Editing of proposals at the United Nations

Presentation for the information of delegations

Introduction

The **Editing Section** 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 48 hours of submission. With such a short turnaround time it is essential that the editor 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 the final version of the adopted text (usually 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.

After adoption, resolutions and decisions are **concorded** in all six languages. This is the process by which differences in meanings among the language versions are corrected. Such differences are usually the result of ambiguity in the original language version. The editors recognize that "constructive ambiguity" is sometimes intentionally used to facilitate agreement on a sensitive text. In consultation with the facilitator/sponsor, editors can help to ensure that the message is identical in all the languages while preserving the desired level of vagueness. At the concordance stage, changes made by delegates at the time of adoption of the resolution are incorporated in the final text and source references (footnotes) are added or deleted as needed.

Editors will not make changes that alter meaning. Whenever a language issue touches on a substantive matter, the editor will consult with the drafter or facilitator. It is helpful for the editors to be informed of any passages that have been closely negotiated.

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 editors are highly qualified professionals who are conversant in at least three of the six official languages. They 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, editors play a key role as coordinators because, by solving problems in the original language version, one editor saves 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. There was a recent article in the New York Times, for example, about the revision of United States Supreme Court decisions after their issuance (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/25/us/final-word-on-us-law-isnt-supreme-court-keeps-editing.html?_r=0).

Structure of resolutions

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(s), the words **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 that editors make to draft resolutions

Editors will check and correct titles and facts (such as dates); correct grammar and syntax; correct, add or delete footnotes where necessary; and make minor adjustments to style 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 that are made by editors:

- **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 conventions, declarations, etc.) will be checked and corrected if necessary. If an event mentioned in a resolution takes place between the

time the draft is submitted and the time the resolution is adopted, the verbs will be adjusted from future to past accordingly.

- **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.** Editors 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, the editors need to be informed of it.
- **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. The editors 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.** The editor 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 the editor can find no such previous text, he or she 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 editor will consult with the author to determine the preferred formulation in such cases.

- **Footnotes.** At the concordance stage, source footnotes may be added 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, the editor will change a reference to "the summer of 2014", for example, to "the third quarter of 2014".
- **Including, inter alia.** The use of "including" together with "inter alia" is redundant. The editor will delete one of them.

Editorial helpdesk and other resources

Editors are available to offer assistance and advice. Delegates are encouraged to contact the Editing Section if they have an editorial or language question on a draft resolution:

editorialcontrol@un.org
(212)963-2528

Other resources:

- United Nations Editorial Manual Online (dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/)
- UNTERM (untermportal.un.org)
- Official Document System (ods.un.org)

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