

Model United Nations of the Far West

Tips for Drafting More Effective Resolutions

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Mechanics

There are certain mechanics that are followed in UN resolutions; some of these are the result of using British rather than American style.

- Standard resolutions are only one grammatically correct sentence long; however it is a complex sentence. The exception is when Member States have agreed on a “Conclusion” (as in the World Summit Outcome adopted in 2005), a Convention (e.g. The Convention on Torture), or a Declaration (e.g. the Ministerial Declaration adopted during the High-level Segment at ECOSOC).
- The terms “Member States” and “Governments”, when referring to the members of the United Nations are capitalized.
- Certain words have British spelling, although it isn’t necessary to do this in MUNFW resolutions: “favour”, “neighbour”, “organisation”, “programme”. etc. The only exception would be the use of the word “programme” when referring to specific UN entities – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), or the broader category of United Nations “funds and programmes”.
- Please note, as used in the preceding bullet, commas and periods appear outside quotation marks, unlike American usage. Also, UN style is to not use a comma at the end of a series – e.g. “apples, oranges and bananas”, not “apples, oranges, and bananas”.
- The names of UN bodies, and the term “United Nations” itself are spelled out not abbreviated unless the acronym for an organization is part of a formal title – e.g., “The UNHCR 2004 Process”, which was part of a resolution adopted in 2003.
- “Secretary-General” rather than “Secretary General.”
- Other common mistakes include whether to use “that” or “which” (normally “which” starts a dependent clause set off by commas), the correct use of the words “affect” and “effect”, the correct use of the words “insure”, “ensure”, and “assure”, and the correct use of the word “economical” – if something is economical it can be done for less expense; “economical” does not refer to “social, political, or economic policies”.
- When calling on the United Nations to do something, the phrase needs to be qualified – e.g., the United Nations system, United Nations organizations, relevant United Nations entities, actors, etc. The UN as a whole can’t do something; various elements of the UN can; thus resolutions need to specify, even if in very general terms, which element of the United Nations is being referred to or asked to do something.

- Members of the United Nations are referred to as “Member States”, rather than nations or countries. The term “countries” is used only with a qualifying adjective or prepositional phrase such as “affected countries,” “donor countries,” “developing countries,” “countries of origin,” “countries of the region”; the term “countries” is not capitalized.

Formatting

Headings

If you are in one of the General Assembly’s Main Committee (First, Second, etc.), the resolution heading should still be “The General Assembly”, not “The First Committee”. Your committee is part of the General Assembly, and it is the General Assembly plenary that must eventually adopt the resolution before it becomes official.

Resolutions in the Security Council, ECOSOC and any of the specialized agencies and commissions are addressed to the body in the heading, e.g., the Economic and Social Council

Initiating Phrases

Member States are very particular about their initiating phrases. On many occasions we have observed delegates deliberate over the initiating phrases for over an hour – Urges vs. Encourages, Welcomes vs. Takes note of – and others where the difference may seem less obvious. The initiating phrase or word needs to make sense in the context of the paragraph. Please refer to the list of initiating phrases for Preambular Clauses and Operative Clauses following the sample resolution.

Preambular Clauses

Preambular clauses refer to the background of the issue (what considerations led to the proposals), cite related decisions (other resolutions on the question or on related issues) if any, and other relevant documentation (reports of other UN bodies or of the SG) if any.

- A preambular paragraph usually expresses some sort of philosophical thought or historical background regarding the issue.
- They begin by recalling previous resolutions that give the general context of the proposal. The preamble also refers to reports that have been examined by the Assembly or in connection with the issue.
- If subsidiary organs have been involved in the issue, or if a conference or other activities connected with the issue have taken place, these may be mentioned in the preamble.
- The preamble further describes various aspects of the issue, the reasons why the proposal is being presented, the needs being identified, what may be required to address them and by whom.

- The preamble may also reflect recent actions or decisions and processes by relevant international and regional organizations. (See Agreed Language below.)

Operative Clauses

The operative part expresses positions or decisions the Assembly is taking or calls for action on the part of various entities. An operative clause makes pronouncements – the views of the Assembly on an issue, defining or characterizing certain situations:

- If a report was considered, the GA may welcome or take note of the report.
- An operative may invite certain actions by Member States, subsidiary organs, specialized agencies and other institutions of the UN system.
- The Assembly may request the preparation of reports by the Secretary-General or reports from subsidiary bodies that should be considered at a specific session and/or request that the Secretary-General provide the services required for some subsidiary bodies to perform their work.
- The Assembly may decide whether a given topic should continue to be discussed in future sessions and at what intervals; by doing so, it inscribes the issue on the agenda of a future session.
- Operative paragraphs also take note of the pronouncements or decisions taken by other international organizations or forums.

Citation of Resolutions

There is a correct way to cite resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and ECOSOC.

- General Assembly Resolutions are documented as A/Res/session number/number of resolution. Thus A/Res/58/153 would be resolution 153 adopted during the 58th session (2003) of the General Assembly. However, normally if a resolution is referred to in the body of a GA Resolution, it is referred to as “resolution 58/153” with the word resolution spelled out. This might also be followed by the date on which the resolution was adopted.
- If a resolution has something like “L.6, this means it was considered by a Committee but not yet formally adopted by the General Assembly itself (“Ls” are the Letter applied to draft resolutions that are being considered in a Committee).
- The Security Council refers to its resolutions as “resolution 1325 (2000) meaning resolution number 1325, adopted in the year 2000.
- ECOSOC refers to its resolutions as resolution 2007/5 meaning resolution number 5, adopted during the 2007 session.
- When referring to resolutions previously adopted by other bodies the paragraph would state the name of the other body followed by the normal pattern: General Assembly resolution 58/153, Security Council resolution 1325 (3000), or ECOSOC resolution 2007/5.
- Reports of bodies appear without the word “resolution” or the symbol “Res.” The citation includes the session number or year followed by the number of the

report: e.g., A/62/12; S/2000/2, or E/2007/70 for the GA, Security Council or ECOSOC respectively.

Also, citing a Press Release should not substitute for citing a resolution or official document – they are summaries, not official records, and they are not necessarily verbatim – a quote from a press release may not be the actual quote unless it is listed within quotation marks. A Press Release can be paraphrased in a speech where you could say “as the Minister of Xanadu suggested in his remarks to the General Assembly...”.

Agreed Language

- Agreed language can be a very valuable resource for drafting resolutions on agenda items with a long history of UN involvement. Resolutions once adopted, form a base of collective agreement or at the very least understanding among the Membership.
- Agreed language is very difficult for Member States to argue against; if they agreed to it last year then they are more likely to accept it again this year. The more recent the language, the more weight it carries among the membership.
- When in doubt or when faced with an intractable situation, going back to agreed language could be a safe way out of tense situations and allow Member States to continue discussion on other areas where progress can be made.
- To identify Agreed Language, go back to the most recent resolutions that that dealt with the agenda item or similar agenda items. When writing UN resolutions, plagiarism is not an issue; quote the preambular/operative clause in its entirety when citing it in the resolution.

Creation of New Bodies

Many delegations want to try and create a new committee or body to deal with some of the issues before the conference. There are two common mistakes that occur in these efforts.

- First, many times a similar body already exists or there is a body that is already considering various aspects of the issue. In these cases, it would not make sense to reinvent the wheel. Check to make sure no other body has jurisdiction. If an existing body is no longer able to carry out the mandate, it must be made clear that the body can no longer fulfill this mandate, hence the new resolution and new body or assignment.
- Second, if a new body is going to be created, the resolution must ensure that it can function. This means that the resolution must include statements on who the members of the body will be, how (and by whom) they are selected, when it will meet, how it will be funded, if a report is required who will research and write the report, and when it is expected, etc.

Mandates

When thinking about authorizing or mandating some body to do something, make sure that body actually has the authority to do it, or make sure that some other body does not have such a mandate. For instance, asking the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to lead the development effort in Guinea-Bissau would not be part of the UNHCR's mandate, which is limited to helping refugees, returnees, stateless persons, and, in some cases, internally displaced persons (IDPs); development functions would come under the purview of UNDP or one of the other UN development agencies. This does not preclude trying to address such an issue, but the UN bodies, and, to an even greater extent, Member States are very sensitive about expanding the mandate of a UN body. Further, in many cases it would require a Charter amendment.

Example:

- (from a resolution on “alternatives to sanctions”) “strongly supports the International Criminal Court (ICC) to have more oversight on the matter,” – the ICC has jurisdiction only over certain crimes committed by individuals (genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes); only the Security Council can establish sanctions.

Further, the UN cannot mandate anything to bodies outside of the UN; the Security Council resolutions are binding on Member States. The GA can “Request”, “Urge,” “Encourage”, etc., but it cannot order or mandate that NGOs, the Bretton Woods Institutions, or specialized agencies (e.g. WHO, ILO, IOM, FAO) do something.

Conventions

Conventions first appear before the GA in proper resolution form. They are adopted by consensus or by a signatory process in which each Member State is called upon to sign the document.

Brevity and Clarity

- It is desirable, when possible, to keep resolutions succinct. However, there is no rule or decision limiting the length of a resolution.
- Resolutions that are both concise and clear carry more weight than resolutions that are confusing or contradictory.
- Keep in mind that resolutions constitute an official pronouncement by the Membership. This could include both a common view set forth as well as the directives to Member States, UN agencies, regional commissions, etc.
- The clearer your instructions are, the easier it will be for UN secretariat and UN agencies to deliver on the directive.
- Member States should consider merging certain preambular and/or operative paragraphs that include similar ideas.

Example:

Encourages Member States to work to maintain and increase the number of women in local and national assemblies, as well as in high-level position in private corporations;

Calls upon Member States to change existing structures and assumptions about women and to actively increase the number of women participating in leadership positions and decision-making processes;

Urges Member States to provide equal opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes including economic decision-making;

Could be merged into:

Urges Member States to promote equal opportunities for women to participate in political decision-making processes, including local and national assemblies, as well as economic decision-making, including high level positions in the private sector.

The meaning of some paragraphs is often obscured by lack of clarity. Here are examples of paragraphs from resolutions turned in for an MUNFW Session that need further clarification.

- *Expresses* its appreciation to both committees designated to ensure and regulate compliance with Conventions - What committees? Although in some cases the phrase “both committees” may be clear, it wasn’t in this particular resolution. Similarly, the UN has adopted a number of Conventions – which ones are being referred to here?
- *Urges* assistance to children exposed to HIV/AIDS; - What kind of assistance (medical, financial, psychological counseling)? And who is supposed to provide the assistance?
- *Urges* the international community to mandate cooperation from Israel, - What kind of cooperation? Who within the international community is supposed to ensure this? The international community is not a “body” that can mandate anything.
- *Expresses* its full support to the report but has some recommendations in terms of security and development; - What report? What recommendations?
- *Authorizes* the United Nations to assist States in tracking the illicit trade of small arms; (or *Authorizes* the General Assembly to assist States in tracking the illicit trade of small arms;) – In each case, assuming this comes from the First Committee where the topic would be discussed, you are the UN; you are the General Assembly. You don’t authorize yourself (or even worse, “*Authorize*” the First Committee) to do something. And in the case of “*Authorizing* the UN”, you would have to specify which part of the UN you were authorizing – the UN as a whole can’t do anything; bodies of the organizations within the UN, agencies or commissions can do things.
- *Reminds* the General Assembly of the necessity to ensure fair treatment of all Member States regardless of size; - Apparently size doesn’t matter, but what is

meant here by “fair treatment”? In what context? Also, the General Assembly would not remind itself of something.

- (In a Security Council resolution) *Decides* to remain actively involved in the project, - This was an attempt to paraphrase the last paragraph of most Security Council resolutions. The standard phrase is *Decides* to remain actively seized of the matter”. This means that the SC still has the matter on its agenda, and the GA may not pass resolutions on the matter unless the GA did so through something along the lines of the Uniting for Peace Resolution. This is a very unusual action that has only been used twice in 60 years, so it is not one that delegates should resort to at the Model UN.

Editing

Some resolutions just need to be read more carefully to clarify the language itself. Here are some examples from actual MUNFW resolutions:

- *Commends* the aid that many nations have given to the developing world; - We might want to commend the nations that gave the aid, but we would not commend the aid itself.
- *Determined* to live in a place free from terrorism in its entire entirety: - The problem here should be self-evident, evidently.
- *Aware* that specific sanctions must be approached by relevant United Nations bodies; - We can see those bodies marching up to the sanctions as we read.
- *Recommends* that steps be taken by the UN Charter to... - This is similar to the above problem. The UN Charter is a document, it isn't capable of walking or doing anything else. Steps could be taken according to the UN Charter, but they would have to be taken by some other entity.
- *Supports* the shift to a new kind of economic warfare; - Aside from implying that there was an old kind of economic warfare, this is not language that the UN would use; if nothing else, the concept is too vague.
- *Expresses* concern at the potential responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security; - What does this mean?
- *Affirming* the intolerable violation of human rights; - Do we really want to affirm violations of human rights, intolerable or not?
- *Encourages* States to be suspicious of any strange activities brought on by organizations; - Most States are suspicious of strange activities, but what are “strange activities” and what organizations are we referring to?
- *Strongly emphasizing* that it is important to maintain the cultural people from vanishing; - Perhaps raising the question, “Where have you gone, Will Shakespeare”.

Consensus

- The goal of all committees should be to adopt resolutions by consensus. Consensus resolutions carry the weight of the entire UN and as such provide a clear directive to UN agencies, national governments, and civil society as to the will of the body.

- Consensus is not mandatory. It is the prerogative of any Member State to request a vote if they so desire.
- Consensus is desirable because when a resolution is adopted as such it creates a platform for further action by the membership.
- It is up to the Member States to determine when an issue could best be served by a strong resolution that does not receive the full support of membership or a weaker resolution that receives a consensus.
- A Member State may join consensus without fully agreeing with the substantive content of the resolution. Member States should take national interest into consideration when determining their position on an individual draft resolution, but may decide that accepting a resolution (not standing in the way of consensus) might enhance their diplomatic standing and thus be in their national interest.

Bloc Negotiations

Once the draft resolution is on paper, the Member State proposing it would usually try to ascertain what measure of support the proposal would have. On some issue, such as emergency humanitarian assistance, it may be relatively easy to obtain support, but there are other questions that depending on their complexity and sensitivity might require a lot of time and effort to negotiate.

As a first step, the original sponsor might wish to consult with like-minded countries or members of a regional group. The original sponsor might also wish to consult donor countries, depending on the proposals contained in the draft resolutions.

The original sponsor might decide to sponsor the draft resolution alone or invite other Member States to become co-sponsors. A Member State does not need to co-sponsor a resolution in order to lend its support to that resolution.

If during the process of negotiations changes are made to the draft resolution, all co-sponsors must be kept informed and must agree with the changes or, if not, might withdraw their sponsorship. The sponsors, for whatever reasons, may decide that they wish to limit the number of sponsors. This is their right. They also decide which countries to invite to become sponsors of the draft resolution. But one sponsor is all that is needed to submit a draft resolution officially.