

## Chairing a Conference

The Bureau at the head of the committee must juggle two primary responsibilities – first, to simulate as realistically as possible the true functioning of their committee, and second, to provide as rewarding an experience for delegates as possible. This guide will attempt to outline the tasks and attitudes required to achieve both, with the overt and underlying theme remaining the idea of the Chairman as the servant of the conference. The tasks of a PGA/chairperson, VPGA/vice-chairperson, rapporteur and committee secretary can be divided into procedural roles and substantive roles.

### I. Chair:

The Chair is the representative of the committee – they make statements on behalf of the committee as a whole, to the committee as well as to other stakeholders, including the media, the Secretariat, the organizers and others. It is essential, thus, that in this role they speak and act impartially and not seek to promote any national or personal views. They must treat all delegates equally and impartially, and not appear to favour any party or any side of a contentious issue.

It is also crucial to note that final decision-making power, the Chair's discretion, as it is sometimes known, is not absolute. In case of delegates disagreeing with the Chair's ruling, they have the right to appeal to the Chair's decision and if contested again, put the question to a vote before the committee. All decisions by the Chair are subject to the committee approval - this properly reflects the balance of power between the bureau and the country representatives. However, this action can sometimes be needlessly antagonistic – chairs should attempt to avoid them by explaining the rationale behind contentious decisions, and delegates should ensure that this is used only as a last resort.

### Procedural Role:

1. Allocation of agenda items to different GA committees as a part of the General Committee
2. (In MUNs) Preparing an extensive version of the Secretary General's report on agenda items as a background guide for delegates
3. Preparing the Programme of Work for the committee and ensuring that allocation and use of time facilitates completing the agenda
4. Is elected at the beginning of the first session of the conference
5. Calling the committee to order at the beginning of every session and giving a brief description of the work at hand,
6. Presenting the committee with the agenda topics as per the General Committee report which is accepted by the Plenary,
7. Introducing and explaining different phases of committee work while entering and closing each – for example, "we will now resume debate on

- agenda item 1, on which the committee had reached such and such point in negotiations”,
8. Moderating debate, recognizing speakers, managing the Speakers’ List, ruling on points of order, and maintaining decorum in the proceedings,
  9. Conducting voting procedures, primarily procedural, but substantive as well as and when required,
  10. Managing allocation of time by limiting speaking time, ensuring all delegates’ views are registered, and facilitating the completion of the committee assigned work,
  11. Managing the decision-making phase by carefully explaining the procedural situation, maintaining transparency in the process, and ensuring accurate representation of delegations’ wishes, and finally declaring that a resolution has been adopted by consensus,
  12. Conducting substantive voting on amendments and draft resolutions if the committee fails to negotiate a text to be adopted by consensus,
  13. Planning the next day’s work in terms of time and goals on the basis of the work done so far,
  14. Closing the committee sessions and moving to Plenary, or closing the conference, with closing remarks including a summary of events, felicitations to delegates etc.

### Substantive Role:

All of the Chairperson’s substantive activities and interventions should be aimed at facilitating negotiation and achieving consensus in their committee. The Chairman’s responsibility is not only to manage the Committee’s meetings so that they operate smoothly, but also to take responsibility for seeing that the Committee produces a result that is immediately acceptable to all, or at least an overwhelming majority of delegates. The Chairperson is the holder of ultimate responsibility with regards to the success of the committee, i.e., achieving a consensus decision.

1. Making a flexible plan outlining the most desirable outcome for the committee on an agenda topic and how to achieve it, which evolves as the committee progresses
2. Working towards achieving an outcome document that is more than the sum of the wishes of all delegates, but is also an outcome that is coherent, legally and technically correct and ideally one that will prove sustainable both politically and in terms of its practical implementation
3. Helping the committee along its way towards a desirable outcome, including through increasingly direct action if it shows signs of stalling or losing its way
4. Resources available to the Chair include:
  - a. Rules of Procedure
  - b. Keeping a positive and cooperative atmosphere by keeping antagonistic voices to the minimum
  - c. Allowing enough time for informal consultations



- d. Using the persuasive power and prestige of their position to positively influence representatives towards cooperation
- 5. Methods the Chair can use include:
  - a. Suggesting consultations
  - b. Appointing a Friend of the Chair, or facilitator to conduct consultations, including Vice-Chairs, Under Secretaries-General or others
  - c. Holding series of separate consultations
  - d. Carefully explaining the purpose, context and past history of international consideration of the issue and making suggestions on how to approach work
  - e. Taking on the role of intermediary or 'broker of agreement' between delegations that are at odds, to help them find a satisfactory solution to their differences. This intermediary role can consist of carrying messages between the protagonists, offering explanations for their respective positions, urging understanding and a willingness to compromise, making suggestions to both parties as to how they can act to advance their objectives and also as to what is realistically achievable.
  - f. Taking on an escalating range of roles in ensuring that constructive texts appear on time. These can range from a compilation of agreed texts and square bracketed alternatives proposed by delegations to provide a starting point for negotiation, through the Chairman's 'non-paper' to stimulate thinking, to a 'Chairman's text.' The last is a proposal by the Chairman based on his/her assessment of what may be acceptable to the conference in the light of the foregoing debate and negotiation, supplemented by the Chairman's consultations.

## II. Vice-chair

The role of the Vice-Chair is to support the Chair in their functioning, with both procedural and substantive assistance. They must take over all the functions of the Chair in their absence, in an effort to keep the committee's workflow smooth and uninterrupted.

## III. Rapporteur

The role of the Rapporteur, (the term is equivalent to "record-taker") is to follow the proceedings of the Main Committee in order to ensure that they are properly recorded in a report of the session. The rapporteur approves the draft report prior to submission to the full General Assembly and is assisted by the Secretariat staff members in the preparation of the final report. As a member of the Bureau, the rapporteur also has a "behind the scenes" role to play in the organization and management of the Main Committee session.

## IV. Secretary



Secretaries are a part of the Secretariat, which includes the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General, USGs etc. The Secretary is the Secretariat official individually responsible for each Main Committee of the General Assembly. Their role thus is to:

1. Provide continuous guidance and advice to the Chairperson concerning the organization of work, status of negotiations, and conduct of business including interpretation of the rules of procedure;
2. Prepare the talking points for the Committee Chairperson for each Committee meeting in consultation with the Chairperson;
3. Be expected to respond to informal questions on the Committee's agenda and follow-up with delegates on issues related to the Committee's agenda;
4. Provide procedural guidance to the Chairperson while seated at the podium alongside the Chairperson and Rapporteur;
5. Liaise with delegates regarding requests to be put on the Speaker's List, tabling resolutions and amendments;
6. Be well versed in the rules of procedure, the MUN's Committees and UN resolution processes;
7. Be expected to be knowledgeable about the substantive work of his/her Committee, particularly as it relates to the theme of the conference and general Member State positions on the issues; and
8. Coordinate with other Secretariat officials on matters regarding the conference.

