

MINI-MODEL UN TOOLKIT

UNEA

SIMULATION

*ANNEX: 3) HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE
SIMULATION*

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



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1. HISTORY OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation founded in 1945 after the Second World War by 51 countries committed to creating a better and safer world. Today, the UN has grown to 193 member countries (Member States). The UN has 3 pillars of work:

1. Human Rights
2. Peace and Security
3. Sustainable Development

The history of the decision-making process in Intergovernmental Organisations is complex and evolved gradually. The information below highlights some of the important milestones of this history.

The League of Nations and Its Legacy

After World War I, the League of Nations (founded by 42 Members) marked a new era of global diplomacy and an attempt to move away from war and conflict. The League made decisions about policies, actions, or judgments that had real consequences for members of the League. The unanimity rule of this intergovernmental organization required all members of the council to agree to make a decision. This meant any one country could block any action by voting “no” — even if all the others voted “yes”. It was thought that this would preserve the legitimacy and unity of the League of Nations.

As the League grew in size, the unanimity requirement became more difficult because any country could prevent a decision from being taken with one simple objection. This often paralyzed decision-making, especially during crises. Scholars have been fairly consistent in seeing the unanimity rule as one of the weaknesses that contributed to the League of Nations’ inability to act decisively.

1945 | The UN Charter and the Rejection of Unanimity

The UN Charter rejected the unanimity rule in favor of majority voting in the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and a qualified majority voting (including the veto) in the Security Council. Matters in the Security Council require 9 votes including all five permanent members—the famous veto system.

This system balanced effective decision-making with the realities of post-war power. It allowed the UN to act more decisively than the League while still protecting the interests of the world’s major powers.

History and Structure of the UN Environment Assembly

The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It meets twice a year to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. It adopts resolutions and decisions on pressing environmental issues. The Assembly is the governing body of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEA reviews and approves UNEP's budget and work program as well as monitors UNEP's performance.

UNEA was created in June 2012 after decades of international efforts, which started at the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. It is composed of all 193 Member States of the UN, who work together to create a coherent system of international environmental governance. It is led by a Bureau, composed of ten Ministers of the Environment, and its President. Both the President and the Bureau serve for a term of two years.

Consensus Today

Consensus in the UN today refers to a negotiated outcome in which all countries agree to a decision without a formal vote, even if not every country fully supports the outcome. A consensus decision typically means no one actively objects, though some may disassociate from parts of an outcome document before or after it is adopted.

Consensus has advantages: it promotes unity and increases the legitimacy of decisions. But there are trade-offs: it takes longer to reach consensus, and it often leads to compromises that dilute the text.

What This Means for this Model UN mini-simulation

As delegates, you collaborate to find solutions to plastic pollution that mirror the real-world decision-making process. Here's how to apply this to your deliberations:

- **Strive for inclusive language:** look for common ground, and avoid divisive language.
- **Build coalitions with like-minded countries:** outcomes are determined by the alliances you form and your ability to negotiate shared language.

Final Takeaway

The international system has never settled on a single way to make decisions, but flexibility, inclusivity, and compromise are priorities. Learning to navigate different decision-making rules—and understanding the reasons behind them—will make you a stronger delegate.

