Toolkit for Navigating Multilateral Negotiations

Based on the second edition of the International Institute for Sustainable Development's *On Behalf of My Delegation: A Survival Guide for New and Lonely Climate Change Negotiators*

October 2026

IISD
International Institute for Sustainable Development

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

On behalf of:
Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
of the Federal Republic of Germany

IKI INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE INITIATIVE

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Preparation Sheet

Download the preparation sheet (.docx) that pairs with this toolkit **here**.

This toolkit was developed by **Jeffrey Jianfeng Qi and Jennifer Bansard**, adapted from **Joyeeta Gupta and Jennifer Allan**'s *On Behalf of My Delegation (2nd edition)*, published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

The authors would like to thank Julian Wittkamp (GIZ) for his contributions during the refinement and enhancement of the toolkit.

This toolkit's development was made possible by the Support project for implementation instruments of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris Agreement (BioClime), which is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and funded by the German Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety under its International Climate Initiative on the basis of a decision adopted by the German Bundestag.

Implemented and published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) for the GIZ BioClime project.

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How to Use This Toolkit

Negotiations have been described as part art, part science.

This guide distills practical insights from experienced practitioners of multilateral environmental negotiations. It is intended for government negotiators at the beginner to intermediate level who participate in—or prepare to participate in—sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the subsidiary bodies of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The guide is organised around the practical situations you are most likely to encounter: preparing before a session, navigating different negotiating formats, working with draft texts in the room, making an intervention at the mic, coordinating within your coalition, managing the second week of a COP, and understanding how consensus is reached and declared.

This toolkit is developed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Its content is based on four instrumental guides to negotiators of multilateral environmental agreements:

- On Behalf of My Delegation: Second Edition (by IISD)
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements Negotiator's Handbook: Third Edition (by United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP])
- Climate Negotiations Terminology: the pocket guide (by International Institute for Environment and Development [IIED])
- Drafting Decisions – Getting to Consensus (by Paul Watkinson, former UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice [SBSTA] Chair)

Guidance and Orientation

Read it before a session as orientation. Return to specific sections when you encounter an unfamiliar situation in the room. The tips are drawn from real negotiating practice, not theory—treat them as distilled field experience, not as abstract rules.

- ▪ This green bullet denotes tips and tricks.
- ✦ This star bullet denotes resources you should check out.

The Fillable Preparation Sheet

We developed a preparation sheet as a coordination tool to help delegations prepare for the climate change negotiations.

It encourages delegation members to reflect on negotiation priorities and strategies to achieve them, clarifies who is in charge of which agenda item, and fosters strategic thinking about possible interlinkages and trade-offs between agenda items.

Access this preparation sheet through the link at the end of this toolkit and fill it out before and during the negotiation and consult it frequently.

Feedback?

If you have any questions or feedback, contact us at enb@iisd.org.

BEFORE THE NEGOTIATIONS

Preparing for the Negotiations

Tips and Tricks

Understanding the Contexts

- Understand the main and peripheral issues in the debate and in the environment of the negotiations.
- Internalise the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement; keep them on your computer or keep a printout.
- Understand the history of international climate negotiations and the shift to global emission reduction efforts represented by the Paris Agreement compared to the Kyoto Protocol.
- Familiarise yourself with the key terms used in the international climate regime.
- Keep copies of group positions and submissions from past and ongoing negotiations in their different drafts (institutional memory). Bookmark the relevant pages on the UNFCCC site.

The Rules of Procedure and Other Preparations

- Keep a copy of the Rules of Procedure handy, and if possible, memorise the key elements, listed in Figure 1.
- Familiarise yourself with the nomenclature of the documents listed in Table 1.
- Familiarise yourself with the UNFCCC website beforehand. It can be difficult to navigate.
- Be sure to sign up for the email lists for contact groups/informal consultations so you are sent the latest versions of the text.

Priorities and Positions of Your Delegation

- Understand and internalise your delegation's priorities, key positions, and redlines. Know your brief thoroughly, including all of your fallback positions, and be ready to respond to questions from other delegations, both formal and informal.
- Read the summary notes of previous delegations. If you don't have those, read the daily and/or summary reports of the Earth Negotiations Bulletin to see who said what in order to identify issue-specific allies.
- Discuss key issues among your negotiation team and contact others in your government who may have an interest.

Resources

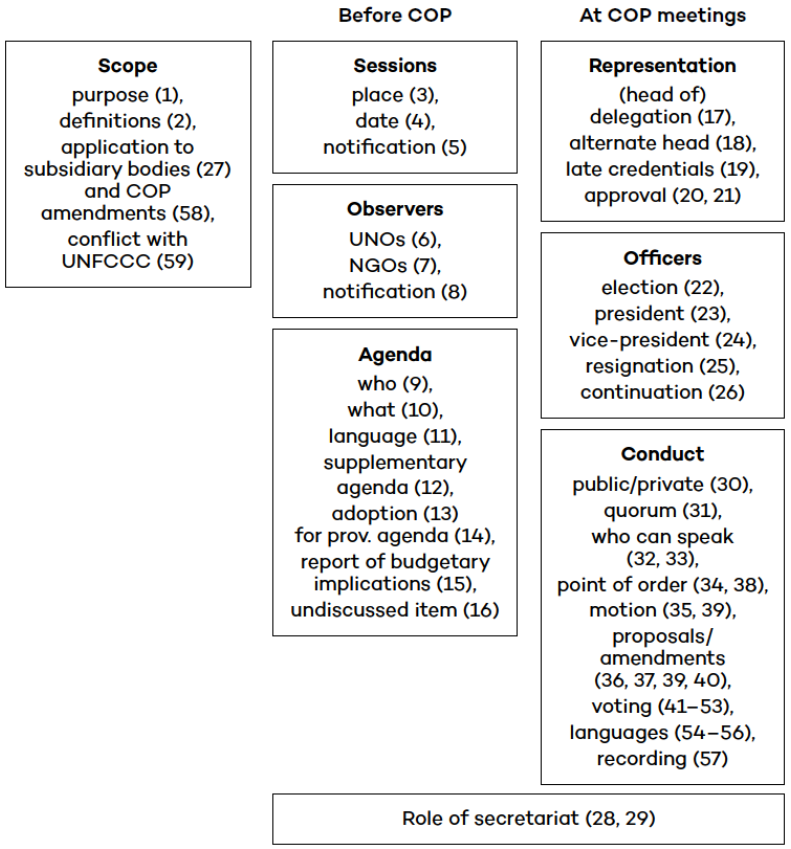
- The Earth Negotiations Bulletin
- On Behalf of My Delegation: Second Edition (by IISD)
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements Negotiator's Handbook: Third Edition (by UNEP)
- A Guide to UNFCCC Website and Documentation (by Legal Response International)
- Climate Negotiations Glossary (by IISD)
- The UNFCCC website
- The UNFCCC Rules of Procedure

The Rules of Procedure

Treaties are governed by the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969) and their respective Rules of Procedure. Adhering to the Rules of Procedure ensures that there is rule of law in the negotiations. The Rules of Procedure are applicable to all formal negotiations.

✦ The UNFCCC Rules of Procedure

Figure 1. The Rules of Procedure



Source: *On Behalf of My Delegation*, 2nd edition.

Outstanding Issues in the Draft Rules of Procedure

The UNFCCC's voting arrangements have never been adopted, which is why parties have to agree, at the start of every session, to apply the Draft Rules of Procedure with the exception of Rule 42 on voting. Decisions are therefore adopted by consensus.

! Consensus Is Not Unanimity

Consensus is understood as broad agreement, but not necessarily unanimous support. It is up to the presiding officer to determine whether there is consensus, and they may determine there is consensus unless a party registers a formal objection. For example, the Paris Agreement was adopted by consensus, despite Nicaragua speaking in plenary to highlight its disagreement with the treaty. The negotiator did, however, specify that he would not block consensus.

Nomenclature of Documents

Negotiations generate a substantial number of documents.

All key negotiation documents, such as the agenda, pre-session documents, and decisions, are available in all UN languages. Other support material and in-session documents are usually only available in English.

Table 1. Nomenclature of documents

Nomenclature	Full Name	Description	Languages
UNFCCC/CP UNFCCC/KP UNFCCC/PA	Provisional and regular documents/agenda	Pre-conference documents	Generally, in all UN languages
INF.	Information documents	Background information	English
Misc.	Miscellaneous documents	Views of parties/observers; participants list	English
Add.	Addendum	The second part of a document previously submitted	Depends on the main document
Corr.	Corrigendum	Only corrections to a document	Depends on the main document
Rev.	Revision	Revised document	Generally, only in English
CRP	Conference room papers	Working docs for negotiations, put forward by parties or negotiation Chairs; exist only in-session	English
L. docs	Limited documents	Draft reports and decision texts	English, but should be translated into all UN languages before adoption
Non-papers	Unofficial documents	Informal, in-session docs to provide ideas, allow for the integration of comments from other countries, and assist negotiations	English
TP	Technical papers	Secretariat-produced reports on a specific topic mandated by Parties	English

BEFORE THE NEGOTIATIONS

Understanding Your Positions

Tips and Tricks

Know Your Own

- Have a good understanding of the issues at stake, as well as clarity about your country's interests and position on each of the issues.
- Be aware of your country's "redlines" (non-negotiable positions) and "yellow lines" (cautionary positions). Keep your aspiration and reserve positions with you at all times.
- Read the briefing notes of your predecessors, or, better still, talk to them.
- Have a clear brief outlining what deliverables your government expects. Know your interests and bottom line.
- Have reasons ready to defend key concepts and negotiating positions.
- Try to organise sessions with scientists and actors from your own country so that you can listen to their advice.
- Be aware of the potential weaknesses in your preparation and seek ways to minimise the vulnerability in the negotiations.

Prepare Options

- Develop more than one version of a proposed text (you may also need to anticipate other parties' reactions).
- Consider relative strategies and chances available in trying to obtain the deliverables.

Know Your Counterparts

- Know in advance who your government has historically trusted and who it has not. Also, know what has been achieved by other countries.
- If there were submissions prior to the session, read other parties' submissions and seek to discern and understand their respective positions, as positions in negotiations are based on these deeper interests.

Resources

- On Behalf of My Delegation: Second Edition (by IISD)
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements Negotiator's Handbook: Third Edition (by UNEP)
- Climate Negotiations Terminology: The pocket guide (by IIED)
- How to Build Common Ground With Your Counterparts (by Frontline Negotiations)

Positions and Bargaining

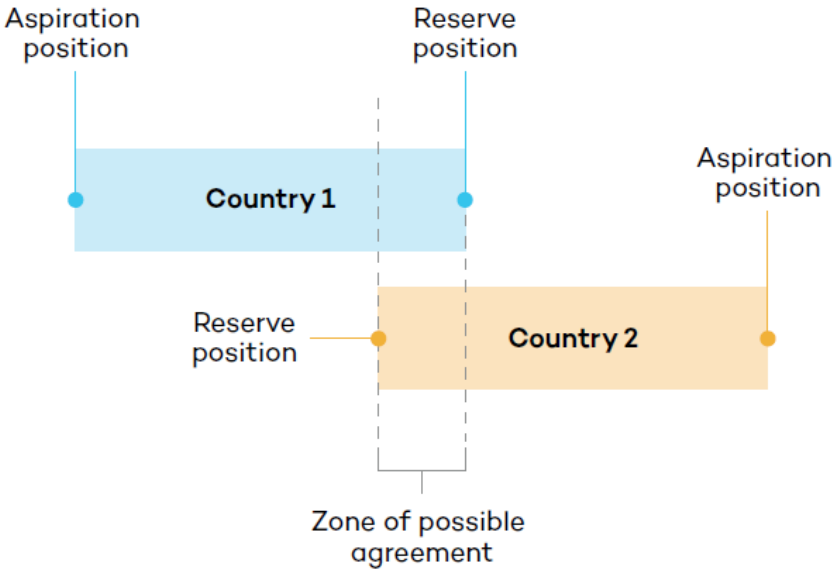
Bargaining Range

Usually, you will have

- **an aspiration position**: a position you want.
- **a reserve position**: the lowest acceptable negotiation position.
- **redlines**: what you absolutely cannot agree with/what absolutely has to be included.

Agreement normally falls between the parties' reserve positions—this is the zone of possible agreement (ZOPA).

Figure 2. ZOPA



Source: *On Behalf of My Delegation*, 2nd edition.

Integrative ("Soft") Bargaining

Multilateral environmental negotiations involve multifaceted issues that are generally not conducive to a zero-sum, win-lose paradigm. Therefore, it is essential for negotiators to prioritise a win-win approach whenever possible rather than settling for a win-lose outcome.

You should try to bridge the gap between your and your counterparts' interests by developing a possible package of negotiating elements—strive to identify new options that will incorporate both your and their positions. You can do this by linking issues to other areas, so everyone makes concessions in different areas and, together, you reach relative satisfaction.

To achieve this, a negotiator must delve deeper into **understanding the underlying interests (the "why") behind a position (the "what")**. By focusing on these interests rather than a rigid position, it often becomes evident that the goals of the negotiating parties are not necessarily in conflict.

Recognising these interests empowers the negotiator to devise alternative proposals that benefit all parties involved, a strategy often referred to as "expanding the pie."

However, it is crucial for these alternatives to be perceived as fair by the other parties. Fairness not only legitimises a proposal but also fosters trust. If a proposal is perceived as unfair, it can erode agreements, especially when negotiations face challenges.

Formal Negotiations and Informal Groups

Formal Negotiations

The formal negotiations begin and end in the plenary sessions. The **opening plenary** adopts the agenda, hears opening statements, and sets out how work under each agenda item will proceed. The **closing plenary** adopts decisions and hears closing statements.

Informal Settings

The bulk of the negotiations take place in smaller, often informal settings, to help find consensus through preparing, re-framing, re-defining, redrafting, and refining the negotiating texts. The COP President or Subsidiary Body Chair appoints pairs of delegates to facilitate these discussions, one from a developed and one from a developing country. These informal groups include the following:

Contact Group

A group established to negotiate a specific agenda item or sub-item. All parties may attend, and meetings are open to observers. Usually, contact groups convene as the first and last meeting on an issue.

Joint Contact Group

A contact group considering an issue under the mandate of multiple bodies. Usually, these are joint Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI)/SBSTA contact groups.

Informal Consultations

A group created by the parties for purposes of informal consultation. Increasingly, these are open to observers and are functionally very similar to contact groups.

Informal-Informal (Inf Inf) Consultations

Parties may convene in these "informal informals" to foster more direct discussions among themselves and at times resolve very specific issues that are stalling progress on draft text. The Secretariat and Co-Facilitators are generally not present. These consultations are smaller and move faster, but they cannot formally revise the text—results must be reported back to the full group and accepted there.

Informal Stocktaking Plenary

During the second week of a COP, the Presidency often convenes an informal plenary (or several) to allow ministers and other negotiation facilitators to report back on progress. This allows all parties to hear a status report and the Presidency's planned next steps.

Ministerial Consultations

During the second week of a COP, ministers will be tasked with convening consultations on specific issues. These issues may not be tied closely to the agenda; some issues could be grouped if the Presidency believes that will advance negotiations. Ministers often have leeway to choose a negotiation format. Some may choose informal consultation groups, while others undertake "shuttle diplomacy," moving from one coalition or party to another.

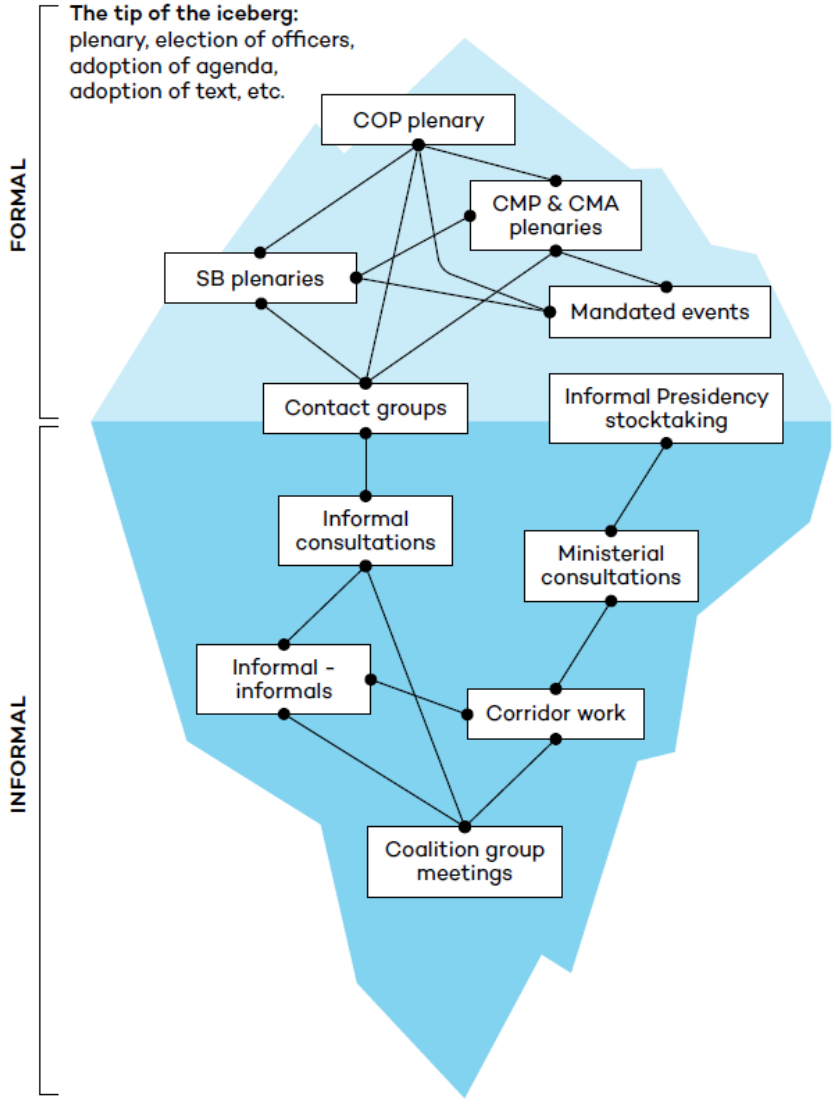
Mandated Events

There are many meetings, round tables, panels, workshops, and other formats established under various agenda items. These take place both during the sessions of the COP and subsidiary bodies as well as intersessionally.

Tips and Tricks

- Collaborate with other national delegates so that you have representation in different parallel sessions.
- Sometimes there will be **huddles**. Huddles are informal clusters that form spontaneously in the room or the corridors when parties are close to agreement. Key language can be settled in minutes. Not being present means not influencing the outcome.
- Informal-informals and spin-off small huddles can move fast. Make sure your group coordinator is there or has a proxy. Results from smaller formats are reported back to the full room—that's when they can be re-opened if you weren't represented.
- Seek ways of finding out what happened in the sessions you missed. The Earth Negotiations Bulletin reports are a good source. See https://enb.iisd.org or sign up to receive each report at https://enb.iisd.org/get-updates.
- If you cannot make sense of all the informal processes, find someone from a non-governmental organisation from your region and ask them for a briefing.
- Attend the daily coordination meetings of your coalition(s) to hear updates from the various negotiation rooms.

Figure 3. The formal and informal processes



Source: *On Behalf of My Delegation*, 2nd edition.

DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS

In the Negotiation Room

Tips and Tricks

- Both competence and warmth help gather goodwill, support, and cooperation. Build relationships and trust with others by treating them as people rather than adversaries. Approach them in informal settings outside the negotiations.
- When making a drafting suggestion, you should be constructive and flexible. Demonstrating a willingness to explore drafting flexibility can help you build influence and ultimately achieve important points.

Bargain

- You should always understand your negotiating position well enough so you can maintain your substantive points as required by the negotiating mandate, yet be flexible enough with language to accommodate proposals by other countries.
- Be flexible and prepared for tactical retreats, to gamble, and, if necessary, to change course toward your goal.
- Be careful not to over-defend your position. You may work yourself into a corner, and then it becomes harder to change your position without losing face.
- If a majority of parties seem to agree with you, use the momentum on your side. Most parties are less likely to object to a majority.
- Try to identify areas in which you can provide concessions to the other party during the negotiations in return for issues on which your concerns are met.
- In a situation where additional incentives are necessary to achieve your goal, package deals are useful to secure trade-offs.

Find Your Allies

- When appropriate, take the floor on behalf of your country or negotiating group to make a political point in which you show support for what another country or group said without explaining the position. This can pay dividends later in the negotiation room.
- Read the room. Find the placards of friendly countries; they might be your allies. Also understand when not to get involved: be aware of what is being decided and what the opposing positions are, and judge whether the specific issue being discussed is a priority for a country or group. Based on this, determine whether an intervention is necessary or if it is better not to get involved.

Resources

- On Behalf of My Delegation: Second Edition (by IISD)
- Climate Negotiations Glossary (by IISD)
- Climate Negotiations Terminology: The pocket guide (by IIED)
- Drafting Decisions – Getting to Consensus (by Paul Watkinson, former UNFCCC SBSTA Chair)
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements Negotiator's Handbook: Third Edition (by UNEP)

Drafting Texts

Tips and Tricks

Before Negotiations

- If there is a call for submission, submit your delegation's views and inputs.
- During the drafting sessions, negotiators never draft in a vacuum except in the early stages of a negotiation. You should have a draft written proposal with many alternative ways to express the same concepts. (see Preparation Sheet).
- You also need to know what can be given away as concessions in the negotiations.

During Negotiations

- Be prepared to "think on your feet."
- Provide precise drafting language in the simplest terms possible.
- Work with existing language to the extent possible.
- Do not let the Chair railroad you into accepting unacceptable decisions. Clearly state your objection if you cannot agree to a proposal (see "At the Microphone" section).
- Watch out for every single addition made to the text. Be wary of accepting vague concessions. Make them specific by including content, targets, and timetables before accepting.
- If you want the other side to accept something, use your bargaining chips; but never give in without demanding something else in return.
- During the negotiation process, the bracketed text will be slowly "unbracketed." You can tie agreement to remove one instance of bracketed text to a compromise on another text element.
- It is important to understand the connotations of specific words, as there is a hierarchy of words (see "Key Drafting Language and Decision Verbs" section). "Shall" and "decides" are stronger than "should," "may," "recommends," "invites," etc. Words like these have a very strong effect in a legally binding document.
- Add "if appropriate," "if necessary," wherever you want to weaken the text. Remove these kinds of clauses when you want to strengthen the text. Keep alert if the other party wants to include such language.
- Avoid reopening issues that have been laid to rest/have had square brackets eliminated; alternatively, in the rare case where circumstances justify reopening, be prepared for resistance and justify why your approach should be followed (for example, it helps solve a set of brackets).

Some Strategies

- Projecting the texts on screen is productive only when parties are close, and positions are nearly aligned. If parties are still far apart, working on screen multiplies options and can make the draft harder to manage, not easier.
- Introduce innovative, problem-solving text (i.e., new ideas/options) to move the process further.
- Use repetition of existing text in the UNFCCC/KP/PA COP decisions to avoid renegotiation of the already agreed text.

Key Drafting Terminologies

Preamble

Preambular texts tend to be fairly long and less precise than operative provisions. From a policy perspective, the preamble establishes the history and context of the issue and refers to relevant pre-existing decisions. It is also used as a repository for matters not accepted for inclusion in the operative text. Because preambular text can come into play in treaty interpretation as part of the treaty context as per the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969, it is important that it be crafted in a manner that is supportive of an overall interpretive approach to the treaty that is acceptable.

Paragraphing

Paragraphing is a common way of arranging legislative text. It involves dividing a sentence into different blocks of text. Paragraphing is hierarchical in the sense that a particular unit may be subdivided into further units.

- Article: Numbered to address a provision on a specific theme in an Agreement or Convention text, for instance, in the Paris Agreement. Articles are not used in a COP decision text.
- Paragraph: Typical COP decision text is numbered (1, 2…).
- Subparagraph: Commonly sequenced with (a), (b), (c)…

Square Brackets

Square brackets connote a lack of agreement about the text they contain, possibly including when a text has simply not been discussed. When the issue with the text has been resolved, and there is consensus, the brackets can be dropped.

A general good practice is to keep bracketed text to a minimum. A proliferation of brackets can make it difficult to manage negotiation of a text, especially where a complicated set of nested options is inserted.

Types of Outcomes

Decision

The substantive outcomes of the COP and other governing bodies (such as the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement [CMA] or Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol [CMP]). Decisions typically take the form of a series of preambular clauses, followed by numbered paragraphs of operative text.

Recommendation/Conclusions

The substantive outcomes of the subsidiary bodies. Recommendations (in the Convention on Biological Diversity [CBD] context) or conclusions (UNFCCC) are typically used by scientific, technical, or compliance bodies to couch advice and propose actions. Sometimes, such advice is couched in recommendation form and other times it is provided to the COP in the form of draft decisions.

Resolution

Within the context of the UNFCCC, resolutions are usually prepared to show the COP's appreciation for the host city and the people of the host country.

Key Drafting Language and Decision Verbs

This section provides guidance on using common drafting language and decision verbs in in-session documents. This list is not exhaustive.

✦ Climate Negotiations Terminology: The pocket guide (by IIED)

Choosing Verb Tenses

Tenses in decisions [D] and conclusions/recommendations [C] are different.

- In the preamble to a decision, a present participle (e.g., "Recalling") or adjective (e.g., "Conscious") is used.
- In the operative part of a decision, the present tense is used (e.g., "Decides").
- In draft conclusions, the past tense is used ("agreed").

Identification of Alternative Versions of a Paragraph

When draft texts are being actively negotiated, alternative versions of a paragraph may be proposed. All versions of the paragraph should be placed in square brackets [...]. The initial version is normally numbered with an Arabic numeral and is followed by the alternative versions proposed, which are usually identified by adding *alt* after the Arabic numeral: e.g., 1*alt*, 2*alt1*, 2*alt2*.

For inserting new paragraphs after an existing paragraph, they should be listed with the same Arabic numeral as the previous paragraph, with the sequential indicator following the number (e.g., 1*bis*, 1*ter*):

bis	*septies*
ter	*octies*
quater	*novies*
quinquies	*decies*
sexies	

Basic Drafting Text Language

Shall	Means that an action is required. Indicates that the following action is **obligatory or binding**. However, when used with a weaker word, such as in "shall endeavour" or "shall strive," it only requires parties to "try to do" something.
Must	Means that the action is required and almost always binding. It could create binding commitments in the context of a treaty; however, it is rarely directed explicitly at parties and is rather used in the passive voice (as in "measures must be taken"), often to strengthen overall goals and obligations.
Will	Means that the action is going to take place with certainty. Anticipates a future fact in assertive, rather than mandatory, language.
Should	Indicates a recommendation or guidance, suggesting that something is expected or advised but not required. Regularly used to indicate the non-binding status of a commitment.
May	Permissive and discretionary language. It does not create an obligation but rather offers a possibility or alternative course of action.

Preambular Terms

This list is organised in alphabetical order.

Acknowledging/ Recognising	Admitting something to be true or real, or recognising the existence of a fact.
Cognizant of	Demonstrating awareness of facts and information, used to remind parties of its relevance.
Conscious of	Noticing the existence of something and being aware of its importance in the context of the decision.
Concurring	Agreeing with something, generally another decision.
Considering/ Taking into account	Emphasising facts, issues, and/or a treaty's provisions that must be taken into consideration while addressing the decision. It may be related to facts or scientific data, documents, decisions and reports, or principles and treaty provisions.
Emphasising/ Stressing/ Underlining	Giving special significance, importance, or drawing attention to an issue.
Endorsing	Supporting an idea or a previous decision or document.
Expressing concern	Strong diplomatic language to express displeasure.
Having concluded that	The COP or other institution has made an assessment based on information and then reached a conclusion.
Having considered	Something has been carefully evaluated or thought out in order to make a decision.
Having taken note of	Having recognised the existence of an agreement, a statement, a report, or some findings without expressing approval for its content.
Having reviewed	Having looked at or examined something.
Mindful/ Bearing in mind	Being aware and conscious of something relevant to the decision; or to reference relevant treaty provisions or past COP decisions.
Noting	Acknowledging something.
Noting with concern/grave concern	Adds emphasis on the gravity of the situation in question, with an underlying intention to act in response. Usually, it relates to facts or information that came to the attention of the COP or a subsidiary body.
Noting with satisfaction/ appreciation	Acknowledges and expresses approval or gratitude for specific actions, achievements, or developments.
Reaffirming/ Reiterating	Agreeing on an issue or decision already made and repeating it to maintain it as still being true. It is used to endorse previous positions on a particular state of affairs and can be applied to principles, objectives, treaty provisions, and past outcomes.

Recalling	Highlighting a previous action, decision, or statement. It brings back matters previously considered and is used to refer to provisions in climate treaties or previous COP decisions to which the decision relates.
Urging	Strongly insisting and encouraging parties to take action related to the context of the decision.
Warning	Alerting about a potential danger, risk, or undesirable outcome.
Welcoming	Receiving or accepting positively. Normally used where the COP has received information from its bodies or other entities which informs the present decision. It also positively greets outcomes, initiatives, and contributions.

Decision Verbs to Describe Action or Consideration

Verbs listed in order of strength, from strongest to weakest.

Decides that/to	Parties have collectively agreed to undertake an action and, therefore, command it. Any such pronouncement commits parties and is the most robust action the COP can take.
Resolves	Same as "Decides," meaning that a firm and solid decision has been reached after extensive discussion and wide acceptance by all involved parties.
Adopts	Wording used when the COP agrees on a new text; means that parties accept and incorporate a document, agreement, or amendment into their overall treaty commitments.
Agrees that/upon/to	Means that all parties support the decision. Less formal and slightly weaker than "Decides." Used to denote agreement between parties.
Approves	Means to accept or to "agree to," and is often used to endorse budgets, staffing plans, or conclusions from governing bodies.
Authorises	Gives authority or official power to someone or another body. This verb is usually used to allow another body (other than the COP) or the Secretariat to carry out a function that it would normally undertake for itself, such as establishing advisory panels or exercising discretionary budget powers.

Establishes	Widely used to create, for example, mechanisms, bodies, processes, and commitments.
Defines	Describes and explains something. It may be used to establish—and consequently shape—new concepts, principles, institutions, or mechanisms.
Endorses	Supporting an idea or a previous decision or document.
Welcomes	An announcement of the COP's appreciation and support for something.
Concludes	Usually used in the context of completing the mandate of a work programme.
Accepts	Usually used in the context of accepting a mandated report.
Accepts with gratitude	Usually used in the context of accepting an offer from a Party.
Insists	To be emphatic, firm, or resolute on a matter of desire, demand, or intention. It strongly expresses the COP's expectation that the intention should be complied with. However, it does not necessarily impose a binding obligation on parties to act in accordance with that intention.
Emphasises/ Stresses	Underlines a situation or idea without particularly doing something about it.
Notes/ Takes note of	To pay particular attention to something. Could be used to "note" a report if there is no consensus to "welcome" it.
Recalls	To repeat a fact, an invitation, or a request. Used either to provide background or to confirm something.
Reiterates	Repeats a fact that has been accepted previously to remind of its importance.
Expresses	"Expresses its appreciation/gratitude": Usually applied to thank countries for hosting the COP or to acknowledge the support given by the United Nations or other organisations.

Decision Verbs for Invitations and Requests

Verbs listed in order of strength, from strongest to weakest.

Instructs	Parties have collectively agreed to undertake an action and, therefore, command it. Any such pronouncement commits parties and is the most robust action the COP can take.
Requests	Same as "Decides," meaning that a firm and solid decision has been reached after extensive discussion and wide acceptance by all involved parties.
(Strongly) urges	Appears stronger than 'Requests' in the messaging tone but lacks the explicit authority to enforce. It is a compelling word used to push for action, and has been used to call for action from non-UNFCCC bodies, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and from parties to comply with discretionary financial commitments or with something with which they should have already complied.
Invites	Requests the presence, participation, or engagement of parties or another entity in a diplomatic way. However, it leaves the invitee with complete discretion over whether to accept or comply with the solicitation.
Recommends	Advises parties, an entity, or a body to undertake a given course of action. A weaker form of "Urges."
(Strongly) encourages	Suggests or expresses hope that another party or entity will take action on something. A weaker variant of "Urges." In practice, it is the equivalent of "hoping" that someone will do what they are "encouraged" to do. A very common expression.
Calls upon/on	Asks certain parties, all parties, or another entity to undertake an action.

DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS

At the Microphone and Making an Intervention

Tips and Tricks

Making Your Intervention

- The norm in informal consultations or contact groups is that groups or coalitions will speak first, followed by individual parties.
- All interventions are directed to the presiding officer. In informal consultations or contact groups, that would be the Co-Facilitator. Normally, you would acknowledge and thank the Co-Facilitator ("Thank you, Mister/Madam Co-Facilitator").
- If you are a part of a coalition or group, you should normally start your intervention with "XX aligns with the intervention made by the distinguished colleague from XX speaking on behalf of the XX group" or "XX aligns itself with the XX group."
- A good intervention is spoken slowly and clearly into the microphone; is concise, to the point, brief, and crisp; avoids repetition; and provides your delegation's position clearly along with a compelling rationale.
- Have a written text that forms the basis for the intervention, as it is a daunting task to speak coherently and clearly in a room full of negotiators.
- It is also better to spend less time on opening statements and more on textual suggestions.
- Before making an intervention, particularly if it is complex or sensitive, you should consult other members of the delegation most concerned with the topic and obtain their views on the intervention.

Active Listening and Exchange

- Listen carefully to the interventions of others and, to the extent possible, support interventions that are generally consistent with your own position in order to generate progress.
- If others object to your text, try to enter into a discussion of the reasons why you proposed the text.
- When statements made by others are not clear, ask clarifying questions to understand what the statements actually mean.
- Ask exploratory questions. Do not just ask: "What does this mean?" Instead, ask "Does this mean…?" This way you can ensure that you are not given a response that does not really answer your question.

If You Cannot Agree With a Proposal

- If you cannot agree with a proposal, you need to clearly say so (silence is consent), identify the concern, ensure that the proposal is bracketed, and if possible, insert your own into the text (in brackets when there are other points of view).
- Avoid using words like "delete." Keep proposing to use new compromise language. Go from "discourage" to "consider"; from "assist" to "explore."
- Try to avoid statements like "we disagree" or "we hold to our own position;" instead, try to think in terms of "in the spirit of compromise," "in order to take account of," "in the interest of reaching agreement," "to promote consensus," "can agree with," "to meet our own interests and yours," etc.

DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS

Coalitions

Countries try to develop coalitions with other countries, as they

- effectively reduce the number of groups engaged in negotiations
- reduce transaction costs for countries by helping them pool their resources and increase their negotiation leverage
- show solidarity and strong support that can help put issues on the agenda, put forward a position, and modify or break a consensus.

Annex and non-Annex in the Paris Agreement

The Convention organises countries into Annex I/B, Annex II, and non-Annex I countries. Most non-Annex I countries belong to the Group of 77 and China (G77 and China). The Paris Agreement does not refer to Annex I or non-Annex I. It uses the terms “developed” and “developing” countries and specifies some flexibility for least developed countries and Small Island Developing States.

Key Groups

- Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
- African Group of Negotiators (AGN)
- Least Developed Countries (LDCs)
- Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC)
- European Union (EU)
- Like-minded developing countries (LMDCs)
- Arab Group
- Umbrella Group
- Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)
- Grupo Sur
- Coalition of Rainforest Nations

Tips and Tricks

- Identify the coalition(s) to which you belong and attend their meetings. Check the live schedule for meeting times.
- Attend the pre-meetings and preparatory sessions for coalitions in the days before a session.
- Ensure you are part of the relevant WhatsApp or Signal groups where coalitions or issue-specific delegates discuss options and developments.
- Master the internal procedures and workings of the coalitions to which you belong. Be active within the coalitions.
- Listen very carefully to the views of others and see if you are speaking the same language.
- Identify if there are issues on which you can agree with other coalitions, but do not do this behind the back of your own group. This can create an unpleasant diplomatic breach.
- In making contacts, keep the existing coalitions of countries in mind.
- Read miscellaneous documents that cover country positions on specific issues.
- Keep copies of group positions and submissions from past and ongoing negotiations in their different drafts (institutional memory).

Resources

- On Behalf of My Delegation: Second Edition (by IISD)

How Negotiations End

It is important for negotiators to reach closure, i.e., reach a conclusion on the issues central to them. Prolonged disagreement leads to postponement of solutions to a future date, thereby delaying action, which may be precisely what the other party wants. Assessing in advance whether a weak agreement is better than a delayed agreement is critical.

- ✦ Drafting Decisions – Getting to Consensus (by Paul Watkinson, former UNFCCC SBSTA Chair)

Key Thing to Remember: No one leaves entirely happy

Consensus in the UNFCCC context means the final package is acceptable to all parties—not that anyone is fully satisfied. Experienced negotiators describe a successful COP as one where everyone is "equally unhappy." If your group feels it won on everything, either the outcome was exceptionally one-sided, or you have misjudged the room.

Strategies Commonly Used

The Package Logic

At a COP, the complete set of decisions across all agenda items constitutes a political package.

- Assess the full package, not any single item. Parties assess overall balance, not individual outcomes.
- A party that "wins" on every individual point is a party that has damaged the trust needed for consensus. Keep in mind that implementation may also be weak if other parties feel an agreement was not fair.
- Links between items can be used strategically, but holding one item hostage to progress on another is a high-risk tactic that can lead to both items failing. Use linkages carefully and transparently.
- If the overall balance is fair, reluctant acceptance of one item may be the cost of the overall deal. Know this going into the closing plenary.

Salvage Progress

In cases where the informal consultation or contact group cannot come to consensus on the draft text, but parties would like to preserve the progress made during the session, they may consider producing a procedural conclusion, noting the progress made during the session and capturing the working draft of the draft texts.

The language in an SB conclusion usually reads something like the following:

> The SBI/SBSTA, at its XXX session, took note of the informal note prepared by the co-facilitators for this agenda item at this session (with a footnote linking to the informal note/draft text). It decided to continue further consideration of this agenda item at SBI XX, taking into consideration, (in particular,) this informal note, with the aim of recommending a draft decision for consideration and adoption by the Conference of the Parties at its XX session.

Rule 16

When countries cannot reach agreement, Rule 16 of the Draft Rules of Procedure applies. This means the agenda item is automatically included on the provisional agenda for the next meeting. All the pre-sessional documents will be presented again for consideration, but any documents prepared during the negotiations will be lost (unless, on an exceptional basis, parties agree to continue with them at the outset of the resumed discussions).

Second Week of COP

The second week of a climate COP is qualitatively different from the first. When the subsidiary bodies close, the COP Presidency takes direct control of unresolved agenda items. The pace accelerates, the stakes rise, and ministerial-level involvement becomes common.

- Issues resolved at the technical level by negotiators carry more precision and more legitimacy than issues resolved by ministers in 48 hours.
- Completing work under the subsidiary bodies is always better than escalating.
- The Presidency has every incentive to limit what it takes up in week two.

What Gets Taken Up–and What Does Not

Do not assume your item will automatically go to ministers. The Presidency decides which items warrant further work in week two. Items not taken up are sent, by default, to the next session of the subsidiary bodies under Rule 16, if there is no procedural conclusion.

The Presidency has every incentive to limit second-week work and will apply pressure to complete technical work in week one. This pressure is intentional and legitimate.

If your item is not taken up in week two, it is not lost—but it means restarting at the next session. If it is taken up, be ready for a faster pace and higher-level engagement than week one.

Ministerial Consultations

Ministerial pairs focus on a small number of key political points, not on detailed textual editing. They often assume that secondary issues will fall into place once the key issues are resolved.

- Stay engaged with the technical track. Technical issues remain live even when ministers are consulting. Ministers often "spin off" specific technical questions back to negotiators, and you need to be available and ready.
- Brief your minister thoroughly before each round. Ministerial facilitators who are poorly briefed on the history and options of their item lose credibility quickly in the room.

Presidency Iterations and the Final Package

Presidency drafts are not negotiating texts in the usual sense. They represent the Presidency's judgment on where a balanced outcome lies. Treat successive iterations as a trajectory, not as individual proposals to accept or reject. The sailing-boat metaphor applies here: successive drafts may tack from one side to the other before settling on a final course. An iteration that seems to favour the other side on one point may be compensating on another.

- Assess all decisions together. Look at the balance across the full package, not just the decision most relevant to your delegation.
- A "no-surprises" approach goes both ways. The Presidency commits to announcing its plans clearly. In return, it may request parties not to take surprise positions in the closing plenary. Respect this norm: disrupting a ready plenary is a high-risk move with significant reputational consequences.

Consensus and Closing Plenaries

The closing plenary is where decisions are formally adopted. Understanding what consensus means in this context—and what options are available—is essential for any government negotiator.

What Consensus Means

Consensus is not unanimity. It means that no party formally objects to the adoption of a decision. A party can express reservations, concerns, or disappointment and still allow a decision to be adopted, provided it does not take the floor to formally oppose adoption. "Unable to join the consensus" and "formal opposition" are not the same thing. The former permits consensus; the latter blocks it. Choose your language deliberately in the closing plenary.

- **Full support:** Party endorses the outcome and makes a supportive statement in the closing plenary.
- **Reluctant acceptance:** Party accepts while placing its concerns on the record. Common for developing countries on finance packages that fell short of expectations.
- **"Unable to join the consensus":** Party does not agree with, but permits, consensus. For example, Nicaragua at COP 21 stated it could not join the consensus on the Paris Agreement but did not formally block adoption. Nicaragua subsequently ratified the Agreement.
- **Formal opposition:** Party does not agree with the agreement and blocks adoption. Bolivia at COP 16 continued to oppose adoption of the Cancún Agreements. President Espinosa declared consensus regardless, citing the position of all other parties.

Placing concerns on the record is a standard practice that allows a delegation to show its capital that it fought for its position while not blocking the overall deal.

Quorum

Quorum is a real and enforceable constraint. Decisions require the presence of two-thirds of parties to be legally valid. The risk of a quorum challenge grows with every hour a conference overruns its scheduled close. Although this has not yet happened in the UNFCCC context, the lack of quorum at CBD COP 16 in Cali (2024) resulted in the suspension of proceedings.

Statements After Adoption

Statements made after a decision is adopted are on the official record. They shape how your position is understood going into the next session on the same item. Use them deliberately.

- Expressing concern on record is not the same as reopening a decision. It establishes a baseline for future negotiations. It is a legitimate tool, not a failure.
- Keep statements brief and substantive. Long speeches that hold up the plenary carry less weight than concise, precise statements. The President has discretion over speaking time.

AFTER THE NEGOTIATIONS

How to Write an Effective Daily Brief

You might be required by your delegation to provide a daily update of the negotiation, or a summary of the outcome of the agenda item you are responsible for.

A daily update brief should be less than one page and provide an overview of what happened during an informal consultation, a workshop, or a mandated event. Remember, your head of delegation might receive upwards of 7-10 of these briefs every day, so you want them to be as succinct as possible and offer a big picture for your head of delegation and colleagues.

- Take detailed notes during the informal consultation or contact group, particularly on negotiating text changes. This will help you verify the accuracy of the next version and of the final meeting report.
- Keep track of the negotiators whose positions support or oppose your delegation's positions. This will help you identify who to reach out to in bilaterals to gain or reinforce support for your delegation's position.
- Maintain daily records and summaries of the negotiations. This will help you provide daily reports to your delegation and prepare a report at the end of the meeting.

Identify the Meeting by Type and by Topic/Name

- Contact group, informal consultation, informal-informal, workshop, mandated event, etc. on X issue

Briefly Summarise What Happened

- General tone and dynamics in the room
- Views expressed by key players
- Strong or unexpected divergences

Flag Any Cross-Cutting or Important Information for Your Head of Delegation and Colleagues

- Any links made to other agenda items or issues
- Unexpected divergences from coalition positions
- Reactions by non-governmental organisations or observers
- Attempts to challenge the process or authority of the facilitators
- Etc.

Identify Expected Next Steps

- Is there an outcome?
- When is the next meeting?
- Is there a new version of the text? If not, when can we expect the next version?
- Do you believe it will need high-level or ministerial consultations?

Preparation Sheet

The preparation sheet is a coordination tool to help delegations prepare for the climate change negotiations.

It encourages delegation members to reflect on negotiation priorities and strategies to achieve them; clarifies who leads each agenda item; and fosters strategic thinking about possible interlinkages and trade-offs between agenda items.

Download the preparation sheet (.docx) that pairs with this toolkit **here**.

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On behalf of:
Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
of the Federal Republic of Germany

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