UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

2026 IAC Model UN Regional Conferences
Topic Set 1 – Standard Committee
Background Guide: Low Lying Lands Look to Leave

A Climate Change-Induced Boycott of the United Nations

COMMITTEE	United Nations Environment Programme
SCENARIO START DATE	2035
GUIDE TYPE	Standard Committee Background Guide

Purpose. This guide gives delegates the factual baseline, scenario assumptions, legal and institutional constraints, major policy choices, and country-level starting positions needed for substantive debate. Delegates remain responsible for researching their assigned country and may depart from the suggested posture where credible national interests support doing so.

1. Committee Mandate and the Nature of the Crisis

UNEP is the UN system's leading environmental authority, and the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) provides universal membership and high-level policy direction on environmental issues. In this simulation, delegates are convened under UNEP/UNEA procedures to respond to an institutional crisis: a coalition of low-lying states argues that the UN system has demanded decades of patience while allowing the physical conditions of their sovereignty to deteriorate. The coalition threatens to boycott UN meetings and suspend cooperation with selected UN programs unless major powers accept a new climate survival compact.

The committee is negotiating under duress

This is not simply a climate-resolution exercise. Delegates must decide what the UN is worth to states that believe multilateralism has failed them. A successful outcome must address emissions, adaptation, loss and damage, relocation, statehood, maritime rights, debt, and climate finance while also giving the boycott coalition a politically credible reason to remain inside the system.

2. Scenario Assumptions: What Is Fictional and Binding

The following assumptions are facts inside the simulation. Delegates should not debate whether they occurred; they should debate their consequences.

Scenario assumption	Binding premise
China and Taiwan	In 2029, the People's Republic of China successfully blockaded Taiwan. The crisis ended in political reunification under Beijing's control. By 2035, China is widely regarded as the world's leading power, with the largest ability to shape trade, infrastructure finance, industrial supply chains, and multilateral outcomes.
United States politics	The political reaction to Donald Trump culminated in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez winning the 2028 U.S. presidential election and reelection in 2032. In 2035 she is a lame-duck president and broadly unpopular. Republicans are also unpopular. Climate change has become much more salient because parts of the U.S. Southwest face extreme heat, water stress, insurance retreat, and episodic conditions approaching uninhabitability.
Demographic contraction	Population aging and low fertility intensify across East Asia and Europe. Governments face rising pension and health-care costs, slower labor-force growth, and growing voter hostility toward foreign aid. Even climate-sympathetic leaders face domestic pressure to spend at home.
Accelerating warming	From 2026 through 2035, the global annual average temperature is higher each year than the year before, and the year-on-year increase itself rises each year. This is intentionally more severe than a simple continuation of historical variability: it creates a global perception that climate risk is accelerating, not merely accumulating.

3. Real-World Baseline in 2026

The scenario begins from a real-world baseline that is already dangerous. UNEP's 2025 Emissions Gap Report assessed full implementation of then-current Nationally Determined Contributions as consistent with roughly 2.3-2.5°C of warming over the century, while current policies pointed closer to 2.8°C. The IPCC has warned that low-lying small island states face existential risks even with relatively modest sea-level rise, and that coastal flooding and erosion risks rise sharply as seas rise and storms interact with higher baselines.

The legal debate has also advanced. By 2025, the International Law Commission's work on sea-level rise reflected strong support for continuity of statehood and for preservation of lawfully established maritime zones despite physical changes caused by sea-level rise. This matters enormously in 2035: the coalition is not only asking where its people can live; it is demanding guarantees that relocation will not erase sovereignty, UN membership, fisheries rights, seabed resources, citizenship, or national identity.

4. The 2026-2035 Crisis Timeline

Year	Scenario development
2026	The world enters the scenario with the 1.5°C objective under severe pressure, climate finance below vulnerable-country expectations, and developed-country electorates increasingly focused on domestic affordability and aging.
2027	A sequence of destructive coastal storms and king-tide floods produces major reconstruction needs across several island and delta states. Donors pledge new adaptation money, but much of it is loans, reprogrammed aid, or slow to disburse.
2028	Climate becomes a central U.S. election issue amid Western drought, heat, and insurance-market retreat. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wins the presidency on a climate-investment and social-policy platform, but Congress remains fragmented and foreign climate transfers are politically constrained.
2029	China blockades Taiwan and achieves reunification. The geopolitical shock accelerates a shift toward a China-centered Asian order. China becomes even more central to solar, battery, grid, and critical-mineral supply chains, giving Beijing enormous leverage over the pace and cost of decarbonization.
2030	Low-lying states begin advocating a "sovereignty without dry land" doctrine: fixed maritime zones, preserved UN membership, portable citizenship, and pre-negotiated relocation rights. Several developed states support the principle but resist unlimited financial obligations.
2031	An adaptation-finance shortfall becomes a legitimacy crisis. Vulnerable states argue that repeated pledges are not bankable and demand automatic funding triggers tied to sea-level, storm, and heat metrics.
2032	President Ocasio-Cortez is reelected but with a reduced mandate. U.S. climate policy remains ambitious domestically, while Congress and voters increasingly oppose large foreign-aid packages. Europe and Japan face similar pension and health-care pressures.
2033	A cluster of low-lying states experiences permanent or near-permanent loss of housing, freshwater lenses, cropland, and critical infrastructure. Managed retreat shifts from contingency planning to active policy.

Year	Scenario development
2034	The “Coalition for National Survival” announces that the UN has become a forum for statements rather than survival. It issues a one-year ultimatum demanding binding political guarantees on survival finance, state continuity, maritime entitlements, and mobility.
2035	After another record year, coalition members threaten to boycott UNEA, the General Assembly high-level week, and selected UN reporting processes. They demand a Survival Compact before the end of the session.

5. Why a Boycott Is a Powerful Threat

Small and low-lying states cannot coerce major powers through military or market strength. Their leverage is normative and institutional. A coordinated walkout would dramatize the claim that the international system is illegitimate precisely where collective action is most necessary. It could fracture climate negotiations, embarrass major emitters, create precedents for other dissatisfied blocs, and weaken the UN’s claim to universal representation.

The coalition also has a credible argument that continued participation is costly. Small diplomatic services spend scarce personnel attending negotiations, preparing NDCs and adaptation plans, meeting reporting requirements, and applying repeatedly for fragmented funds. If the benefits remain uncertain, boycotting can be framed domestically as refusing to subsidize a process that manages their decline.

6. The Six Substantive Battles

Battle	Core question
Mitigation	How much faster should major emitters cut emissions, and should 2035 obligations be differentiated by historical responsibility, current emissions, per-capita emissions, income, or capacity?
Adaptation	Who pays for sea walls, land raising, desalination, resilient housing, ports, grids, freshwater systems, and managed retreat before disaster occurs?
Loss and damage	Should finance compensate irreversible harms and non-economic losses? Should payments be grants, insurance, debt swaps, levies, or assessed contributions?
Mobility and relocation	Do residents of states rendered partly uninhabitable gain special migration rights, labor access, residency, or a collective relocation option? Who preserves political self-government after relocation?
Statehood and maritime zones	Can a state retain UN membership, citizenship, EEZ rights, and sovereign legal personality even if its population relocates and its land becomes uninhabitable or submerged?
Institutional legitimacy	What enforcement, automaticity, monitoring, or governance reforms would convince the boycott coalition that promises made in 2035 will actually be honored?

7. The Demographic-Aid Trap

A distinctive feature of this scenario is that climate politics becomes more urgent at the same time foreign aid becomes harder to finance. Europe, Japan, South Korea, and China face older populations and shrinking workforces. Taxpayers are asked to fund pensions, health care, heat adaptation, grid upgrades, defense, and industrial policy at home. Even wealthy states that accept the moral case for climate finance may reject open-ended transfers abroad.

This changes the negotiation. Low-lying states should expect developed countries to prefer mechanisms that are capped, leveraged, automatic only under narrow conditions, or funded through revenue streams that do not look like ordinary foreign aid. Examples include aviation and shipping levies, fossil-fuel extraction charges, carbon-border revenues, debt swaps, multilateral development bank capital, catastrophe bonds, insurance pools, or mandatory private-sector contributions.

8. China as the Leading Power

China's role is intentionally ambiguous. As the world's leading power in 2035, Beijing has the resources and industrial capacity to provide adaptation infrastructure and clean-energy technology at scale. It can also portray itself as the champion of developing countries against Western historical emissions. But China is itself a major emitter, faces severe population aging, and will resist formulas that transform historical-responsibility language into unlimited Chinese liability. It is likely to favor infrastructure delivery, financial aid, and political recognition over legal reparations.

The 2029 Taiwan reunification also changes diplomatic behavior. States dependent on Chinese trade and finance may be reluctant to oppose Beijing. The United States and its allies may view climate finance as one of the few remaining arenas in which they can rebuild influence. Low-lying states can exploit this competition, but doing so risks turning survival finance into geopolitical patronage.

9. The United States in 2035

President Ocasio-Cortez is personally associated with ambitious climate policy, but the U.S. delegation is constrained by weak domestic popularity, a skeptical Congress, high domestic adaptation costs, and voter hostility to foreign transfers. The United States therefore enters the room unusually willing to support strong language on mitigation, statehood, and climate mobility, but wary of uncapped mandatory finance.

Washington may favor technology deployment, debt relief, Multilateral Development Bank reform, private capital guarantees, and targeted grants for existentially threatened states. It may also seek an agreement that restores U.S. moral leadership after China's geopolitical rise. The delegation's key challenge is credibility: low-lying states will ask whether a deal can survive the next U.S. administration.

10. Policy Menu for a 2035 Survival Compact

Instrument	What it does / main controversy
Automatic survival finance	Create a formula-based fund that disburses grants when objective thresholds are reached, reducing repeated political bargaining.
Climate vulnerability allocation	Replace or supplement income-based eligibility with vulnerability metrics so middle-income island states can access concessional funding.
Debt-for-resilience swaps	Cancel or restructure debt in exchange for verified adaptation investment; useful where debt service crowds out resilience spending.

Instrument	What it does / main controversy
Shipping / aviation levy	Generate a dedicated revenue stream outside national aid budgets. Disputes center on regressivity, trade impacts, and control of proceeds.
Fossil-fuel extraction levy	Charge upstream production based on carbon content, framed by advocates as responsibility-linked financing; major producers likely resist.
Multilateral Development Bank capital and guarantees	Use public balance sheets to mobilize multiples of private investment for resilient infrastructure, though the least profitable adaptation projects still require grants.
Sovereignty continuity protocol	Politically recognize continued statehood, UN membership, nationality, governmental authority, and treaty personality despite loss of habitable territory.
Fixed maritime zones	Recognize existing lawful baselines and maritime entitlements as preserved despite sea-level rise, protecting fisheries and resource rights.
Climate mobility compact	Create pre-agreed visa, residency, labor, and eventual citizenship options while preserving the right of affected peoples to maintain a distinct national community.
Territorial hosting / compact states	Allow a threatened state to lease or acquire land abroad for government, culture, schools, or settlement while maintaining legal continuity.
Adaptation technology commons	Pool patents, procurement, engineering standards, and bulk purchasing for desalination, microgrids, cooling, coastal defenses, and resilient housing.
Compliance and review mechanism	Annual public scorecards, independent verification, automatic replenishment formulas, and a dispute pathway designed to make promises durable across changes of government.

11. Country and Bloc Matrix

Country	Bloc	Core interests	Likely offer	Likely red line
China	Security Council Permanent Member / global leading power / Leader of Non-Western and developing countries	Preserve leadership, avoid reparations precedent, expand infrastructure influence	Large infrastructure and technology package; fixed maritime zones	Uncapped liability tied to historical/current emissions
United States	Security Council Permanent Member / second-strongest power / Leader of Western and developed countries	Rebuild climate leadership, constrain China, survive domestic politics	Strong mitigation language, mobility, statehood continuity, targeted finance	Treaty-like mandatory transfers that Congress cannot sustain
France	Security Council Permanent Member / Western and developed countries	EU unity, overseas territories, climate diplomacy, fiscal limits	Statehood/maritime continuity, EU finance package	Open-ended obligations detached from EU burden-sharing

Country	Bloc	Core interests	Likely offer	Likely red line
United Kingdom	Security Council Permanent Member / Western and developed countries	Financial-center role, climate diplomacy, aid constraints	Innovative finance, insurance, MDB reform	Large permanent aid commitments without private leverage
Russia	Security Council Permanent Member / Actively opposed to Western countries	Hydrocarbon interests, great-power sovereignty, geopolitical leverage	Selective adaptation aid and statehood language	Fossil-fuel phaseout or extraction levies targeting producers
Canada	Western and developed countries	Climate reputation, resource economy, fiscal caution	Carbon-finance tools, Indigenous/coastal adaptation knowledge	Producer levies perceived as punitive
Japan	Western and developed countries	Severe aging, Indo-Pacific credibility, technology exports	Infrastructure, disaster resilience, concessional finance	Large grant obligations amid pension pressure
Germany	Western and developed countries	EU climate leadership, industrial competitiveness, aging	EU-wide finance and clean-tech deployment	Unilateral German fiscal burden or unlimited transfers
Italy	Western and developed countries	Mediterranean climate impacts, debt constraints, migration sensitivity	Adaptation, mobility planning with controls	Automatic large aid assessments
Netherlands	Western and developed countries – also particularly vulnerable to sea level rise due to large amounts of land and population living below sea level	World-leading coastal engineering, trade, fiscal discipline	Engineering/knowledge compact, targeted funds	Poorly governed open-ended finance
India	Non-Western and developing countries / world's largest country by population	Development space, heat adaptation, equity, low per-capita responsibility arguments	Finance from richer emitters; technology transfer; state continuity	Mitigation caps viewed as constraining development
Brazil	Non-Western and developing countries	Climate diplomacy, Amazon leverage, development finance	Progressive finance formula and forest/climate package	Rules that ignore land-use contributions by developed states
Nigeria	Non-Western and developing countries	Development, population pressure, oil revenues, adaptation	Debt relief, transition finance, migration planning	Fossil levies without transition support
Egypt	Non-Western and developing countries	Delta vulnerability, debt, regional leadership	Adaptation grants, coastal protection, debt restructuring	Financing solely for Small Island Developing States that excludes vulnerable populous deltas
Turkey	Non-Western and developing countries	Regional influence, adaptation, fiscal constraints	Infrastructure and migration burden-sharing	Legal liability formula disadvantaging emerging economies

Country	Bloc	Core interests	Likely offer	Likely red line
Indonesia	Non-Western and developing countries	Coastal exposure, relocation experience, growth	Archipelagic adaptation, technology, blended finance	Constraints on development or maritime sovereignty
Pakistan	Non-Western and developing countries	Flood vulnerability, debt, climate justice	Loss-and-damage finance and debt relief	Eligibility rules based mainly on small population or island status
Maldives	Low-lying coalition	National survival, tourism economy, sovereignty	Automatic grants, statehood continuity, mobility options	Loans masquerading as climate support
Tuvalu	Low-lying coalition	Physical survival, culture, maritime rights	Strong legal continuity and guaranteed relocation pathways	Any suggestion statehood ends with territory loss
Kiribati	Low-lying coalition	Dispersed islands, fisheries Exclusive Economic Zone, relocation planning	Fixed maritime zones, land/relocation arrangements	Loss of Exclusive Economic Zone rights or forced assimilation
Marshall Islands	Low-lying coalition	Sovereignty, U.S. ties, nuclear legacy, sea-level risk	Special compact finance, statehood, mobility	Great-power rivalry subordinating island agency
Bahamas	Low-lying coalition	Storm risk, tourism, finance, debt	Insurance/reinsurance, grants, resilient infrastructure	Income metrics that disqualify vulnerable island states
Barbados	Low-lying coalition	Climate-finance reform leadership, debt vulnerability	Multilateral Development Bank reform, vulnerability metrics, automatic finance	Incremental funding without architecture reform
Bangladesh	Low-lying coalition	Mass delta exposure to rising sea levels, internal displacement, development	Large-scale adaptation and mobility support	A Small Island Developing State-only definition of existential vulnerability
Vietnam	Low-lying coalition	Mekong delta, manufacturing, food systems	Delta adaptation, finance, technology	Measures that threaten export competitiveness
Guyana	Low-lying coalition	Low coastal population belt, oil revenues, sovereignty	Coastal defense and innovative finance	Climate formulas that ignore vulnerability because of fossil income
Suriname	Low-lying coalition	Low coastal settlement, forests, debt	Forest/climate finance, coastal defense, debt relief	Complex access rules and loan-heavy support
Belize	Low-lying coalition	Coastal/tourism exposure, reef economy, debt	Blue finance, debt swaps, adaptation grants	Failure to value ecosystem loss

Country	Bloc	Core interests	Likely offer	Likely red line
Federated States of Micronesia	Low-lying coalition	Dispersed islands, U.S. compact ties, fisheries	Statehood, maritime zones, mobility, adaptation	Any erosion of sovereign fishing rights
Seychelles	Low-lying coalition	Island infrastructure, blue economy, middle-income trap	Vulnerability-based finance and ocean protection	GDP thresholds that block concessional support

12. Likely Negotiating Blocs

- Coalition for National Survival: Low-lying states insist that the agreement be judged by bankable finance, legal continuity, and mobility—not rhetoric. They are willing to walk out.
- China-centered development coalition: China and some developing states support large infrastructure and finance to developing countries, but resist Western-style liability formulas and intrusive conditionality.
- Climate-ambitious but fiscally constrained developed states: The United States, Germany, France, Japan, Canada, the UK, Italy, and the Netherlands may support strong climate action while seeking capped or leveraged finance.
- Large vulnerable developing states: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey and Vietnam argue that vulnerability cannot be monopolized by small islands; any fund must also address heat, floods, deltas, agriculture, and mass displacement.
- Hydrocarbon-resistance bloc: Russia and other fossil-dependent states will resist extraction levies, mandatory phaseout schedules, and liability language.

13. The Boycott Coalition’s Minimum Credible Package

For simulation purposes, a purely rhetorical resolution should not be enough to end the boycott threat. A credible package likely needs at least four of the following five elements:

- A multi-year finance mechanism with a predictable funding formula and substantial grant component.
- A clear political commitment to continuity of statehood and UN membership notwithstanding loss of habitable territory.
- Protection of existing lawful maritime zones and associated resource rights.
- Concrete mobility or relocation pathways negotiated before emergency displacement occurs.
- A mitigation package that demonstrates major powers are reducing the future hazard rather than financing endless adaptation to worsening conditions.

14. Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. What would persuade the low-lying coalition to suspend its boycott?
2. Should climate finance be based on historical emissions, current emissions, income, capacity, vulnerability, or a hybrid formula?
3. Can financing be made automatic without surrendering national budget authority?
4. Should middle-income but highly vulnerable island states qualify for grants and concessional finance?
5. What legal status should a state have if most or all of its population permanently relocates abroad?
6. Should existing maritime zones remain fixed even if coastlines retreat or islands disappear?
7. What rights should climate-displaced people receive in destination countries?
8. How can a relocated population preserve democratic self-government, language, culture, and citizenship?
9. How should China’s position as the leading power and major emitter affect burden-sharing?

10. How can the United States make promises that remain credible after President Ocasio-Cortez leaves office?
11. How should large vulnerable countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, and Vietnam fit into a system initially designed around low-lying island states?
12. What enforcement or review mechanism prevents the 2035 compact from becoming another unfulfilled pledge?

15. Delegate Research Checklist

- Your country's historical, current, and per-capita greenhouse-gas emissions; energy mix; and 2026 climate pledges.
- Exposure to sea-level rise, heat, drought, storms, water scarcity, or coastal flooding.
- Current position on climate finance, loss and damage, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.
- Foreign-aid budget and domestic demographic/fiscal pressures.
- Positions on the continuity of statehood and preservation of maritime zones under sea-level rise.
- Trade, security, and financial relationships with China and the United States.
- Whether your country would accept climate migrants, fund adaptation abroad, support levies, or recognize a deterritorialized state.
- One concession your country can make to stop the boycott and one demand it will not accept.

16. Suggested Resolution Architecture

- Article I - Emergency political declaration recognizing the existential character of sea-level rise for low-lying states.
- Article II - Mitigation acceleration package with differentiated 2035/2040 targets and clean-technology deployment.
- Article III - Survival Finance Facility with predictable revenues, grant windows, and vulnerability-based eligibility.
- Article IV - Adaptation and managed-retreat facility for water, housing, ports, health, energy, and ecosystem protection.
- Article V - State continuity and maritime-zone principles.
- Article VI - Climate mobility, residency, labor access, education, and cultural continuity arrangements.
- Article VII - Debt relief, insurance, and automatic disaster triggers.
- Article VIII - Transparency, independent review, replenishment, and consequences for non-performance.
- Article IX - Institutional compact under which boycott states resume full participation upon specified implementation milestones.

17. Selected Sources and Further Reading

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