN Crisis Relief: <https://crisisrelief.un.org/about>

References

United Nations. (2023). *About UN Crisis Relief*. United Nations. <https://crisisrelief.un.org/about>

World Health Organization. (2023a). *About WHO*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/about>

World Health Organization. (2023b). *Disasters and Emergencies*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/teams/integrated-health-services/clinical-services-and-systems/surgical-care/disasters-and-emergencies>

World Health Organization. (2023c). *Environment, Climate Change, and Health*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/interventions/>

World Health Organization. (2023d). *Governance*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/about/governance>

World Health Organization. (2023e). *Outbreak and Crisis Response Appeal 2023*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/funding/outbreak-and-crisis-response-appeal/2023>