

MINI-MODEL UN TOOLKIT

UNEA SIMULATION

ANNEX: 2) UNDERSTANDING CONSENSUS

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS
WORLD FEDERATION OF UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATIONS



United Nations
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In order to reach consensus, delegates have to make their best efforts to find common ground. In this context, finding common ground means focusing on shared values or goals, even amid differing views. This often involves compromise, especially when it comes to the debate of amendments. Debating amendments is never just a matter of adopting or rejecting the amendment as proposed.

During the debate of amendments, the delegate who proposed an amendment to the text is given an opportunity to explain why others should accept it. **If there are no objections**, the proposed change to the text is added and the delegates move on to the next amendment. **If there are objections by one or more delegates**, those opposing explain their reasons.

Debate continues until delegates **agree on a revised version that addresses objections** or **the proposer withdraws the amendment in the spirit of consensus**. If the debate goes on for too long and delegates do not seem to be moving toward a consensus, the amendment should be bracketed and then returned to after all of the amendments have been discussed.

No changes can be made in the text until it is clear that all delegates agree. Not all delegates are going to be actively involved in every debate, but all must reach an agreement before the change is put into the text. The Facilitator is responsible for making sure that no objections remain on any proposed revisions to the amendment and then making all agreed upon changes to the text. If objections persist, negotiations continue until consensus is reached.

Consensus is not about agreeing 100% with every part of the text. It is a negotiated outcome where all countries accept a decision without a formal vote, even if some recommendations within the resolution lack full support from every country. **A consensus decision typically means no delegation actively objects when formally adopting a decision after negotiations are complete.** If delegates disagree with specific paragraphs, they can make a statement called an **Explanation of Position** before or after the adoption of a resolution, where they can express their concerns or disagreements with specific parts of the resolution, while still agreeing to adopt it by consensus. During this statement, they can indicate which paragraph(s) their government wants to disassociate from. This allows them to support the resolution overall while protecting their own national interests. The Explanation of Position can also be used to express disappointment over removed text or withdrawn amendments during negotiations.

Consensus-building involves three perspectives:

- A. The Delegate(s) who proposed a change
 - B. The Delegate(s) who opposes an amendment
 - C. Neutral delegate(s)
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A. Delegate who proposed a change

If a proposed change is accepted without opposition, the next step is to make the change a permanent part of the text and move on to the next amendment.

But when one or more delegates oppose the change, the delegate has a few options:

Option 1: Defend the amendment if objections seem unconvincing. But if objections remain widespread, consider withdrawing the amendment in the spirit of consensus. If a delegate agrees to withdraw their amendment they can state their disappointment in removing the amendment from consideration in an Explanation of Position before or after the resolution is adopted.

Option 2: Revise the amendment to address concerns raised. This is called a **sub-amendment to the amendment**. This is the most common way to reach consensus and often involves being open to making compromises in the spirit of consensus.

Delegates that support the amendment should follow the same guidelines when making recommendations to the consensus process. As mentioned above, reaching consensus requires delegates to make their best efforts to find common ground. Delegates who support the amendment can make suggestions on how the amendment could be revised even if they did originally propose it.

B. Delegate who opposes an amendment

Delegates who oppose an amendment also have options:

Option 1: Explain their objection. If they find parts of the proposal agreeable, they should highlight them to build common ground.

Option 2: Suggest a sub-amendment that resolves their concerns.

Sometimes consensus emerges by shifting focus to a broader issue. For example, in a simulation on biodiversity loss, one delegate proposed creating a website to collect biodiversity data. Other delegates opposed the amendment because they felt that these websites already existed. One of the opposing delegates asserted that the real issue is the accessibility of this data to all countries. Another delegate stated they should also be concerned about whether the current information was up-to-date. The group found consensus by focusing on data accessibility and accuracy—something they all cared about. Opponents should always seek common ground and propose alternatives.

C. Neutral Delegates

Even without a strong stance, neutral delegates play a key role. They should listen to both sides, identify areas of agreement, and suggest alternate versions that could unify the group.

