

# FINISH THE SENTENCE CHALLENGE

DISASTER  
DEATHS  
ARE  
AVOIDABLE



**International Awareness Day for Avoidable Deaths (IAD4AD)**

2026



**MOUNT  
ROYAL  
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VOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS

**SENDAI FRAMEWORK**  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 2015-2030

**Finish the Sentence Challenge: Disaster Deaths Are Avoidable...**

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**About Avoidable Deaths Network (ADN):** ADN is a global-local membership network dedicated to reducing disaster deaths that are avoidable in low- and middle-income countries. ADN is a member of the Sendai Framework's Voluntary Commitment Platform and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Leading Edge Programme Networks and Partnerships Group.

## 1. Introduction

Every year, the International Awareness Day for Avoidable Deaths (IAD4AD) invites global campaigners to pause, reflect and take action on the fact that disaster deaths are avoidable. (DDAA).

As part of the global campaign, the Avoidable Deaths Network (ADN) launched the Finish the Sentence Challenge, inviting participants to reflect on the slogan DDAA, using the prompts of 'if', 'because', 'when' and 'due to'. Participants were encouraged to reflect on risk governance, systemic vulnerabilities and the everyday actions that can reduce avoidable mortality.

A secondary objective of the campaign is to promote global recognition of the slogan itself. According to UNDRR (2017, p. 8), disaster deaths refer to “the number of people who died during the disaster, or directly after, as a direct result of the hazardous event.” These deaths may be categorised as direct, indirect, or missing, each offering important insights into the preventability of disaster-related mortality.

## 2. Methodology

On 4 and 5 March 2026, 78 sentences were developed by 40 students at Mount Royal University, in Calgary, Canada. The Challenge was led by Dr. Ranjan Datta, with Prof. Nibedita Ray-Bennett as the resource person. Responses were transcribed verbatim by Dr. Biswajit Paul and were cleaned for sensemaking by Ms. Lauren MacLeod.

## 3. Results

### 1. Disaster deaths are avoidable if...

1. disaster policies, plans and education are put in place for individuals, families, communities, and emergency and healthcare interventions.
2. there are better coordination and communication.
3. infrastructure and resources are implemented to prevent disaster deaths.
4. there is access to immediate healthcare.
5. preparation is conducted.
6. education is provided on what to do in case of a disaster.

### Finish the Sentence Challenge: Disaster Deaths Are Avoidable...

7. policy focus, lack of detail, and inadequate tools can be improved, as these factors contribute to disaster deaths.
8. support for low- and middle-income countries can be improved, along with technology and healthcare systems.
9. there are resources that can but put in place to prevent them.
10. governments take action, implement better policies, and create more resources.
11. proper tools are used and precautions are taken.
12. action is taken to prevent them from happening.
13. awareness, knowledge and precautions are strengthened.
14. we spread awareness and make an effort to prevent them.
15. resources are equally distributed.
16. policies change to support those that need, or may need, it.
17. the tools used are adequate for communication, coordination and collaboration.
18. there is a shift away from profit, instead to livelihoods.
19. those responding knows what the most vulnerable actually need.
20. education prioritizes accurate distribution of information.
21. racial inequality and the pressure to conform to whiteness are dismantled.
22. legal systems which justify racism (Indian Act) are dismantled.
23. institutional racism is addressed.
24. individual, institutional, and governmental actions work together to eliminate structural inequalities.
25. there are no gaps in knowledge, missing details or a lack of tools.
26. governments care to help communities.
27. remove human limitations, take out geographical realities, and the combination of environmental, social and political factors, as natural hazards can be unpredictable.
28. governments and communities work together to reduce risk.
29. governments and communities invest in disaster risk reduction and education.
30. the community help each other to uphold emergency procedure and promote/ raise awareness.

### 2. Disaster deaths are avoidable because...

31. we have the knowledge, resources and medicine to treat/ prevent injuries or natural hazards from causing enough destruction to lose lives.
32. the government has procedures in place to help those who can't help themselves.
33. deaths caused by disasters is a lack of adequate planning from government resources to civilians. For example, the government should have fool-proof steps and plans put in place for disasters based on the location.
34. early warning systems, emergency planning, and public education and awareness can be implemented.
35. proper preparation and safety measures can be implemented before the hazard strikes.

### Finish the Sentence Challenge: Disaster Deaths Are Avoidable...

36. most disasters cannot be prevented, but most deaths can be reduced or avoided through effective action.
37. they occur as the result of negligence.
38. communities can prepare and respond early.
39. they are preventable and inevitable with use of resources.
40. of global collaboration through academics and practitioners.
41. policies and medical treatments can be utilized.
42. you can prepare early for all situations.
43. studying disasters helps individuals respond more effectively, and early warnings and evacuation plans improve survival.
44. inadequate tools and lack of resources can be addressed through better planning and investment.
45. governments can design more suitable strategies for all income groups.
46. they can be better managed with timely action.
47. most deaths happen due to lack of preparation, planning, and protection.
48. we are living in the “modern” era, so all other factors are not an excuse to label deaths as unavoidable.
49. they occur due to a lack of preparation. Why not wear protect gear when planting seeds in snake bite season?

### 3. Disaster deaths are avoidable when...

50. governing bodies prioritise the distribution of resources and think critically about preventative measures.
51. people have warning systems and emergency plans.
52. resources are shared appropriately, government intervention is available, and people have the knowledge to avoid/ get themselves out of dangerous situations.
53. there is government intervention, more resources and knowledge, and more people have access to healthcare.
54. the government changes policies to better help, support and protect their people.
55. people take extra precautions.
56. communities have equal access to resources, infrastructure, healthcare, and decision-making power before, during, and after crises.
57. preparedness measures (including medical) can be taken ahead of high-risk seasons (such as snakebites in monsoon season).
58. resources required to prevent them are affordable and available for everyone.
59. they fall into the category of indirect or disaster-related, rather than direct deaths caused by physical impact of a hazard. For example, they may depend on the timeliness of medical intervention, snake bites, drowning, etc.
60. governments change weak disaster governance measures to not favour social hierarchy and harmful colonial ideals.

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61. government systems are set in place so that there is coordination, communication and collaboration.
62. visibility is raised about direct and indirect deaths.
63. preventable measures are put in place.
64. policymakers are willing to provide resources and reduce impact of borders that directly impact marginalized communities. There is the idea that the people being impacted could prepare better by wearing better protection or changing practices. I would say that this is a privileged take because not everyone has access to protective clothing or compromising the field.
65. the government changes policies to better help, support and protect their people.
66. when people take extra precautions
67. the government, community, and individuals are well prepared for any circumstances - well implemented emergency procedures.

### 4. Disaster deaths are avoidable due to...

68. the existence of human rights.
69. the ability of people to predict events.
70. the improvement of social equality.
71. early warning systems.
72. time, resources and disaster risk measures, making disaster deaths amenable avoidable, preventable, and governance related.
73. improvement within prevention factors and a better sense of equality and resources, especially in poor countries.
74. better access to families of various living conditions, incomes, etc.
75. available resources and knowledge - these events have been happening for a while (centuries) and we are an adaptable people.
76. better planning, education, and infrastructure.
77. better infrastructure, planning and risk reduction.
78. ongoing awareness knowledge gained.

## 4. Findings

Across the responses, students consistently emphasised that disaster deaths are avoidable when strong governance, equitable resource distribution, and effective preparedness measures are in place. Participants highlighted the need for clear policies, coordinated communication, early warning systems, accessible healthcare and community-centred education to reduce both direct and indirect deaths. Many responses pointed to structural issues such as inadequate tools, weak disaster governance, social inequality, and institutional racism, as underlying contributors to avoidable mortality, particularly in low-

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and middle-income countries. Students stressed that preventable deaths arise from gaps in planning, lack of protective infrastructure, insufficient public awareness, and failures to prioritise vulnerable populations. Overall, the findings show a shared belief that with appropriate policies, timely action, inclusive decision-making, and investment in risk reduction, most disaster deaths can be prevented, whether caused by hazards, delayed medical care, or systemic neglect.