Editing of resolutions at the United Nations

Presentation for the information of delegations

Introduction

The **English Translation and Editorial Service** edits all United Nations documents, including **draft resolutions**, to make them clear, accurate, consistent, grammatically correct, in conformity with United Nations editorial standards and translatable into the other five official languages. All draft resolutions are normally edited, translated, formatted, proofread and reproduced by DGACM within a very short time frame. Given the tight turnaround, it is essential that editing staff have the contact information of the main sponsor or facilitator so that any questions can be cleared up quickly.

Delegates should also be aware that when they are preparing a draft resolution that is based on a previous resolution, they should download from ODS the final version of the adopted text (available under the symbol A/RES/xx/xx) and use it as the basis for the new resolution. This not only saves precious processing time, but also improves accuracy.

The editing team will not make changes that alter meaning. Whenever a language issue touches on a substantive matter, we will consult with the drafter or facilitator. It is crucial that we be informed of any passages that have been closely negotiated or are otherwise highly sensitive. Similarly, any problematic or sensitive terminology – in any of the official languages – should be flagged in the original submission so that all language staff are made aware of such issues.

Any changes made by delegates at the time of the adoption of the resolution are incorporated into the final text before issuance.

Why is it important for resolutions to be edited?

Once adopted, these important international instruments belong to the world. Many of them will be cited for years, even decades, to come. For this reason, it is imperative that they be grammatically and factually correct, consistent and equivalent in all six official languages.

Unfortunately, the time pressure under which resolutions are negotiated and processed increases the chance of mistakes. Furthermore, ambiguous language in the original language version of a resolution can lead to different interpretations in the other five languages. United Nations editing staff are highly qualified professionals who are conversant in at least three of the six official languages. We are experts in spotting language that could have different interpretations, playing a key role in carrying out the General Assembly's mandates on multilingualism, equal treatment for all six languages and equally authentic resolutions in all six languages. In addition to ensuring the highest quality of resolutions, we play a key role as coordinators because, by solving problems in the original language version, we save five translators from having to independently solve the same problems.

It is interesting to note that throughout the world, legal texts are often edited following negotiation and adoption. For example, there was an article in *The New York Times* about the revision of United States Supreme Court decisions after issuance (link to article).

Structure of resolutions

Language designation in masthead

If a draft resolution is submitted in more than one language version, each version meant to be equally authentic, then the language is indicated in the masthead as, for example, "Original: English and French".

No original language is indicated in the masthead of adopted resolutions; all languages are to be considered equally authentic.

Paragraphs

Resolutions are essentially one long sentence. There are normally three elements in a resolution: the name of the organ, the preamble and the operative part.

- **Preambular paragraphs** are not numbered. They serve to present the background to the action part of the resolution. Preambular paragraphs **must begin** with a verb in the form of a present, past or perfect participle or an adjective in italics. Examples of the types of verbs and adjectives used in preambular paragraphs are provided in the annex.

- **Operative paragraphs** are numbered. They express the opinions of Member States and contain the action that they are agreeing to take. Operative paragraphs **must begin** with an action verb. Examples are provided in the annex.

- When the opening verb of a paragraph is repeated in the following paragraph, the word **also** is used. If the verb is repeated a second time in succession, the word **further** is used. Also and further are placed after the verb in the preamble and before the verb in the operative part.

Subparagraphs

Subparagraphs are lettered (a), (b), (c). Each subparagraph begins with a capital letter. All of the subparagraphs in a paragraph must have a similar syntactical structure. The following example from resolution 66/167 shows proper subparagraphs:

6. *Calls upon* all States:

   (a) To take effective measures to ensure…

   (b) To foster religious freedom and pluralism…

   (c) To encourage the representation and meaningful participation of…

   (d) To make a strong effort to…

Another good example, from resolution 66/94:

> 10. *Reaffirms* the importance, in particular for developing countries, of the work of the Commission concerned with technical cooperation and assistance in the field of international trade law reform and development, and in this connection:
>
> > (a) Welcomes the initiatives of the Commission…
> >
> > (b) Expresses its appreciation to the Commission…
> >
> > (c) Takes note with interest of the comprehensive approach…
> >
> > (d) Expresses its appreciation to the Governments…

Examples of changes made to draft resolutions during the editing process

Titles and facts (such as dates) are checked and corrected as needed; grammar and syntax corrected; footnotes corrected, added or deleted where necessary; and minor adjustments to style made to bring the text into line with United Nations editorial standards and practice and to render the text translatable. The following is a list of common corrections:

- **Titles of bodies, meetings, conventions, etc.,** will be checked and corrected if necessary. The full title will be used at first mention in both the preamble and the operative part. Thereafter a shortened version of the title may be used. The following is an example from resolution 67/184:

  > 2. *Notes* the progress made thus far in the preparations for the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice;
  >
  > 3. *Decides* that the duration of the Thirteenth Congress should not exceed eight days;

- **Acronyms** are not used in resolutions and will be spelled out in full the first time they occur in both the preamble and the operative part. Thereafter a shortened version of the title may be used.

- **Dates** (of meetings, adoption of resolutions, conventions, declarations, etc.) will be checked and corrected if necessary.

- **Names of countries.** In United Nations documents and resolutions, the short form of the names of countries is used. For a list of the official short names of countries, see unterm.un.org.

- **Names of cities.** Names of cities are followed by the country name, unless the city is the capital.

- **Punctuation.** We are experts in punctuation issues and will apply United Nations style in this regard. If, in an unusual case, a punctuation mark becomes a matter of political sensitivity during negotiations, we need to be informed to ensure that it is not modified for grammatical reasons.

- **Terminology.** We also need to be informed of any problematic or sensitive terminology, which should be flagged in the original submission; this applies to all official languages.

- **Personification.** A resolution or report does not decide/recommend/launch/ convene/extend a mandate, etc.; it is the author or body adopting the resolution or report who takes the action. We will correct personification [Example: "General Assembly resolution 65/14 requested the Secretary-General to report…" will be changed to read "The General Assembly, in its resolution 65/14, requested the Secretary-General to report…"]

- **Takes note/notes.** In general, "takes note" is used when the object is a report, statement or decision. "Notes" is used in the sense of "observes".

- **A body should not take note of or welcome its own past decision.** We will consult with the author to come up with a more appropriate verb, such as "recalls" or "reaffirms".

- **Reiterates.** If the General Assembly uses the term "reiterating" or "reiterates" in a preambular or operative paragraph, it means that the Assembly is repeating something it has said in a previous resolution. If no such previous text can be found, we will consult with the sponsor to come up with a more appropriate verb, such as "affirms" or "stresses" or "emphasizes".

  Further, if the verb "reiterates" is used, it is not enough to simply cite the paragraph number of the previous resolution (as in "*Reiterates* paragraph 8 of its resolution 64/259"); some context must be given. The following example of proper formulation is from resolution 67/246, section V, paragraph 6:

  > *Reiterates* that accountability is a central pillar of effective and efficient management that requires attention and strong commitment at the highest level of the Secretariat, as defined in paragraph 8 of its resolution 64/259 of 29 March 2010;

  If the Assembly does not wish to provide context, the verb "reaffirms" may be used, as in resolution 67/246, section V, paragraph 5:

  > *Reaffirms* paragraph 37 of its resolution 62/87 and paragraph 2 of its resolution 64/228, and requests the Secretary-General to complete the capital master plan as approved by the General Assembly in various resolutions.

  The author will be consulted to determine the preferred formulation in such cases.

- **Footnotes.** Source footnotes may be added during the editing process if the source is available in all official languages. Similarly, sources not available in all languages may be deleted.

- **Seasons of the year.** As seasons of the year are different in different hemispheres, a reference to "the summer of 2024", for example, will be changed to "the third quarter of 2024".

- **Including, inter alia.** The use of "including" together with "inter alia" is redundant; one of them will be deleted, as appropriate.

Editorial helpdesk and other resources

The staff of the English Translation and Editorial Service are available to offer assistance and advice. Delegates are encouraged to contact us if they have an editorial or language question on a draft resolution:

ETESFrontDesk@un.org

Other resources:

- United Nations Editorial Manual Online (www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/editorial-manual)
- UNTERM (unterm.un.org)
- Official Document System (ods.un.org)

Thank you for your participation in the session. Please get in touch at ETESFrontDesk@un.org if we can be of assistance.

Annex

Common preambular verbs and adjectives

Acknowledging

Affirming

Alarmed

Aware

Bearing in mind

Believing

Cognizant

Commending

Concerned, Gravely concerned, Deeply concerned (about)

Conscious

Convinced

Deploring

Disturbed, Deeply disturbed

Emphasizing

Expressing (alarm, appreciation, concern, gratitude, satisfaction)

Guided

Having considered, Having heard, Having received

Mindful

Noting, Noting with concern, Noting with appreciation, Noting with satisfaction

Reaffirming

Realizing

Recalling

Recognizing

Stressing

Taking into account

Taking note, Taking note with appreciation, Taking note with concern

Thanking

Underlining, Underscoring the fact that

Urging

Common operative verbs

Accepts

Adopts

Affirms

Agrees

Appeals

Appreciates

Approves

Authorizes

Calls upon

Commends

Condemns, Strongly condemns

Decides

Declares

Demands

Denounces

Deplores

Discourages

Emphasizes

Endorses

Expresses (alarm, appreciation, concern, gratitude, satisfaction)

Invites

Notes, Notes with concern, Notes with appreciation, Notes with satisfaction

Reaffirms

Recognizes

Recommends

Reiterates

Rejects

Renews, Renews its invitation, Renews its commitment

Requests

Supports

Takes note, Takes note with appreciation

Underlines, Underscores the fact that

Urges

Welcomes

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