



# CHAPTER FOUR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND COMMITTEES

## Introduction

The General Assembly is the main deliberative policy-making body of the United Nations (UN) and is empowered to address all international issues covered by the Charter. In many ways, it acts as the central hub of the United Nations. Many UN bodies report to the General Assembly, but not all of these bodies are subsidiary to the GA. For example, the Security Council constantly updates the General Assembly on its work, but it is an independent body; its work does not require the General Assembly's independent approval. In contrast, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and is governed by General Assembly mandates. Other subsidiary bodies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), also have direct reporting relationships with the General Assembly.

The UN Charter assigns each of the main Committees of the General Assembly specific tasks and topics to discuss during each session. Because every Member State has a seat in every Committee, it is important to note that the points of discussion do not overlap; that is, even if two or more Committees are discussing a general topic area, each Committee is responsible for discussing a very specific point or aspect of that topic. For example, the Fourth Committee may discuss the Israeli-Palestine conflict with regard to its political components. However, issues concerning the legal, social, or economic components of the Israeli-Palestine conflict are left to other Committees, the General Assembly Plenary, or the Security Council. Therefore, Representatives in each Committee should take care not to expand the discussion of any topic beyond the limitations set by

their Committee's mandate and into another Committee's area of discussion. This is known as the Committee's purview.

A note concerning funding: The Fifth Committee makes financing decisions concerning only the UN's regular, annual budget, not those decisions dealing with voluntary contributions or new outlays. Even though AMUN will not be simulating the Fifth Committee, other Committees generally do not act unless sufficient funds are available for their proposals, thus financial questions should still be considered during the other Committees' deliberations. Therefore, if a Committee creates a new program or initiative, that Committee should specify how the program can or will be funded, and if the program falls within the UN's regular annual budget, that resolution should defer to the Fifth Committee to establish funding.

The purpose of the Combined Plenary session on the final day is to ratify the resolutions which passed in the four Main GA Committees and build consensus. While a small amount of additional debate is typical, it is expected that the work done by each Committee over the first three days of the Conference will be respected. It would thus be rare for significant changes to be made, or for a resolution to fail in the Plenary session after passing in Committee.

The following are brief descriptions of each Committee simulated at AMUN, along with the Committee's agenda, a brief purview of each committee, a brief background and research guide for each agenda topic and the Committee's website address. Representatives should use this information as the first step in their research on the powers and limitations of their particular Committee in relation to the agenda topics.

## THE CONCURRENT GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY

**Purview of the Simulation:** The General Assembly Plenary typically considers issues that several Committees would have the power to discuss, but which would best be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Likewise, the General Assembly Plenary is also responsible for coordinating work between the many different bodies of the United Nations. For example, the 60th General Assembly recently established a Peacebuilding Commission that will oversee the United Nations' peacebuilding processes and

coordinate the work of the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, and Member States emerging from conflict situations. Note that if the Security Council, which is given the primary task of ensuring peace and security by the Charter, is discussing a particular issue, the General Assembly (Plenary) will cease its own deliberations and defer to the Security Council.

**Website:** <http://www.un.org/ga/>

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF NATURAL DISASTERS, FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT

Every year, more than 200 million people are affected by natural disasters. Increased population densities, environmental degradation, and global warming have compounded the effects of poverty, making the impacts of natural hazards increasingly more severe. A natural disaster is the effect of a natural hazard (e.g., flood, volcanic eruption, earthquake, or landslide) that overwhelms local capacity and necessitates a request to the national or international level for ex-

ternal humanitarian assistance. From tsunamis, droughts, floods, and cyclones, to earthquakes, droughts and biological epidemics, there has been a drastic rise in the number and severity of natural disasters in recent decades. From 1994 to 2005, approximately 7,100 disasters occurred which killed over 300,000 people worldwide. During 2007, 414 disasters associated with natural hazards were recorded, taking more than 16,800 lives, affecting over 211 million people, and causing more than \$74.9 billion in economic damage. It is estimated that almost 80% of these disasters were caused by climate-related hazard events. The increasing prevalence and severity of natural disasters requires increased cooperation in channeling humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected areas.

The UN has been responsive not only in efforts to respond to disaster occurrences, but also in efforts to reduce disaster impact. The General Assembly declared the 1990s the International Decade for Disaster Reduction. It also established the International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which defined guiding principles for preparedness, humanitarian relief, and rehabilitation of areas affected by natural disasters. In 1994, the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World represented the first comprehensive document to address the need for multilateral, coordinated cooperation on disaster reduction and response. It marked a paradigmatic shift in the international community by emphasizing the need for proactive disaster preparation over reactive disaster response.

The Yokohama Strategy remained the leading framework until 2005, when the World Conference on Disaster Reduction took place in Hyogo, Japan. The Conference built upon the work of the Yokohama strategy and attempted to address continuing gaps in disaster preparedness in the formulation of the Hyogo Framework for Action: 2005-2015 (HFA). Its over-arching objective is to build resilience of nations and communities to disasters by significantly reducing disaster losses measured in lives and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries. The Framework identifies priorities for action, guiding principles, and practical means for achieving disaster resilience for vulnerable communities in the context of sustainable development. As the guiding document in natural disaster management, the HFA also reaffirms international consensus that disaster reduction is the priority focus of disaster management.

Since the adoption of the HFA, many global, regional, national and local efforts have also attempted to address disaster risk reduction more systematically. Many regional bodies have formulated strategies at regional scale for disaster risk reduction in line with the HFA. In addition to calling for the implementation of the HFA, the General Assembly has encouraged Member States to establish multi-sectoral national platforms to coordinate disaster risk reduction in countries. While progress has been made in the formulation of such plans, much work remains to be done in terms of implementation.

A recent breakthrough in on-the-ground coordination of disaster responses occurred in 2005, when the Tampere Convention on the Provision of Telecommunication Resources for Disaster Mitigation and Relief Operations came into force. The Tampere Convention makes it easier for humanitarian organizations to set up communications equipment without interference from local regulations, which facilitates faster, more coordinated, and more accountable disaster response activities.

Despite such progress, the international community continues to encounter coordination challenges that hinder efficient distribution of humanitarian assistance in response to disasters. Several organizations exist, including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, which aim to help facilitate assistance, but most organizations' efforts emphasize disaster reduction. To address UN inter-agency cooperation, in 2000 the Economic and Social Council launched the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction to improve cross-agency coordination. After natural disasters, several organizations within the United Nations structure perform recovery and rehabilitation, and many run their own efforts for funding and assistance. Coordination is at times confusing and difficult because the lead organization

can differ based upon the type of event and location. Moreover, the lead agency is reliant on the international community for financial, technical and labor support. In an effort to alleviate coordination challenges, in 2008 the General Assembly appointed the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat as the focal point within the overall United Nations system. However, further improvement in cross-agency coordination is still needed to ensure continuity, timeliness, and predictability in the response by relevant United Nations humanitarian and development organizations in the event of disaster.

Natural disasters and sustainable development are inextricably linked for many developing countries. While effective disaster-preparation and disaster-response policies are essential in order to safeguard communities' well-being and livelihoods, economic growth and sustainable development are equally integral to the improvement of states' capacities to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. In March 2009, the General Assembly recognized that reducing vulnerability to natural disasters was a key component of poverty eradication, sustainable development strategies, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Assembly's emphasis on the role of development organizations in disaster response promotes a holistic perspective that broadly addresses the relationships between environmental degradation, sustainable development, humanitarian aid, and natural disaster mitigation. Amidst efforts to improve aid coordination, further discussion and commitments are still necessary to ensure that future implementation encompasses the complex inter-relationships between these subjects.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- Given the link between sustainable development and disaster reduction and relief, in what ways can the General Assembly promote a more comprehensive approach to natural disaster response?
- How can further coordination and cooperation be encouraged between UN agencies and NGOs?
- What steps can be taken now to prepare for the increase of natural disasters due to climate change?

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## UN Documents:

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A/RES/61/131  
A/RES/60/125  
A/RES/59/212  
A/RES/45/100  
A/RES/44/236  
A/63/351  
A/63/277  
A/62/323  
A/61/314  
A/60/227  
A/59/374

Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action

Common statement of the Special Session on the Indian Ocean

Disaster: risk reduction for a safer future

Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015

The Tampere Convention

## Additional Web Resources:

[www.ochaonline.un.org](http://www.ochaonline.un.org) -United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

[www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) - International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

[www.unisdr.org](http://www.unisdr.org) - International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

[www.gdacs.org](http://www.gdacs.org) - Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System

## PEACE, SECURITY AND REUNIFICATION ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

The Korean question” was brought before the United Nations General Assembly, and the goals of free elections and reunification of the peninsula were established without support from the Soviet bloc. In the fall of 1948, both the Republic of Korea (RoK) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) were formally established under leaders whose stated goals included reunification of the peninsula. After two years of border skirmishes and raids, the DPRK launched a full scale invasion of the South on 25 June 1950. Hostilities on the peninsula continued, with significant involvement from the UN, the United States, and China, until an armistice agreement was reached on 27 July 1953.

Secretive North-South talks regarding unification began in the 1970s, and momentum for constructive dialogue between the two countries accelerated with the end of the Cold War. In 1991, both the DPRK and the RoK joined the United Nations. For much of the 1990s, talks centered around the DPRK’s nuclear-related activities, which have at times posed considerable challenges to reunification dialogue. Though both countries signed the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1992, it and subsequent international agreements such as the Agreed Framework, were seriously hindered by challenges in their implementation.

Recurring famines in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the subsequent humanitarian assistance by the international commu-

nity have also been a key area of bilateral and multilateral relations in recent years. In both 1996 and 1998, severe famine occurred in the DPRK following widespread floods, and in 2001, severe drought again threatened the country’s food security. The international community’s response has been complicated by political tensions that have limited humanitarian access at times. However, the World Food Programme estimates that emergency operations between 1995 and 2005 directly supported one third of the country’s population. Since 2007, gains in food security have been reversed, and the DPRK’s reliance on external food aid has been increasing.

Bilateral relations improved at the beginning of the decade, resulting in a historic inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang on 13-15 June 2000. The result was the South-North Declaration, signed by former Republic of Korea President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on 15 June 2000. The Declaration consisted of five points, promoting cooperation through the resolution of humanitarian issues by integrating the economy and cultural aspects of civil society. In response, the UN General Assembly adopted A/RES/55/11 on 31 October 2000, which welcomed and supported the developments arising from the inter-Korean summit, calling it a “major breakthrough in inter-Korean relations and in realizing eventual peaceful reunification.”

In recent years, a number of programs have aimed to expand bilateral functional cooperation. Both governments worked together in repairing the Gaeseong-Pyongyang highway and in completing the Gaesong-Sinuiju railroad; in May 2007, passenger trains crossed the North-South border for the first time in 56 years. In addition, joint educational programs have been undertaken to educate the youth of Korea on reconciliation and reunification. The UN has encouraged ongoing efforts to initiate and sustain a constructive dialogue, but reunification efforts have been overshadowed by the international community’s concern for the nuclear-related activities by the DPRK. In August 2003, the Six Party Talks began between the United States, Republic of Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, China, the Russian Federation, and Japan, with discussions centered around the DPRK’s nuclear-related activities. Although efforts were initially hampered when the DPRK announced in 2003 its intentions to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, an agreement was reached in September 2005 between the six countries in which the DPRK agreed to stop its nuclear testing.

However, on 9 October 2006 the DPRK announced its nuclear weapons capability with a successful underground test. In response, the UN Security Council adopted S/RES/1718, which called for the suspension of the DPRK’s ballistic missile and nuclear weapons activities. On 2-4 October 2007, a second inter-Korean summit took place in Pyongyang. The summit resulted in the Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace and Prosperity, which aims to bolster economic cooperation and promote regional peace and security. At the summit, the DPRK agreed to begin the disarmament process in exchange for aid and diplomatic concessions. On 16 November 2007, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 62/5, which celebrated the summit and affirmed that inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation were essential for consolidating peace and security on the Korean peninsula. The General Assembly called on Member States to “continue supporting the inter-Korean dialogue, reconciliation, and reunification,” and encouraged both governments to implement the Declaration “fully and in good faith” in an effort to develop a sound foundation for peaceful reunification efforts in the future.

The GA's recent discussions have also focused on human rights issues in the DPRK. In 2008, the GA called attention to the lack of freedom of thought or movement in the country, the trafficking of women, violations of worker's rights, and the relation between human rights violations and the country's widespread malnutrition. While expressing serious concern at the continued reports of systematic and widespread violations of civil, economic, and social rights, the Assembly recognized the potential of the inter-Korean dialogue to help improve the human rights and humanitarian situation in the DPRK.

Despite the progress indicated by the most recent inter-Korean summit, tensions on the divided peninsula have increased markedly. During 2008, the DPRK began the process of dismantling its Yongbyon nuclear facility in agreement with the second summit conditions, but progress stalled when disarmament talks broke down in December 2008. The following month, the DPRK announced its intent to cancel all military and political deals with the Republic of Korea and accused Seoul of "hostile intent." In April and May of 2009, the DPRK engaged in a series of missile launches and underground nuclear tests. In response, the Security Council unanimously condemned the missile testing as a violation of S/RES/1718 and imposed tougher sanctions. In the wake of criticism from the international community, the DPRK declared its withdrawal from the Six Party Talks, its intention to restart its nuclear facilities, and its position that the DPRK was no longer bound by the 1953 armistice.

In its work, the General Assembly has typically avoided in-depth discussions of the DPRK's nuclear program, leaving consideration of that topic to the relevant UN bodies and agencies. However, Member States have encouraged the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks and continue the denuclearization process, and the UN has expressed its hope that talks will soon resume. In light of the ongoing developments and tense atmosphere, the General Assembly must consider how its discussions and recommendations can best support efforts to achieve peace and reunification in the Korean peninsula.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- What role can functional development and cooperation play in the reunification process?
- How has food security situation in the DPRK impacted reunification efforts? In what ways can the international community assist?
- Which past measures have been most supportive of reunification goals, and how can past lessons inform future actions?
- Given the ability of the General Assembly to discuss and issue recommendations, what current course of action should the Assembly take?

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A/62/264  
A/62/L.4  
A/55/L.14  
S/RES/1718  
S/RES/825  
A/HRC/7/20  
CRC/C/OPAC/KOR/Q/1/Add.1  
CRC/C/PRK/4  
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

## Additional Web Resources:

- [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) - Amnesty International  
[www.hrw.org/asia/north-korea](http://www.hrw.org/asia/north-korea) - Human Rights Watch  
[www.koreanunification.net](http://www.koreanunification.net) - Korean Unification Studies (*Note: While this is a blog, it contains excellent source material and resource links*)