

Research and Preparation

By David L Williams, in collaboration with the THIMUN Foundation

THIMUN: Preparation
and Practice –
Booklet 4

THE DELEGATION

If you are going to participate in an MUN, especially as a delegate, you will need to spend as much time as possible on your preparation. Ideally, you should know several months beforehand which country or organisation you will be representing, the forum you are assigned to and the issues which that forum will be dealing with.

REPRESENTING A MEMBER STATE

There are currently 193 Member States of the United Nations. As soon as you know which Member State you will be representing, you can begin your research.

The best place to start your research is Member States page on the website of the United Nations: <http://www.un.org/en/member-states/index.html>

Click on the name of the country and you will find information about that country and basic contact details. Most countries' missions to the UN have their own websites.

For basic facts about every country in the world, you can also use the CIA World Fact Book: www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/index.html

Simply select a country or geographical location from the list and you will be provided with up-to-date factual information.

Remember that, in the United Nations General Assembly, each Member State has an equal right to speak and to vote. So, whether you are representing Vanuatu or the United States of America, your voice counts.

Be determined to represent your country to the very best of your ability.

When learning about the country you will be representing, you should ask yourself the following questions and make yourself familiar with the answers.

Politics

- » What kind of government does my country have? (Monarchy, Republic, Parliamentary democracy etc.)
- » What is the origin of the particular governmental and political structures?
- » Who is the current Head of State?
- » Who is the current Head of Government?
- » What are the main political parties?
- » How stable is the current political structure?

Geography

- » Where is the country located?
- » Which countries are its immediate geographical neighbours?
- » What significance does the geographical location of the country have in its politics and/or its economic situation? (Small Island State, Land-locked mountainous region etc.)

History and Culture

- » What particular historical events have helped to shape the current state?
- » What are the main religious and ethnic groups?
- » What role does religion and/or ethnicity play in the country's internal or external politics?
- » Is the country a former colony? If yes, since when is it independent?

Economics

- » How self-sufficient is the country economically?
- » How dependent is it economically?
- » What natural resources does it have?
- » What basic commodities or manufactured articles does it produce and export?

- » What basic commodities or manufactured articles does it have to import?
- » What economic and/or trade organisations does it belong to or is it affiliated with?

Defence

- » What is the country's military strength or weakness?
- » What defence alliances does it belong to?
- » Has it been involved in any internal or external conflicts in its recent history?

International Relations

- » What role does it play and what influence does it have on the world stage?
- » What direct involvement does it have with any United Nations Organs or Agencies?

Just knowing about your assigned country, however, is not enough. You need to be able to recognize your country's flag, of course, but above all you should try to identify yourself with your country.

You have to put yourself in the role of a citizen of that country, trying to understand why the people of that country feel and think as they do.

Furthermore, you have to accept the policies of your government enough to represent them adequately and appropriately.

REPRESENTING A NON-MEMBER STATE OR ORGANISATION

At many international MUN conferences you will find a number of delegations which are not Member States of the United Nations.

Officially only Member States have the right to vote on resolutions. However, at THIMUN conferences non-member delegations (NMDs in THIMUN parlance) have full voting rights, so they are able to take a full and active part in MUN conferences and have much greater rights and freedoms than is usually accorded to them in the real United Nations.

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Non-member delegations fall into three categories:

- Non-member nations or states;
- United Nations Agencies and International Organisations;
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs);

Non-Member Nations or States

The Holy See and Palestine are not members of the United Nations but have Official Observer status. They do, however, have a policy on a number of important issues, so that, if you are representing one of these entities, your research, preparation and performance will be much the same as if you were representing a Member State.

Both states have Permanent Missions at UN Headquarters in New York and both have websites, which would be a good place to start your research.

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/member-states/non-member-states/index.html>

For the Holy See, go to <https://holyseemission.org/>

For Palestine go to <http://palestineun.org/>

The websites also have information on issues.

As a representative of one of these states, you will normally be granted speaking rights on any issue which is relevant or of special interest to your delegation and you will be permitted to vote on resolutions.

Therefore, you will need to work hard when lobbying to find support for the measures you would like to see adopted by the various forums and you will need to speak persuasively in debate so that Member States will vote for your ideas. For example: The Holy See might seek support for its ideas on social justice and peace from many nations but on some religious or moral issues might seek the support of countries with largely Roman Catholic populations.

Palestine will obviously look for support from Arab countries but will need wider support from Security Council members and nations belonging to such intergovernmental organisations as the European Union, if it is to achieve its objective of independent statehood.

UN Agencies and International Organisations

These include organisations such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

As a representative of such an organisation, you need to be an expert in its particular field of specialisation.

These organisations have the right to vote on resolutions and they are usually granted speaking rights on issues relevant to their respective areas of expertise.

In preparing for the conference, you should obtain as much factual information about the issues as possible and particularly what your organisation is doing about the problem.

You can then present the Member States with the information they need to come to a reasoned conclusion. For example:

A delegate representing the UNHCR has to find out as much as possible about the UNHCR, its role and function and its mandate. Assemble the facts concerning the numbers of refugees from any given area of conflict, the humanitarian problems being faced by the refugees and what the UNHCR has done and/or is doing to alleviate the problem.

All such organisations have their own websites, which is where you should start your research.

Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs are essentially pressure and/or lobby groups specialised in a particular field such as human rights (Amnesty International) or the environment (Greenpeace). Like the other NMDs, they will be granted speaking rights on the issues they are particularly concerned with. At THIMUN conferences they also have full voting rights.

If you are representing one of these organisations, your first port of call should be the website of the organisation.

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As a representative of one of these organisations, you will have a political agenda of your own. It is your job to raise the awareness of the Member States and you will need to work hard in the lobbying process to make sure that what you want to achieve is included in any resolution being debated. For example:

If you are representing Amnesty International, there are a number of human rights issues about which Amnesty feels very strongly, including capital punishment, the use of torture, detention without trial, child soldiers and the rights of women.

If you are representing Greenpeace, you will be focusing on environmental issues and on protecting the environment for future generations.

In conducting your research as a Non-Member Delegation, you need to ask yourself a different set of questions from those of a Member State delegate, namely:

- What kind of organisation am I representing (UN Agency, NGO etc.)?
- What are its main aims and objectives?
- What are its main actions and activities?
- What are its most recent and current activities?
- How is the organisation constituted?
- What is the origin of the organisation?
- Who is the current head of the organisation?
- Who are its members, if any?
- Where are its main offices?
- What is its function or role within the international community as a whole?
- What is the relationship of the organisation to the United Nations?
- What reports and documentation does it produce? (Try to obtain the most recent publications)

THE ISSUES ON THE AGENDA

Resources

The UN website <http://www.un.org/> is again the best starting point for your research. Here you can find a wealth of information not only about the organs and agencies but also about the current issues.

The UN News Service <http://www.un.org/news/> will keep you up-to-date and informed about the developments in and around the UN.

Study past UN resolutions, press statements, reports and documents relating to the issues.

The internet, of course, is the most valuable, helpful and up-to-date resource in researching the agenda issues.

But be careful!

Not all websites provide accurate or impartial information. Government websites like to show their country in the best possible light, which, of course, is useful if you are representing that particular country, but the information provided will certainly be biased and may not give the whole picture.

Use important NGO websites, such as Greenpeace for environmental issues and Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch for human rights issues.

You should also keep yourself informed and up-to-date by reading a quality, daily or weekly newspaper or news magazine, and pay attention to current affairs documentaries and news broadcasts on TV or radio.

Seek the advice of experts: those working in the field, diplomats from the local embassies, consulates and trade delegations, businessmen and NGO employees.

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Make every effort to contact:

- the nearest embassy, consulate or trade delegation for the country you are representing;
- your country’s mission to the United Nations in New York;
- the foreign ministry in your country of residence;
- organisations and experts in the specific fields, specialised NGOs, political parties and government spokesmen;
- teachers, environmentalists, scientists, economists;
- other delegates attending the same conference.