

Opening Speeches

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THIMUN: Preparation
and Practice –
Booklet 6

In most conferences, each delegation has the opportunity to address the General Assembly or one or more particular forums during its opening session, which means that the Ambassadors, Heads of Delegation and some selected delegates have to prepare an Opening Speech.

Additionally, each individual delegate will often be asked to make an opening statement during the first formal session of his or her respective forum.

You must be aware that delivering an Opening Speech is a serious occasion. Whether you are the Ambassador, Head of Delegation or a delegate in a particular forum, your speech must be truly representative of your nation or your organisation.

The concerns of your nation or organisation can be of either a general or a specific nature.

Speaking time is usually very short, typically one minute. Your opening speech will contain, therefore, only a selection of issues or aspects of an issue together with your country's position with regard to them. Focus on the issue or issues which are of major concern to your delegation. Present a clear message and highlight what actions you will be supporting.

You might have come to a conclusion that there is a single important theme in current international relations and that you need to address the Assembly or forums on this theme. This could be a currently high profile issue in the field of international security, human rights, environment, economic development or disarmament.

Alternatively, you might want to emphasize the interrelatedness of the areas of concern, such as the effects of development on the environment.

Structure your speech. Your speech must have a clear beginning, a middle and an end.

Remember that the other delegates do not have a written copy of the speech so they need to be able to follow your train of thought simply from listening.

Your speech should be substantial. Try to avoid platitudes and broad meaningless generalisations.

A dramatic opening will grab the attention but do not attempt to be funny.

Under no circumstances, should you abuse the privilege you have in addressing the world community by insulting other members of the United Nations or by presenting your own delegation in an unworthy fashion. Remember that you are a diplomat and represent your country or organisation in a dignified manner.

You can see from the sample speeches that your speech can be dramatic in tone but should always be content-based. The other delegates will respond to a speech that is informative as well as emphatic.

Sample Opening Speeches

Delegation: Chad

Most esteemed President, fellow delegates,

The post-colonial era has seen the independence of many of the poorest countries in the world, Chad among them. However, Chad strongly believes that this independence should not have to result in a new dependence upon foreign aid for survival. Because of this, Chad believes that the future for Africa rests on multilateral efforts within the UN to assist in the global effort to solve the pressing environmental, social and political crises that face both Chad and the rest of Africa. This process started a while back and it is beginning to bear fruit with many of the African countries emerging from the problems of recent years. The result of this is that now Chad, as an African nation, can work together with the rest of the continent to help solve the major issues of today such as the problems of the rights of the child, combating diseases such as Ebola, which kill thousands, and helping African nations achieve the permanent seats which they deserve in the Security Council. It is with these principles and these objectives held firmly in mind that the Chadian delegation enters this conference.

Honorable President, fellow delegates, thank you very much.

Delegation: China

Honorable Chair, fellow delegates, distinguished guests,

China recognizes its unique position as a developing state with significant political and economic clout. With the sixth largest economy in the world, China understands and empathizes with the desire of developing nations to strengthen their own political and economic systems. As such, China plans to be a liaison between developing and developed nations. The practice of developed countries using economic exploitation and political coercion to slow the growth of underdeveloped countries in order to keep the balance of power shifted for their own benefit is of the utmost concern. China firmly believes that a more equitable distribution of financial power is in the best interests of the entire world economy and will support resolutions that initiate growth for the developing world.

Thank you.

Delegation: Colombia

Fellow delegates, respected Chairs and esteemed President,

As members of the same world, it is only fair that each one of us work hard and together to improve the peace, growth and prosperity of the entire human race. In Colombia alone, almost 5,000 children under the age of 5 are set to die this year due to malnourishment, illness, abuse and a general lack of both national and international assistance and aid. But this is not a problem only affecting Colombia and other developing nations. Take the country we are in right now, for example. In the Netherlands, an estimated 1,000 children are set to die for the exact same reason. But why, why, delegates, why is it that we are letting children around the world die? The answer lies in the insufficiency of international cooperation to help humanity. This is something that is not only needed to help protect child rights, but also to help take nations from a state of relief to a state of development after natural disasters and to help with a true establishment of a culture of peace.

Thank you

Delegation: UNIFEM

Honorable Chair, fellow delegates,

A very special thing has happened today. Observe how many ladies sit among the men as equals. They're not in the fields, they are not instruments of pleasure available for purchase. They're here with a voice that will be respected. The United Nations Development fund for Women could not be more proud of the progress we have made. Over the years, UNIFEM has worked to give a voice to those who are not allowed to speak. Women everywhere were once denied the right to life, to identity, to self-worth. But now, as the equal presence of women in this forum clearly screams out, women are getting status on society's ladder. UNIFEM has given women a chance to voice their opinions. UNIFEM has fought to ensure women can enjoy rights in issues such as medication and health care, along with maternal care and freedom and protection from violence. This week, it'll be the responsibility of this forum to continue with this revolution. This week, don't just be a voice for a delegation, be a voice for all the women who have still not been allowed to find their own.

Thank you

Delivering the speech

In most conferences you will be called upon to make an opening address to the General Assembly or to your particular Council or Committee. This should have been drafted as part of your preparation (see above).

It is always advisable to have your speech typed up in a large font with double-line spacing. Mark the places where you intend to make rhetorical pauses and underline any significant words or phrases to which you intend to give special emphasis.

Some delegates might like to memorise their speech but, while this is not absolutely necessary, it is essential to practice it so many times that you are thoroughly conversant with the content and know how you want to deliver it.

Practice delivering your speech many times in front of your fellow team members, your teacher and any of your family members tolerant enough to listen. Ask them to be critical both of the content and of the delivery.

At the conference make absolutely sure that you are present when your delegation's name is called to approach the podium to speak.

Walk with dignity up to the microphone. Make sure that the microphone is adjusted to the right height. Normally this will be at chin level. If it is not at the right height, adjust it before beginning to speak.

Remember that microphones are made to be adjustable. You never need to stand on tiptoe or bend down low to speak into a microphone.

Look up at your audience before beginning to speak. Begin your speech with a simple, formal greeting, e.g. "Madam President, Honoured Delegates ..."

Project your voice. The microphone and amplifier cannot compensate for mumbling or whispering. The front few rows of the audience should be able to hear you clearly without the assistance of amplification.

Make eye contact with your audience. You will probably be reading your speech from a sheet of paper but do not look down all the time. Look up at the end of a sentence or when you are making a rhetorical pause.

Make sure that you complete your speech within the given time but do not speak too fast. The audience is only able to hear the speech once, so your delivery should be measured. As a rule of thumb, your delivery should sound a little slow to your own ears. If you think you are speaking normally, you are probably speaking too fast!

The end of your speech should be clear from the content but, nevertheless, you should end with a phrase such as: "Thank you Madam President!"