



Arizona Model United Nations 64

Organization of American States

Background Guide

Committee Introduction and Purview

The Organization of American States (OAS) is a regional forum of discussion under article VIII of the UN Charter, which “provides the constitutional basis for the involvement of regional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security.” With 33 member states throughout the Western Hemisphere, its values, among others, include promotion of democracy, education, security, sustainable economic development, and human rights. The OAS is organized in three main bodies. The General Assembly is the primary policy-making organ and governs the other bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The Permanent Council conducts the body’s day to day business - resolving conflicts peacefully, fulfilling decisions from the General Assembly of the OAS, and submitting recommendations to the UN General Assembly. Finally, the General Secretariat is assigned to implement policies set by the General Assembly and Permanent Council, including by making offices and hiring personnel.

Note that the OAS is a regional body under the UN Charter, which means it follows the guidance of the General Assembly, Security Council, International Court of Justice, and other bodies. It is not an independent body that can make unilateral decisions. The OAS uses the same rules as the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Topic I: Addressing the Situation in Haiti

Haiti has faced prolonged instability marked by political turmoil, gang violence, and humanitarian insecurity. In recent years this instability has deepened, with armed gangs controlling large swaths of territory, contributing to widespread displacement, insecurity, and economic collapse. Political governance has been severely weakened, and basic services such as security, healthcare, and transportation have deteriorated. The result has been a breakdown of effective state authority in many regions, worsening an already fragile situation.

Haiti has a complex history of international intervention and regional engagement. In the early 1990s, the OAS and the United Nations collaborated on the International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), a joint mission focusing on human rights and the restoration of democratic

institutions, after the military overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The mission extended until 2000 and marked the first joint OAS–UN peace effort.

The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly responded to the crisis in Haiti with peacekeeping and stabilization mandates. For example, UNSC Resolution 1542 (2004) established the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which worked in cooperation with the OAS to promote security, human rights, and the political process in Haiti. Subsequent resolutions, like the UNSC Resolution 1944 (2010), renewed this mission’s mandate in the face of ongoing instability, electoral delays, and humanitarian need.

The OAS has been an active voice on Haiti within the hemispheric system. Resolution 1080—the Santiago Commitment to Democracy and the Renewal of the Inter-American System (1991)—provides the OAS Secretary General with authority to convene councils and extraordinary sessions in cases of constitutional breakdown, an important precedent in Haiti’s case following the 1991 coup.

However, in recent years, OAS’s direct actions on Haiti have been more diplomatic and normative rather than operational. The crisis now raises questions about how the OAS, in conjunction with UN partners and regional bodies like CARICOM, may support political stability, human rights protections, and humanitarian relief without overstepping sovereignty.

Questions to Consider:

- How is gang violence dealt with in your country?
- What kinds of collaborative action could help this situation?
- How might a solution balance state sovereignty and maintain the core value of the OAS?
- What actions can the OAS recommend other UN bodies to take?
- Should the OAS pursue new peace missions, or focus on diplomatic and humanitarian channels?

UN and OAS Documents

- UNSC Resolution 1542 (2004)
- UNSC Resolution 1944 (2010)
- OAS Resolution 1080 (1991)

References

- [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1542\(2004\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1542(2004))
- [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1944\(2010\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1944(2010))
- <https://www.oas.org/sap/peacefund/VirtualLibrary/KeyPeaceInstruments/SantiagoCommitment/SantiagoCommitment.pdf>
- https://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter_american_treaties_A-41_charter_OAS.asp

Topic II: Natural Disasters and their Effects on member States

Natural disasters—including hurricanes, flooding, droughts, and earthquakes—have affected numerous OAS member states in the Western Hemisphere. These events cause loss of life, destroy infrastructure, disrupt economies, and can exacerbate social tensions. Climate change has intensified many of these phenomena, with scientific evidence linking global warming to increased storm strength and extreme weather patterns. This connects the hemispheric impacts of natural disasters to broader global environmental issues.

The OAS General Assembly has adopted resolutions addressing climate change impacts and disaster preparedness. For example, OAS member states adopted resolutions at the Assembly in San Salvador in 2011 that committed to strengthening resilience against climate change impacts, promoting adaptation activities, and supporting greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts region-wide. These commitments align with global frameworks such as the UNFCCC outcomes and emphasize information sharing and capacity building.

Earlier OAS resolutions—including work through the Inter-American Council for Integral Development—created mechanisms like the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction and called for cooperation on research and mitigation of natural hazards. These efforts complement global disaster response systems and reinforce the need for regional coordination.

Disaster response requires coordination between national authorities, regional bodies, and international partners. For small island states and other vulnerable members, natural disasters threaten economic development, food security, and population displacement. The OAS can facilitate technical assistance, best-practice exchanges, and regional planning to enhance preparedness. Linking OAS efforts to frameworks like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction or specific UNFCCC agreements offers opportunities for practical cooperation.

Caribbean states tend to focus on the causes and effects of hurricanes—including climate change—and disaster risk financing for when natural disasters cause damage to their country's infrastructure. Central American states tend to focus on infrastructure resilience and emergency response systems. South American states tend to focus on climate policy and technology transfer. North American states tend to focus on capacity building and early-warning systems when discussing this topic.

Questions to Consider:

- Has your country experienced natural disasters in recent years?
- What are some steps your country is taking to address climate change?
- How might international collaboration help address these issues?
- How should the OAS work with other UN bodies to address natural disasters and their causes?
- How should member states balance consideration of human life against economic effects when addressing this topic?

OAS Documents

- OAS Climate Change & Sustainable Development Resolutions (2011)
- OAS AG/RES. 1682 (1999)

References

- <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/oas-general-assembly-concludes-with-resolutions-on-climate-change-sustainable-development/>
- <https://documentsearch.oas.org/search/classification?class=CIDI/RIMDS-II/DEC.&classNum=1&lang=e>
- <https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/ga-res99/eres1682.htm>
- <https://www.oas.org/csh/english/sisreports174.asp>

Topic III: Deforestation of the Amazon

The Amazon rainforest is the largest tropical forest on Earth and a crucial regulator of global climate. It sustains enormous biodiversity, plays a key role in carbon sequestration, and supports the water cycles that influence rainfall patterns far beyond South America.

Deforestation—driven by agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, and illegal logging—threatens these ecosystem functions. These activities diminish biodiversity, degrade soil and watershed health, and increase atmospheric carbon levels.

The Amazon basin is home to many indigenous communities that have stewarded forest landscapes for generations. Deforestation encroaches on these territories, threatening cultural traditions, livelihoods, and human rights. The OAS, through its human rights mechanisms, recognizes that environmental degradation is intertwined with social justice and indigenous rights, making forest protection a multifaceted policy concern.

At the hemispheric level, OAS declarations on environmental issues reflect member states' awareness of climate change and biodiversity loss. Climate change resolutions adopted at OAS general assemblies commit states to scientific cooperation and greenhouse gas reduction efforts. These commitments intersect with global agreements such as the Paris Agreement, demonstrating that regional action complements broader international environmental policy.

Amazon Basin states tend to focus on sustainable development and sovereignty with some international cooperation between them. Caribbean states tend to support climate change mitigation due to their vulnerable position and extensive natural disaster occurrences.

Questions to Consider:

- How might international cooperation help the issue of deforestation?
- How does your country approach deforestation and logging?
- How can OAS member states balance economic development with forest conservation?
- What mechanisms can strengthen enforcement against illegal deforestation?

- How does Amazon deforestation affect long-term regional climate goals?

UN Documents

- A/RES/67/200

References

- <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/67/200>
- <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/oas-general-assembly-concludes-with-resolutions-on-climate-change-sustainable-development/>