



ESCAP

General Assemblies

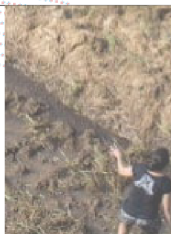
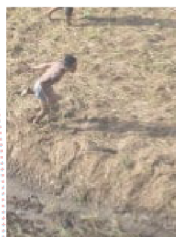
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Topic 1
Protecting the shrinking
civic space

Topic 2
Ensuring climate resilience in
the Asia-Pacific region



October 5-6, 2026



Committee
Economic and Social
Commission for Asia
and the Pacific

Georgia Tech
Model United Nations

Bridging *technology* ***and*** *diplomacy.*



Georgia Tech
Model United Nations

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#GTMUN2026



Letter from the Secretary General



Esteemed delegates,

My name is Henry Bui, your Secretary General for the 2026 edition of the Georgia Tech Model United Nations Conference, also lovingly known as GTMUN. As your Secretary General, I would like to give you all a warm welcome as you begin your journey this conference cycle.

Every year at GTMUN, we see hundreds of you delegates spend hours speaking about your ideas, deliberating with others about the efficacy of solutions, and collaborating with compatriots to draft extensive resolutions. It is always impressive to see each delegate's ability to tackle these very significant issues affecting the real world today, proposing novel solutions, creatively applying international policy, and synthesizing resolutions that solve these urgent questions comprehensively and on a global scale.

I am especially excited to see everything you all will achieve this October. With over 1,000 delegates attending, this will be the largest GTMUN to date, and with it, we are bringing you 18 diverse committees to further test your abilities. Each committee has been carefully crafted to open unique perspectives and to allow each delegate to apply their skills in possibly new, unique ways. I hope that in the midst of being lost in deep research rabbit holes and hours of debate in each session, you all are satisfactorily challenged and that you all leave with joy and excitement in the work you accomplish.

Outside of the Scheller building where you will debate for two days, you will find that many of the skills you have used will be applicable to other aspects of your professional career: your ability to speak publicly, to improvise and adapt, and to act diplomatically. As a computer science student and teaching assistant, I have found that my experience in Model UN has been some of my most valuable. It has taught me to be confident in what I say, and it has taught me how to work with people with all different kinds of backgrounds and perspectives. One of our core values at Georgia Tech is that we thrive on diversity, and that is something that shines strongly at GTMUN.

As you prepare for committee, I want you to remember the most important thing you should get out of GTMUN—even more important than demonstrating your abilities or honing your skills for your professional career—is having fun. Not every speech has to be perfect, and not every unmoderated caucus has to go your way! Take the opportunity to try eccentric things in your speeches and diplomatic approach, and take the opportunity to meet new people. Do not forget that you are surrounded by many others who have similar goals, aspirations, and interests as you do! You might find a future close friend. Though competing is quite fulfilling (and the prospect of awarding is exciting), it can also be very stressful, so it is critical to find joy in what you are doing.

Once again, we, the GTMUN Secretariat, are excited to see everything you will achieve.

Good luck & have fun,

Henry Bui

Secretary General of GTMUN 2026



What is a *Position Paper*?

A position paper is a paper which describes how a country intends to address the topics of the committee, detailing tangible solutions to committee issues and connection to the country's policies. A position paper should contain details for each topic that will be addressed by the committee.

Formatting Requirements

- 12-point font, double spaces Times New Roman
- 1-2 pages per topic (excluding Works Cited page)
- A Works Cited page with citations in MLA format
- Files submitted in .pdf format with title "GTMUN26_COMMITTEE_COUNTRY.pdf"
- e.g., "GTMUN26_DISEC_Germany.pdf" or "GTMUN26_UNEP_United_States.pdf"

Start Each Topic Page With

- Committee: [Name of committee]
- Delegation: [Name of delegation]
- Topic: [Topic name/decription]

Position Paper Rubric

In order to be eligible for awards, delegates must submit a position paper and receive a score of at least 12/20 (for single-topic committees) or 24/40 (for double-topic committees). Refer to the next page for the exact scoring guidelines.

Our AI Policy

Delegates are expected to be drafting documents during the span of the conference using their own thoughts and ideas. As such, GTMUN *does not permit* plagiarism, pre-writing, or the use of generative AI during conferences.

- Plagiarism is the act of using another individual's work or writing and passing it as one's own without proper citation or credit. This includes writing from other delegates in the committee or from online sources.
- Pre-writing is the act of writing material for in-conference documents (e.g., working papers, draft resolutions, crisis directives) ahead of the conference. While doing prior research and bringing research notes is permitted (and encouraged), these notes should not contain text that is intended to be directly copied and pasted into a document. Suspicion of pre-writing is subject to the chair's discretion.
- Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini) cannot be used to partially or wholly write a conference document. GTMUN recognizes the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence engines as a tool for research. Though discouraged, GTMUN accepts the use of such tools to locate resources and brainstorm starting solutions. However, generative AI must not be used to generate content for the conference, such as in-conference documents and position papers. GTMUN encourages the development of creative, unique solutions in committee and knows delegates are more than capable of producing such ideas without relying on generative AI.

Delegates that violate the writing policy will face consequences that may include disqualification from awards.

	Great (5)	Good (4)	Adequate (3)	Poor (1)
Background	- Detailed description of the topic (including dates and stakeholders) - Several facts and statistics - Discusses many relevant UN documents and resolutions	- Basic description of topic (including some dates and stakeholders) - Some facts and statistics - Discusses some relevant UN documents and resolutions	- Minimal description of topic (with no or few dates and stakeholders) - Few facts and statistics - Misses some key relevant UN documents and resolutions	- Unclear or incorrect description of topic - Incorrect or missing facts or statistics - No mention of relevant UN documents and resolutions
Policy	- Country's detailed history with issue - Detailed present position (or a strongly-defended inferred position) of country - Several references to statements from appropriate officials or documents - Several facts and statistics	- Country's basic history with issue - Present position (or reasonable inferred position) of country - Some references to statements from appropriate officials or documents - Some facts and statistics	- Sparsely describes country's history with issue - Present position (or basic inferred position) of country - Few references to statements from appropriate officials and documents - Few facts and statistics	- Incorrect or missing description of country's history with issue - Incorrect present position (or unreasonably inferred position) of country - No references to statements from appropriate officials and documents - Incorrect or missing facts and statistics
Solutions	- Detailed personal objectives - Proposes well-supported potential solutions - Identifies delegates to work with and provides strong reasoning for selections - Actionable, reasonable solutions which are within the scope of the committee	- Expresses personal objectives - Proposes reasonable potential solutions - Identifies delegates to work with and provides reasonable justification for selections - Actionable solutions within the scope of committee	- States personal objective - Proposes potential solutions - Identifies delegates to work with - Actionable solutions	- No proposed goals or plans - No potential collaborators mentioned - Implausible or missing actionable solutions
Mechanics	- No grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors - Numerous and diverse citations from appropriate sources	- Few grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors - Citations from appropriate sources	- Some grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes - One or two citations from inappropriate sources	- Many grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes - No citations from appropriate sources

Introduction to Committee

On March 28, 1947, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) was created as one of the five regional committees under the UN Economic and Social Council. Its mission, which was originally to increase economic development and support post-WWII reconstruction of nations in Asia and the Far East, has since expanded to addressing sustainable development challenges within the Asia-Pacific region.

Currently headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand, UN ESCAP comprises 53 member states and 9 associate members, primarily from the Asia-Pacific region, alongside non-regional members such as France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

This committee focuses on developing protocols to address climate change, establishing regulations for sustainable infrastructure, and promoting sustainable urbanization in Asia and Pacific nations. As a regional platform, UN ESCAP was created to gather and collaborate on economic policies suited to the region's needs, as reflected in ongoing collaborative meetings among its members. While the UN body cannot pass binding resolutions, enforce laws, or infringe upon state sovereignty, it plays a crucial role in providing policy recommendations, shaping guidelines, and fostering regional cooperation.

Disclaimer

Model United Nations provides an opportunity for delegates to engage diplomatically with topics of global importance and explore possibilities for conflict resolution in a meaningful way. Many of the topics at hand may involve sensitive or controversial subject matter. We ask delegates to be respectful and professional when engaging with their committee and communicating with fellow delegates and GTMUN Conference staff. The content warning below is meant to warn you of potentially controversial topics that are present in the content of this background guide, as well as content that may appear in other aspects of the committee (e.g. debate, speeches, directives), so that you can prepare yourself before reading this background guide and participating in the committee. At GTMUN, we take equity violations very seriously and require delegates to fully comply with our equity guidelines. Failure to do so will result in an immediate disqualification from awards, and you may be asked to leave the conference. Please remain respectful in committee, and avoid overgeneralizations as well as take into account individual differences and contexts during your speeches. If you have any questions regarding our equity guidelines, we encourage you to contact one of our staff members. If, because of this committee's content warning, you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to our staff via email at gtmunconference@gmail.com.



Topic 01

Protecting the shrinking
civic space

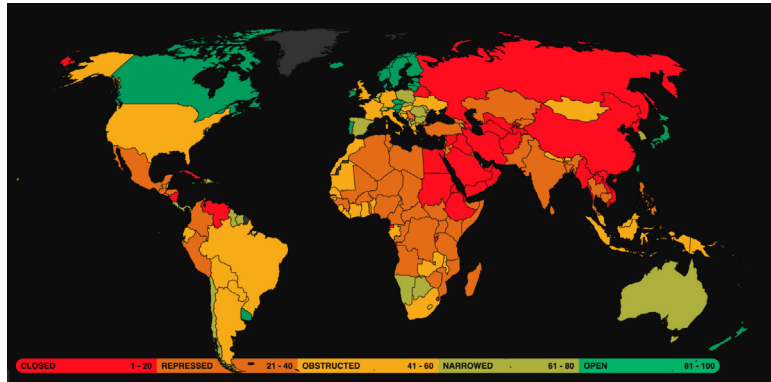
Key Terms and Acronyms

Civic Space	The environment that allows citizens to share information, express beliefs, and participate in political decision-making
Civic Society Organizations (CSOs)	Non-governmental groups formed by citizens to advance shared interests, often serving as intermediaries between the public and the state
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	Independent, typically nonprofit organizations that operate outside of government to address social, political, or humanitarian issues
Democratic Backsliding	A gradual erosion of democratic institutions, norms, and practices, often occurring through incremental government actions rather than sudden coups
Civil Liberties	Individual rights that are protected from government interference, include but are not limited to the freedoms of press, assembly, speech, and association
Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)	Any individual or organization who takes action to promote human rights in a peaceful manner
The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	The UN body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights guaranteed by international law
Digital Authoritarianism	The use of digital technology, including surveillance, censorship, and disinformation, by governments to control and repress populations

Introduction

Imagine not being able to post your opinion online, attend a protest, or speak out against government officials without the fear of arrest. That is what life looks like in many countries with shrinking civic spaces.

A country's civic space is the environment that allows citizens to share information, express themselves, and participate in decisions that affect their lives (Asia Foundation, 2023a). Without it, citizens lose their voice, and government officials have less accountability. The civic space often shrinks due to a variety of factors, including oppressive laws that harass civic actors and cut off funding to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) (International IDEA, 2021). This represents a decline in the universal freedoms of assembly, association, and expression.



Map of the global ratings of civic space and fundamental freedoms published by the CIVICUS Monitor.

In numerous Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar, the government has been documented using legal mechanisms to detain or prosecute Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) under charges of rebellion or “spreading propaganda against the state,” which has made it harder for them to speak out against governmental institutions (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). Typically, a shrinking civic space is a sign of a decline in democratic values and a rise in authoritarianism.

The CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool that tracks these trends using real-time data. Their methodology combines several sources of data on the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression to assign each country one of five possible rankings. From the biggest, or healthiest, civic space to the least, the rankings are: Open, Narrowed, Obstructed, Repressed, or Closed. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, seven Asian countries are rated as Closed, nine as Repressed, six as Obstructed, and only two are Open. In the Pacific, the situation is more positive, with seven countries rated as Open, five as Narrowed, and only two as Obstructed.

History of the Committee

The United Nations has worked to protect civic spaces and human rights for nearly 80 years. Starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which enshrined the freedoms of assembly, association, and expression, rights that are all

necessary for a society to function democratically. The adoption of this declaration paved the way for modern human rights frameworks dedicated to protecting the shrinking civic space. Later, in 1998, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders established the rights of individuals and groups to peacefully protect human rights (OHCHR, n.d.). This document recognized the crucial role of activists in promoting and fostering civil liberties and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means.

Within the regional context of the Asia-Pacific region, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has gone through a transformation in its relationship with civic space. Originally founded as a purely economic body focused on post-war reconstruction, it expanded in the 1990s to include the “social” aspect as well (UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). This shift allowed for discussion on issues such as gender equality, poverty, aging, and urbanization. Building on this outlook, in 2015, Resolution 71/1 formally recognized the importance of inclusive and sustainable development, emphasizing that governments must work alongside NGOs and other Civil Society actors to achieve these goals.

However, alongside these advancements, the commission has placed a strong emphasis on sovereignty and follows a principle of “non-interference.” As a result, many member states believe that the commission has no authority to discuss civic space and that such issues infringe upon national sovereignty. This position limits the extent to which the international community can intervene when civic spaces are threatened. The continuous friction between the protection of universal human rights and respect for state autonomy remains central to modern debates on civic space governance within the United Nations system.

Topic

Following the September 11 attacks on the United States, countries started to prioritize national security over cooperation with other states (Asia Foundation, 2023a). This was especially the case in formerly colonized states across Asia and the Pacific, where historical experiences often foster stronger feelings of nationalism. As a result of these nationalist ideals, authoritarianism rose in the mid-2000s. Leaders tended to use rising polarization to increase their own political bases, often utilizing tactics such as placing the blame for many problems in the country on certain minority groups by employing divisive rhetoric. This rise of populism and authoritarianism, geopolitical tensions, and the impacts of climate change has reduced the ability of groups to engage in political dialogue and express disagreement freely (Asia Foundation, 2023b).

Understanding why civic space shrinks requires looking beyond legislation and government repression, as the boundaries of a civic space are affected by many

interconnected political, social, and economic factors.

The first issue that affects various civil society actors is access to funding. Many CSOs in Asia and the Pacific depend heavily on international donors from more developed countries. This creates a fragile dependency on these external donors, which can change priorities and may not be sustainable for the long term. In many cases, donors have shifted funding from rural to urban areas, leaving rural communities with even less support (Asia Foundation, 2021). Additionally, many donors treat CSOs as subcontractors, providing funding only in exchange for advancing the donor's own interests rather than prioritizing local objectives (Asia Foundation, 2023a). This is why building a stronger domestic philanthropy network is essential to creating a civil society that is independent and can better work towards the needs of local communities.

The second factor is civil society governance and accountability. Even CSOs with adequate funding may have trouble fulfilling their goals if there are internal tensions or problems with leadership (Asia Foundation, 2023a). There needs to be a certain level of transparency and accountability within the CSO itself for it to adequately influence political decisions. In continuation, there may also be tensions between different civil society actors. While differing priorities or views can contribute to tensions between different actors in the civic space, such as pro-democratic civil society actors receiving backlash from more conservative and traditional ones, there are also disagreements between civil society actors who have similar objectives. For example, there is a growing disconnect between established CSOs and newer forms of youth-led activism, which are not only shaped more by digital skills and social media fluency but also a generational disconnect in values with older organizations (Asia Foundation, 2021). When civil society is fragmented and lacks internal accountability, it makes it easier for governments to discredit these movements and harder for citizens to trust them.

The last factor is the relationship between civil society actors and the general public.



People participating in an protest.

In many countries, civic space continues to shrink because the government can impose restrictions on civil society actors with little public backlash. This is often because citizens do not think civil society is important or relevant to their lives (Mendelson, 2015). Rebuilding that connection, particularly in rural areas and with younger generations, is essential to increasing the boundaries of civic space. While social media and other digital technology can be used for civic

engagement, as it allows citizens to organize easily and spread information faster, it does not come without its risks. Governments can use technology as a surveillance tool to track activists, and digital echo chambers, where algorithms only show users ideas they already agree with, fuel polarization and reduce people's ability to engage in healthy debate or disagreements (Asia Foundation, 2023b).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the risks of digital surveillance became especially apparent as governments used emergency powers to heighten surveillance and restrict freedoms in the interest of health and security concerns (Asia Foundation, 2023a). Many governments also increased cybersecurity laws to prevent the spread of misinformation, but these laws still exist today and have been used to manage dissent and censor criticism of government institutions (Asia Foundation, 2023b).

These pressures described above have translated into a wave of human rights violations across the region. The detention of HRDs remains one of the most widespread methods of managing dissent. Many HRDs are held in solitary confinement, subjected to ill-treatment, and facing fabricated charges of murder and terrorism (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). Furthermore, at least 18 countries in the Asia-Pacific region have deployed security forces to arrest protestors, and 14 countries have blocked news portals and social media platforms, shut down the internet, and banned certain publications (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). The restricted coverage of protests and criminalized critics of the government. In 2023 and 2024 alone, 1,577 incidents of harassment against HRDs were recorded across 23 Asian countries, with state actors being responsible for the overwhelming majority of attacks (Hallie, 2025).

Case Studies

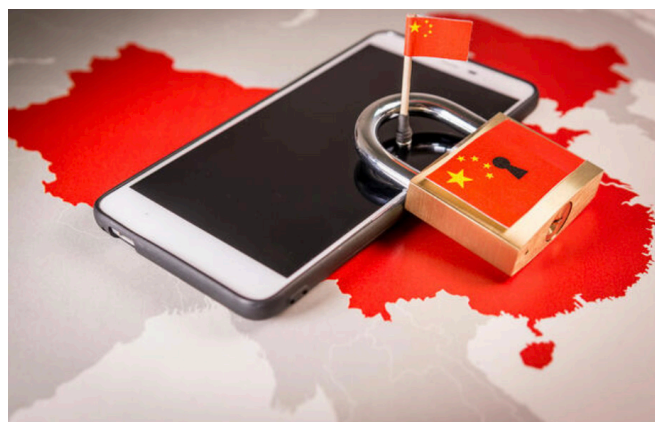
China

China is one of the most frequently cited examples of civic space restriction in the Asia-Pacific region. The Chinese government has constructed what is widely known as the most sophisticated censorship infrastructure in the world, the "Great Firewall." Through this system, authorities have blocked access to any foreign publications and social media platforms that criticize the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Consequently, citizens are largely unable to access independent information or communicate freely with the outside world (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024).

Beyond censorship, the Chinese government has deployed digital technology as a tool of surveillance. The government has detained several HRDs, lawyers, journalists, and academics who attempt to speak out against the government or advocate for civil liberties (Human Rights Watch, 2026). A stark example of this crackdown is the 2020 Hong Kong national security law, which dismantled the city's legal protections for

free expression and assembly, leading to the closure of independent newspapers and the prosecution of protest leaders (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024).

China's case is especially significant because of its regional significance. Foreign-based researchers discovered that a major Chinese company exported some of its "Great Firewall" internet censorship technologies to countries like Pakistan and Myanmar (Human Rights Watch, 2026). This means that the erosion of civic space is not contained within Chinese borders but rather has a regional influence in creating environments where censorship becomes increasingly normalized.



A phone with a lock around it with the Chinese flag symbolizing strict government control over digital presence.

Pakistan

Pakistan's civic space has deteriorated significantly over the past decade due to military influence, weak democratic institutions, and an increasingly hostile legal environment for civil society actors (Baloch & Dawar, 2023). The CIVICUS monitor currently labels the country as repressed. While Pakistan still has formal democratic institutions, in practice, CSOs and HRDs operate under a constant threat of legal harassment, surveillance, and physical intimidation.

One of the main mechanisms used to contain the civic space is anti-terrorism legislation. Laws such as the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act have been increasingly used to detain military journalists and activists who are critical of the government but pose little actual security threats (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). For example, authorities



People protesting against the government media control in Pakistan with "Free Media" banners and signs in November 2007

have used the Anti-Terrorism Act to target members of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, a rights movement advocating against enforced disappearances and military abuses in Pakistan's Pashtun regions. Members have faced arrests and terrorism charges, despite largely engaging in peaceful advocacy. This and many other censorship laws motivate citizens who see journalists and activists arrested for speaking out to stay silent and not speak up.

CSOs also face significant bureaucratic obstacles. NGOs working on issues such as women's and minority rights are subject to intrusive registration requirements and restrictions on receiving foreign funding, such as needing to obtain security clearance before receiving international grants (Mendelson, 2015). These legal and bureaucratic pressures combined with the threat of physical violence have made Pakistan one of the most challenging environments for HRDs and other civil society actors to operate in (Baloch & Dawar, 2023).

Vanuatu

Vanuatu offers a distinct contrast to the other case studies because it shows how the civic space can be restricted even without strict legislation and authoritarian leadership. Currently rated as narrowed on the CIVICUS monitor, the country primarily utilizes government monitoring of media and subtle social pressure to restrict civic space.

The government monitors news outlets to ensure that reporting does not contradict or embarrass official government messaging (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). As a small country with few media organizations, many outlets rely on government advertising revenue for their survival. This financial dependency creates an environment where they are obligated to report what the government wants. Journalists who rely on government contracts or goodwill are discouraged from criticizing the government. While they may not face arrest, they do face economic consequences and social implications of falling out with authorities. This is known as “soft censorship,” and

it is oftentimes harder to document than other forms of censorship because it leaves no paper trail (CIVICUS Monitor, 2025).



French president Emmanuel Macron welcomed by then-Vanuatu Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau in July 2023

While Vanuatu's situation does not approach the severity of the abuses seen in China and Pakistan, it proves that the civic space can be affected by other structural forces that are harder to see and remedy. This serves as a reminder that economic leverage and social conformity can be as effective a tactic as legal threats in silencing dissent.

Current International Frameworks

Several international frameworks provide a foundation for ESCAP's work on this topic. In July 2025, the UN Human Rights Council passed resolution 59/10 on Civil

Society Space, which reaffirms the right of civil society actors to access resources and express concerns over the use of AI surveillance and digital repression. This resolution further emphasizes that rights enjoyed in physical civic spaces must also be present in digital environments, recognizing the growing importance of online platforms for civic participation (UN Human Rights Council, 2025).

Beyond Resolution 59/10, civic space protections are enumerated in various international human rights documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These frameworks protect the freedoms of assembly, expression, and association, which are essential for civil society actors to function.

ESCAP's work is also guided by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16. SDG 16 seeks to promote inclusive societies, ensure access to justice, and build effective and inclusive institutions (ESCAP, 2030 Agenda). Civic space is closely linked to these objectives because public participation and the ability to hold governments accountable are closely linked to effective implementation of the sustainable development goals. Therefore, restrictions on civic space can not only undermine progress with SDG 16 but also other sustainable development goals by weakening trust in institutions and reducing citizen participation.

The international community has emphasized that regional organizations such as ESCAP should play a larger role in implementing these commitments through technical assistance, regional cooperation, and monitoring mechanisms. However, despite the existence of these international frameworks, implementation remains uneven across the region. Member states often have differing views on the balance between national security and civil liberties, leading to disagreements. Differences in political systems and legal traditions can lead to inconsistent implementation, making it difficult to address the issue of shrinking civic spaces.

Directives / QARMAs

How can states establish a standardized definition of “misinformation” or “incitement” that prevents arbitrary censorship?

How can you ensure that citizens continue to have access to information in case of an internet shutdown or a ban on social media?

How can you better protect the rights of Human Rights Defenders?

How can you increase the relevance of the civic space to the general population?

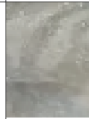
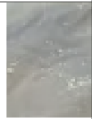
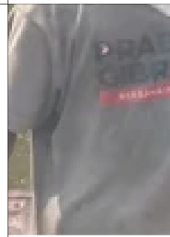
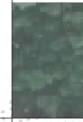
What responsibilities do donors have to local CSOs compared to the national government?

How can you enhance the link between governments and civil society in rural and urban areas? (International IDEA, 2021)

How has your country’s government affected its current civic space?

Has your country’s civic space grown or gotten more restricted recently?

How is youth activism reshaping the civic space, and how can you use this to foster more involvement in the government?



Topic 02

**Ensuring climate resilience
in the Asia-Pacific region**

Key Terms and Acronyms

Drought	Is a long period of time with dry weather and a significant shortage of water relative to the statistical average for a region.
Cyclone	Is a storm that forms over warm tropical water, bringing heavy winds, rain, and storm surges.
Flash Floods	Are a rapid, violent amount of water that occurs within minutes to six hours in a region that has recently faced intense rainfall or large bodies of water diverting their path.
Greenhouse Gases	Gases in the atmosphere that absorb and trap heat on Earth's surface, leading to increased temperature, causing the greenhouse effect.
Water Scarcity	Is the lack of sufficient freshwater sources to meet the demand of a group of people.
Aquaculture	Is the controlled breeding and harvesting of aquatic species in fresh or marine waters.
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Is a global climate fund specifically for developing nations to access and use to build sustainable infrastructure and make an impact. The fund is made up of pledges from over 46 nations, including various developing countries.
Green School	Is a school building or facility that creates a healthy environment for learning while saving energy, resources, and money. These schools are to be powered by renewable energy sources, and construction is sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Introduction to the Topic

In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the central Philippines. It was one of the strongest storms ever recorded, with vicious winds reaching 315 kilometers per hour. It was also one of the deadliest, resulting in the deaths of around 6,300 people and causing the displacement of four million others (UNDRR, 2023). As the climate crisis in the Asia-Pacific region worsens, extreme weather events like Typhoon Haiyan are sure to become more frequent and more destructive.

The Asia-Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world, with over 75 percent of people in the area being affected by disasters globally. The region has been severely impacted by a range of natural disasters such as floods, landslides, heatwaves, and earthquakes, all of which cause widespread destruction and disrupt entire societies. Many of these events have been brought on by the devastating impacts of climate change, primarily driven by human actions through fossil fuel reliance and rapid industrialization. As the region warms faster than the global average, nations are facing sea-level rise, glacial melt, extreme heatwaves, and disruptions to food and water security.

In recent years, UN ESCAP has taken the initiative to address the massive economic and environmental threats facing the region and has specifically promoted the Sustainable Development Goal 13.1: climate resilience. The purpose of SDG 13.1 is to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Recent UN SDG reports highlight an unprecedented run of global heat, with the years of 2024 and 2025 having been the hottest on record, with global temperatures reaching 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels and emissions continuing to rise. UN ESCAP recognizes that the impact of rising emissions includes

more frequent droughts, floods, storms, and rising sea levels, which intensify conflict over resources and cause climate migration.

Globally, reliance on fossil fuels must decrease, and investment in renewable energy sources and sustainable initiatives needs to be made. While some nations such as China and India have seen massive expansions in solar and



Severe destruction and damage in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Haiyan in Philippines

wind deployment, many other regions remain without funding, infrastructure, and/or trained personnel to host these renewable technologies. Regional cooperation will be essential to avert the worst impacts of the crisis on populations. In addition, tackling shared risks in solidarity provides a key opportunity to enhance the Asia-Pacific region's collective strength. While the UN ESCAP cannot pass binding resolutions, enforce laws, or infringe upon state sovereignty, it does play a crucial role in providing recommendations and encouraging environmental guidelines to avert adverse lifestyle impacts. As a delegate of this committee, you are tasked with proposing actionable solutions to strengthen preparedness, promote sustainable development, and mitigate the impacts of climate change in the Asia-Pacific region.

Historical Background

From the melting of Siberian tundra to the drying of tropical rainforests, the Asia-Pacific region encompasses diverse ecosystems and socioeconomic conditions that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Measures to respond to climate change and build resilience in the region have grown as its environmental vulnerability and unequal development have become more widely recognized.

The beginnings of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific were prompted in 1947 with the establishment of the UN ESCAP, which aimed to strengthen economic development. Although the commission was not originally focused on environmental concerns, issues related to environmental protection gained greater attention following extreme weather events such as the 1970 Bhola cyclone, one of the deadliest humanitarian disasters ever recorded, and the landmark 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. The conference resulted in the Stockholm Declaration and the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which later supported regional environmental cooperation in Asia and the Pacific.

Prior to the 20th century, many Asian communities developed nature-based solutions such as stilt houses, floating agricultural systems, and ice stupas to protect their homes, grow food, and manage seasonal water scarcity. However, as much of the region became characterized by high-density population, rapid economic growth, and increased urbanization, many communities became increasingly vulnerable to changes in extreme climate events (ECEs).



Villagers in northwest Bangladesh tending a floating farm.

By the 1980s, much of the world's manufacturing was shifting toward Asia. This transition began after World War II, with countries like Japan emerging as a major manufacturing power and the four "Asian Tigers": Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, undergoing rapid industrialization and maintaining exceptionally high growth rates. By the late 20th century, many multinational companies began offshoring their factories to Asia to capitalize on lower labor costs and fewer regulations. In countries such as China, economic reforms of the time opened the country to foreign investment, helping transform it into the center of global manufacturing. However, this rapid industrialization also led to greater greenhouse gas emissions, environmental degradation, and pressure on natural resources, even as the region was experiencing tremendous economic growth.

In 1992, small island developing states (SIDS) were formally recognized at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as a distinct United Nations category due to the vulnerability arising from their small size, geographic isolation, and environmental fragility. This category consists of island nations such as Tuvalu, Fiji, and Vanuatu, which have all experienced disproportionate impacts from climate change despite contributing the least to global emissions. SIDS remain among the countries most vulnerable to sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and coral reef degradation.

With impacts of ECEs and climate change being felt across the Asia-Pacific region, a growing consensus during this time encouraged greater international dialogue and cooperation. This was demonstrated in 1988, with the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and in 1992, with the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Together, these interventions collectively laid the foundation for regional action on environmental protection, sustainable development, and resilience to climate-related risks.

During this same period, a broader shift toward proactive disaster reduction occurred, with the UN dedicating the 1990s to investing in prevention and preparedness, rather than simply giving humanitarian aid after a disaster hits. This opened the door for new innovative disaster reduction technologies and the formation of the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development (RESAP), which allows states in the Asia-Pacific region to use satellite imagery and geospatial data to track typhoons, monsoons, and droughts in real time. Alongside this technology, the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which later evolved into the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were used to explicitly task nations with ensuring environmental sustainability, linking poverty reduction and food security directly to clean water access and resource management.

As of recently, the adoption of the UN 2030 SDGs, with a key focus on SDG Target 13.1: strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and

natural disasters, has provided a critical framework aligning disaster risk reduction strategies with national planning. Along with UN ESCAP, other organizations in the Asia-Pacific region are actively addressing climate change. ASEAN has set 2050 net-zero targets; Central Asian states are now focused on water security, and UNEP works with Asian Pacific governments at all levels to guide policy and strategy for reducing emissions and to implement Paris Agreement frameworks, which have set long-term goals to guide nations to reduce global greenhouse gases. However, with 2030 rapidly approaching and 2050 on the horizon, the severity and frequency of climate change only continue to rise.

Current Challenges

In the current global landscape, a combination of new technological advancements and unresolved barriers has created an immense array of complex challenges in ensuring climate resilience in the Asia-Pacific. Ocean warming has reached an all-time high in Asia, affecting over 10 million civilians, and all “23 monitored glaciers in high-mountain Asia have lost mass,” which threatens long-term water security in the region (World Meteorological Organization, 2026). The overall region has seen one of its warmest years in 2025, and it is only projected to get warmer. The loss of glacier mass along with the prolonged monsoon and cyclone season is leading to devastating flooding in many countries, including but not limited to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. While severe droughts and sand and dust storms have typically hit West Asian nations, the change in weather patterns is disrupting communities further; as of November 2025, “natural disasters affected more than 29.3 million people in 17 different countries and caused 8,800 deaths and 13,600 injuries... The region needs more than 44 million people to assist with humanitarian relief efforts” (Humanitarian Action, 2025).

Beyond humanitarian concerns, the climate crisis imposes severe economic costs across the region. Extreme weather repeatedly destroys vital physical systems,



Severe water floods on a major road in Thailand in 2011

including transport, energy grids, and water supply. “Flooding alone is projected to wipe out \$286 billion in value,” while extreme weather as a whole costs the region an average of \$58 billion per year in direct physical losses (Fernandez, 2026). Outside of physical damage, extreme heat is projected to cut worker capacity by more than half in parts of Asia by 2030. Because primary sectors like farming and fishing employ over a third of the region’s workforce, this drop

in labor productivity will cause detrimental effects to these countries' economies, combined with the heightened risk of crop failure, will suppress export production. Ultimately, these causes have and will continue to shrink state revenues and weaken debt stability while driving up public health and emergency spending expenditures.

Although past frameworks have provided comprehensive international guidelines, notable lapses in prolonged enforcement, environmental education, and sustainable urban development continue to affect climate change efforts. Additionally, new ways of using technology to predict extreme weather events, improve data collection, and scale renewable energy present critical opportunities for actionable change. As UN ESCAP and the Asian-Pacific community continue to promote regional cooperation, addressing these challenges remains essential to developing effective and resilient disaster reduction policies.

Prolonged Enforcement in Climate Change

While human-driven climate change has fueled rapid-onset disaster events, slow-onset events are frequently overlooked, despite being the central force of climate migration and complex legal uncertainty. Slow-onset events are caused and intensified by climate change that occurs over prolonged periods of time, such as sea level rise, desertification, increasing temperatures, and ocean acidification. Among the regions most severely affected by slow-onset climate change are Small Island Developing States. As global sea levels continue to rise and cause gradual inundation, the slow, progressive submergence of normally dry land by water, countries like Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Kiribati, and Fiji are at immense risk of existential threats and sovereignty uncertainty.

Although these nations only make a minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, many face the reality of their entire country sinking. In 2021, Tuvalu's foreign minister delivered a powerful speech while standing knee-deep in ocean waters to represent the urgent global crisis that demands the world's attention. Scientists have projected that in the next 25 years much of Tuvalu's most crucial infrastructure will be below the high-tide line, making the current generation of approximately 11,000 people the last inhabitants of the land. As a result, Tuvalu is preparing to carry out the first planned migration of an entire country in



Tuvalu's foreign minister, Simon Kofe, says his country is looking at ways to retain statehood even if it disappears due to climate change and rising sea levels.

response to the effects of climate change.

In addition, further compounding this humanitarian crisis is the legal ambiguity surrounding SIDS. Under the 1933 Montevideo Convention, a state must possess a defined territory to maintain maritime rights, voting rights in the UN, and sovereign legal status. Thus, if SIDS become completely submerged, they face the risk of losing any international recognition of their country. Moreover, current international legal frameworks fail to extend legal protection to climate refugees, as the 1951 Refugee Convention only protects individuals fleeing persecution, war, or political unrest. However, despite the growing number of people displaced by environmental disaster, the response to the climate refugee crisis has been inadequate, and many international countries have been hesitant to accept climate refugees, further isolating these states.

Environmental Education

Environmental education is a learning approach whereby individuals and communities acquire the knowledge, attitudes, skills, values, and motivation to improve the quality of the environment and attain an ecologically and socially sustainable future. Environmental education is vital for making a difference in the fight against climate change; however, according to recent reports, many countries lack a formal



People learning in an outdoor environment education program.

curriculum, resources, and content, leading to low acceptance of teaching climate education. While policy changes and global commitments are necessary to prevent the climate crisis from further worsening, improved education can be a first step in achieving goals set by UN ESCAP and SDG 13.1.

One of the recent developments in the sector of environmental education is a Green School. Green Schools take a holistic approach in educating students

about sustainable development. According to UNESCO, it has the ability to integrate climate action and sustainability principles into school governance, facilities and operations, teaching and learning, and community engagement. In collaboration with the Greening Education Partnership, UNESCO has defined a Green School quality standard, which are the requirements to become a green school. The goal is to green at least 50% of schools in every country by 2030. This initiative shows how education systems can lead the climate resilience movement by enabling the next generation with knowledge, values, and the ability to create a sustainable future.

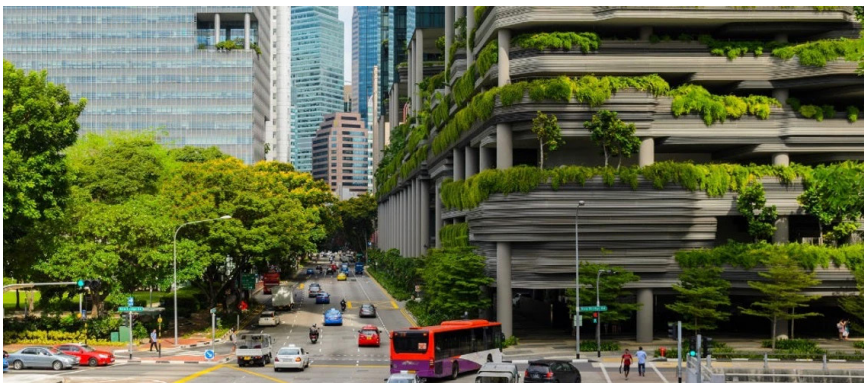
Sustainable development

The first time in history where the global urban population outnumbered the rural population was in 2008, which began the urban millennium, and by 2050 it is predicted that two-thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas. The predicted growth gives importance to the topic of sustainable development through an urban perspective. Cities generate 80% of global GDP; however, they also consume more than 75% of global resources and emit 75% of greenhouse gases, which signifies the need for cities to balance both growth and developing resilient cities.

Urban development not accounting for resource usage and greenhouse gases can lead to many issues, with one being urban heat islands. According to NASA, an urban heat island occurs “when a city experiences much warmer temperatures than nearby rural areas.” Though the sun's heat and light reach cities and countries equally, the temperature increase in cities occurs because of how well surfaces in each environment absorb heat. Rural areas have an increased number of plants that can transpire and cool the environment, whereas cities are filled with sidewalks, streets, and buildings, which are made from materials that only absorb the sunlight, leading to the increased temperature. The result of these increased temperatures is that people can suffer from heat exhaustion, more energy consumption takes place to operate fans and air conditioners, and power outages can occur, endangering public health.

With more individuals, governments, and private parties focused on sustainability, many positive solutions and practices are being created; however, some are exploiting the idea of green labeling. A recent theory that is seen in political ecology and environmental sociology is the idea of green extractivism. This refers to massive exploitation of natural resources under the idea of sustainable development, most commonly seen in mining, palm oil production, and renewable energy industries, where creating renewable solutions is being used to justify land grabs and biodiversity loss. The impact of this practice is two-fold. First, profound ecological devastation increases environmental consequences such as deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion.

Massive mining also leads to water contamination with heavy minerals. Secondly, this practice has social and economic harms. Communities are known to face massive displacement and economic dependency on destructive industries.



View of green spaces in Singapore.

There are various technologies that can help urban planners build energy-efficient, cooler, and safer cities, with one of them being satellites. Satellites can track global hotspots and provide data to help urban planners understand urban heat islands and find ways to prevent them. Additionally, sustainable technology, both hardware and software, can be applied for environmental, social, and economic sustainability factors. Physical technologies like solar PV, rainwater harvesting, carbon-capture technology and smart sensors can directly support environments, society, and governance (ESG), while software like the internet of things can allow for monitoring, tracking, and optimizing sustainability performance.

Case Studies

Water Scarcity Crisis in Thailand

With over 68 million people, a land span of 513,115 square kilometers, 25 river basins, and an annual rainfall of around 1700 mm, Thailand sees severe flooding in rainy seasons and extreme droughts in the dry season, making the region vulnerable to water scarcity issues. Similar to other East Asian nations, Thailand's growing population, rapid urbanization, and agricultural and industrial expansion have created pollution, which heavily impacts the quality of surface and groundwater. Hazardous wastes and wastewater often lack a method of filtration, polluting surface water sources. Agricultural run-off, aquaculture practices, and untreated sewage are major contributors to groundwater pollution. Currently, the country lacks a clear policy on



Person walking through extremely dry and cracked earth.

the extraction of groundwater, leading to overexploitation of the water source. With changing temperatures and the climate crisis, droughts are regular in the country, with certain areas not having a water source for a large period of time. Lack of water and droughts are also impacting the agricultural production of the country, which is a major component of Thailand's exports. Due to Thailand's agricultural dependence, the rising climate crisis impacts the entire population. Water scarcity is a global

threat and is expected to hit Thailand significantly in the upcoming years; the country needs a long-term plan to manage this crisis immediately.

Early Warning Systems in the Philippines

Every year, the Philippines faces multiple tropical cyclones between September and

November, seeing 12 in 2024. 1.4 million people were displaced, with over 13 million affected and hundreds dead along coastlines. Studies have shown that with the rise of global temperatures, the intensity of these cyclones will increase along with the vulnerability of infrastructure. As a result, in November of 2019, the Philippine government approved the project of creating a multi-hazard impact-based forecasting and early warning system for the Philippines. This project plans to update the existing warning system to better forecast tropical storms and assist in long-term climate risk reduction and adaptation measures. The total project is valued at 22 million USD, with 12 million coming from co-financing, specifically in-kind benefits, and the other 10 million will be a Green Climate Fund (GCF) grant. The system has already been proven helpful for fishermen in moving their boats on time before Typhoon Man-yi struck in November 2024. The project is set to be fully completed in April of 2027 and will be of further use to coastal communities and ensure lasting infrastructure within the Philippines. The Philippines is currently one of the few Asian Pacific nations using the Green Climate Fund.



Person installing a electronic siren in the Philippines as part of a community early warning system.

Cool Roof Initiative in Tamil Nadu, India

India is one of the most heat-vulnerable regions in the world, leading to school closures, lower productivity, and deaths in seasons before the monsoon. One such state that is deeply impacted by this crisis is the state of Tamil Nadu, specifically the capital city of Chennai. The city experienced its most prolonged heat wave in 2024, in part due to its densely populated nature consisting of many high-rise buildings and lacking green spaces. The marginalized communities within Chennai face the most impact of drastic temperatures, leading to emigration, lower productivity, illness, and deaths. To address this rising problem, India Administrative Service (IAS) Officer Supriya Sahu established the Cool Roof Initiative, which proposed painting the roofs in a simple white-reflective paint that will reflect the sunlight in the summer months, cooling homes and buildings by 5-8°C and allowing locals to enjoy 40% more time to work, study, and perform daily tasks without discomfort. This project kickstarted a green wave in Tamil Nadu, and Supriya Sahu, along with the state of Tamil Nadu, plans to take it further with “green schools,” more trees in the city, conserving endangered species, and declaring heat a state-specific disaster. For this project, UNEP awarded Supriya Sahu the Earth Award in 2025 for her efforts in helping vulnerable communities adapt to rising temperatures. This example shows

that addressing climate change does not only rely on state-of-the-art technology or new sustainable infrastructure but can come from simple changes like reflective paint and still make a meaningful difference in communities.

Directives / QARMAs

As delegates of this regional commission, it is critical to take into account how economic development, state sovereignty, disaster risk reduction, and environment governance intersect in building climate resilience across the Asia-Pacific region. Some questions to consider:

What policies can Asian and Pacific nations adopt to mitigate and rebuild post-climate disasters?

How can governments pursue development while ensuring it is environmentally friendly and sustainable in the long term?

What strategies can governments employ to address climate change without displacing existing residents in vulnerable neighborhoods of the country?

What should policy development and implementation look like between national, state, and local regions to ensure addressing the crisis in all areas of a nation?

What guidelines should the UN ESCAP develop that provide a framework for governments in the region to address the climate crisis specific to their nation?

How can regions convert their existing infrastructure and policies to adapt to rising temperatures and severe weather patterns?

In what ways can nations change their energy, industry, transport, food, agriculture, and forestry systems to adequately address the impact of a planet with increasing temperatures?

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