Model United Nations Glossary

**Abstain** - During a vote on a substantive matter, delegates may abstain rather than vote yes or no. This generally signals that a state does not support the resolution being voted on, but does not oppose it enough to vote no.

**Adjourn** - All UN or Model UN sessions end with a vote to adjourn. This means that the debate is suspended until the next meeting. This can be a short time (e.g. overnight) or a long time (until next year’s conference).

**Agenda** - The order in which the issues before a committee will be discussed. The first duty of a committee following the roll call is usually to set the agenda.

**Amendment** - A change to a draft resolution on the floor. It can be of two types: a "friendly amendment" is supported by the original draft resolution's sponsors, and is passed automatically, while an "unfriendly amendment" is not supported by the original sponsors and must be voted on by the committee as a whole.

**Arab League** - A body independent of the UN, comprised of Arab states in Africa and the Middle East. Some of its procedural rules differ from those of the UN (e.g. in the Arab League, a resolution is not binding on states which vote against it).

**Binding** - Having legal force in UN member states. Security Council resolutions are binding, as are decisions of the International Court of Justice; resolutions of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council are not.

**Bloc** - A group of countries that form a logical combination because of geographical, economic, or cultural similarities (e.g. G8, African bloc, Arab League).

**Caucus** - A break in formal debate in which countries can more easily and informally discuss a topic. There are two types: moderated caucus and unmoderated caucus. Usually some of a committee's most productive work is accomplished during caucuses.

**Chair** – Also known as a moderator, this is a member of the dais that moderates debate, keeps time, rules on points and motions and enforces the rules of procedure.

**Dais** - The group of people in charge of a Model UN committee, which generally consists of a Chair, a Director and a Rapporteur.

**Delegate** - A participant acting as a representative of a member state or observer in a Model UN committee.

**Delegation** - The entire group of people representing a member state or observer in all committees at a particular Model UN conference.
Division of the question - During voting bloc, delegates may motion to vote on certain clauses of a resolution separately, so that only the clauses that are passed become part of the final resolution (e.g. vote on Clauses 1, 3 and 4 together, but the rest individually). This is useful if you agree with one part of a resolution but not the whole thing.

Draft Resolution - A Working Paper which has been signed by sponsor countries and approved for debate by the chair. A draft resolution seeks to fix the problems addressed by a Model UN committee and must be submitted in the correct format. If passed by the committee, the draft resolution will become a resolution.

Flow of debate - The order in which events proceed during a Model UN conference.

Foreign aid - Money given by one country to another for humanitarian or developmental purposes. It plays a key role in shaping foreign policy.

Foreign policy - The attitudes and interests of a state towards external issues. Foreign policy can be influenced by a variety of factors such as military strength, trading partners, history and domestic government.

Formal debate - The "standard" type of debate at a Model UN conference, in which delegates speak for a certain time in an order based on a speakers' list. They must also formally yield the floor to questions, the chair, or another delegate.

G8 (Group of Eight) - A body comprised of eight of the world’s most powerful nations: Canada, the U.S., U.K., France, Italy, Japan, Germany, and Russia.

Gavel - The tool, shaped like a small wooden hammer, which the chair uses to keep order within a Model UN committee.

Head Delegate - The leader of a Model UN team attending a conference as a delegation.

Member State - A country that has ratified the Charter of the United Nations and whose application to join has been accepted by the General Assembly and Security Council. Currently, there are 193 member states.

Moderated caucus - A type of caucus in which delegates remain seated and the Chair calls on them one at a time to speak for a short period of time, enabling a freer exchange of opinion than would be possible in formal debate.

Moderator - See Chair.

Motion - A request made by a delegate that the committee as a whole does something. Some motions might be to go into a caucus, to adjourn, to introduce a draft resolution, to enact a right of reply, or to move into voting bloc.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) - Security organisation created in 1949 by Western powers to provide a collective force against the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold
War era it has taken on new responsibilities in peacekeeping and enforcement of international law in places such as Kosovo and Afghanistan.

**NGOs (Non-governmental Organisations)** - Organisations or associations that are not associated with a specific country or international political organisation. Their aims can be broad (World Vision International, Amnesty International, Greenpeace) or quite specific (Doctors Without Borders). The United Nations has a history of working closely with NGOs on various issues, especially relating to humanitarian projects.

**Non-member / observer** - A state, national organisation, regional organisation, or non-governmental organisation that is not a member of the UN but participates in its debates. Observers can vote on procedural matters but not substantive matters. Examples are the Holy See, Palestinian Authority or Red Cross.

**On the floor** - At a Model UN conference, when a working paper or draft resolution is first written, it may not be discussed in debate. After it is approved by the Director and introduced by the committee, it is put “on the floor” and may be discussed.

**Operative clause** - The part of a resolution following the Preamble which describes how the UN will address a problem. These numbered clauses set out actual solutions and initiatives for the committee to undertake, and always begin with a verb (such as: decides, establishes, recommends).

**Placard** - A piece of card with a country's name on it that a delegate raises in the air to signal to the Chair that he or she wishes to speak.

**Point** - A request raised by a delegate for information or for an action relating to that delegate. Examples include a point of order, a point of inquiry, and a point of personal privilege.

**Position paper** - An informal paper written by a delegate before a Model UN conference summarising their country’s position on a topic, including its track record on the issue, policy targets and proposed solutions.

**Preambulatory clause** - The clauses at the beginning of a resolution that introduce the issue by describing previous actions taken on the topic and reasons why the resolution is necessary. Each begins with a participle or adjective (noting, concerned, regretting, aware of, recalling, etc.). They are not numbered.

**Procedural** - Having to do with the way a committee is run, as opposed to the topic being discussed. All delegates present must vote on procedural matters and may not abstain.

**Quorum** - The minimum number of delegates needed to be present for a committee to meet. In the General Assembly, a quorum consists of one third of the members to begin debate, and a majority of members to pass a resolution. In the Security Council, no
quorum exists for the body to debate, but nine members must be present to pass a resolution.

**Resolution** - A document that has been passed by a UN body aiming to address a particular problem or issue. The UN equivalent of a law.

**Right of Reply** - A right to speak in reply to a previous speaker’s comment, invoked when a delegate feels that their personal or national integrity has been insulted or slandered by another’s speech. It is easily the most over-attempted and misused motion in Model UN debating – delegates often fail to understand that asking for a ‘Right of Reply’ is making a very serious accusation and must not be abused. The Director decides whether to grant the Right of Reply and their decision is not open to appeal. If granted the Chair will normally ask the offending party if they wish to apologize.

**Roll call** - The first order of business in a Model UN committee, during which the Chair reads aloud the names of each member state in the committee. When a delegate’s country’s name is called, he or she may respond “present” or “present and voting.” A delegate responding “present and voting” may not abstain on a substantive vote.

**Rules of Procedure** - The rules by which a Model UN committee is run.

**Second** - To agree with a motion being proposed. Many motions must be seconded before they can be brought to a vote.

**Secretariat** - The most senior staff of a Model UN conference.

**Secretary General** - The leader of a Model UN conference.

**Security Council** - The most powerful body within the UN, it is comprised of fifteen members, five of which are permanent and have the power of veto (see veto). It is responsible for the UN’s peace and security policy, dealing with conflict through peacekeeping, sanctions and other measures.

**Signatory** - A country that wishes a draft resolution to be put on the floor and signs the draft resolution to accomplish this. A signatory need not support a resolution; it only wants it to be discussed. Usually, Model UN conferences require some minimum number of sponsors and signatories for a draft resolution to be approved.

**Simple majority** – 50 per cent plus one of the number of delegates in a committee. The amount needed to pass most votes.

**Speakers’ list** - A list that determines the order in which delegates will speak. Whenever a new topic is opened for discussion, the Chair will create a speakers’ list by asking all delegates wishing to speak to raise their placards and calling on them one at a time. During debate, a delegate may indicate that he or she wishes to be added to the speakers’ list by sending a note to the dais. Your country’s name cannot be on the speakers’ list more than once at a time.
**Sponsor/Co-sponsor** - Working papers and resolutions require sponsors (the main authors) and in some cases co-sponsors. Being a co-sponsor does not necessarily mean being in support of the ideas presented, - you may just want to see them debated in front of the rest of the committee. A friendly amendment can only be created if all sponsors agree.

**Study guide** - A guide to a topic being discussed in a Model UN committee usually written by conference organisers and distributed to delegates before the conference. This is the starting point for any research before a Model UN conference and is also known as a topic guide.

**Substantive** - Having to do with the topic being discussed. A substantive vote is a vote on a draft resolution or amendment already on the floor during voting bloc. Only member states (not observer states or non-governmental organisations) may vote on substantive issues.

**Unmoderated caucus** - A type of caucus in which delegates leave their seats to mingle and speak freely. Enables the free sharing of ideas to an extent not possible in formal debate or even a moderated caucus. Frequently used to sort countries into blocs and to write working papers and draft resolutions.

**Veto** - The ability, held by China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, to prevent any draft resolution in the Security Council from passing by voting against it.

**Vote** - A time at which delegates indicate whether they do or do not support a proposed action for the committee. There are two types: procedural and substantive.

**Voting bloc/Voting procedure** - The period at the end of a committee session during which delegates vote on proposed amendments and draft resolutions. Nobody may enter or leave the room during voting bloc.

**Working paper** - These are documents in which the ideas of some delegates on how to resolve an issue are proposed. Working papers are one step below a draft resolution, and many are often combined into one. Their overall purpose is to set out specific solutions or policy stances on an issue that can be debated within the committee.

**Yield** - In formal debate the delegate must yield his/her time at the beginning of their speech in one of three ways:

1. to the chair: once the speech is over the chair takes the floor and moves on with the speaker's list
2. to questions: delegates can ask questions to the speaker for his/her remaining time
3. to another delegate: another speaker uses up the remaining time to give a speech, but cannot yield themselves.