

WTO



BACKGROUND GUIDE

HPSMUN2025

Note from the Secretary-General



In retrospect, my first MUN was pretty much a joke. I had no idea where to start my research, I didn't understand half the terminology, and my confidence was somewhere under the table. I was inexperienced, underprepared, and incredibly anxious. But today, when I look back at my most recent MUN as a delegate, everything stood in sharp contrast. I was confident, I was working with my atmosphere. I had a grasp on what I was doing — every last detail. And yet, despite all that growth, I couldn't figure out what to write for this Sec-Gen note. Not because I didn't know how to write it. Believe it or not, I put off writing this one note for over a week simply because I was just not satisfied with what I was coming up with.

But then something caught my attention the other day. I looked across the table and saw my team working — quietly, diligently, brilliantly. It was a beautiful yet rare sight. And at that exact moment, I finally realized what it truly means to be a Secretary-General.

Being a Sec-Gen isn't about being the best delegate in the room. It isn't about delivering perfect speeches, or making resolutions, or position papers. It's about being someone people can rely on. Someone who gets things (shit) done. Someone who can spearhead an event of this significance and make it exceptional. And when I ask myself how I learned all of this — how I reached a point where I could humbly call myself a Sec-Gen — I realized something important. MUNs didn't just teach me confidence or reduce my anxiety. MUNs taught me how to organize, how to manage, and how to lead.

People often think MUN is only about public speaking or writing resolutions. But that's just the superficial tip of the iceberg. MUN teaches you how to network, how to collaborate, how to lobby and how to enjoy doing it.

The first Inter-School HPS MUN was never established just for awards, certificates, or recognition. It was created so you could learn, grow, and — most importantly — enjoy the journey. Because the moment you start having fun, you absorb more than any workshop or handbook can ever teach you. You learn how to build connections, make memories, and use those connections meaningfully.

It may not make sense to you now — but when you've played the delegate game long enough, everything comes together. It's like watching a painting come to life. Every MUN you attend becomes a stroke on the canvas. Every experience adds color, depth, meaning. And when you finally step back and look at the whole picture... you realize how beautiful the journey truly was. That's exactly what happened to me. And if there's anything I hope for, it's that each one of you gets to experience that same transformation — in your own way, at your own pace.

For now, this is all I can write as your Secretary-General.

And maybe... that's enough.

Note from the Chair



I am Aprameya, a freelancer primarily working in the field of academic and creative writing. Over the past eight years, I've participated in more than 100 MUNs across the three major circuits of South India — Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai. I'm such a staunch advocate for libre software that many jokingly assume I'm a long-lost son of Richard Stallman. As for whether I'm employed by RAW, ISI, Mossad, CIA, GCHQ, or FSB... I neither confirm nor deny anything.

Note from the Vice-Chair



Apurva Srinivas believes that a committee is only as strong as the questions it dares to ask and the silences it knows how to break. As the Vice Chair, Apurva offers a reminder that this room is built on the delegates' voices—their courage to challenge what seems inevitable and their willingness to look beyond the velvet curtains to what lies beneath. Behind every motion and every point raised lies a chance to hold power to account, to carve out fairness where none existed, and to leave behind a world just a touch more honest than the one found. Apurva hopes that each voice in the committee carries not only facts but also the quiet grace of purpose that transforms lingering thoughts into ideas.

Rooted in the belief that truth often lies in the tension between opposing sides, Apurva is passionate about cultivating a space that is both intellectually rich and emotionally grounded—a space where delegates think deeply, argue respectfully, and grow collectively. She looks forward to witnessing the energy, insight, and nuance that every participant will bring to the committee.

Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings, dear delegates.

This is a *concise* guide designed with the purpose of providing you a *basic* understanding of the agenda and the conduct of the simulation. Note that the perusal of this guide's content will be *insufficient* if you wish to enjoy a healthy and competitive debate. Use the information you find between these pages as *just an accompaniment* to your research efforts.

We shall be available to clarify any and all of your doubts before the conference. However, we would suggest you consider querying us as an option to be exercised as *last resort*, not first move.

Regards,
Executive Board,
General Council,
World Trade Organization

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Basic tips for first timers

Debate and Research

One of the first questions all first time delegates have with regards to MUNs is – how do we prepare for the debate?

Fun fact: In MUNs, the process of preparing for the debate is termed ‘research’.

Contrary to popular belief, one does not have to know every thing about one’s own allotted country nor does one need to know about the country’s specific capacities in terms of territory, finance, ranking in major indices relating to various issues and aspects etcetera. What one does have to know is about their country’s current government’s stance on the given issue and the history and context within which such stance has been developed – or in fancier terms, the foreign policy of one’s country. A detailed explanation of what foreign policy is and how it can be identified can be found in the section relating to foreign policy in this guide.

Once you know and understand your country’s foreign policy, you can then try to find literature, legal, and scholarly material that helps justify and advance the country’s foreign policy stance.

For example, if you are allotted India and the agenda of the committee is India and Pakistan's border dispute, you must try to find material that will justify India's claim that Kashmir belongs to India – the stance that the Indian government takes on the issue.

With the same aforementioned example, let us look at what the ideal search terms for finding such research material will be in your preferred search engine: 'India Pakistan border Indian legal claims pdf'.

You can change the search query according to the relevance of the results but in 99% of the cases, you can find the results you

are looking for using the search query construction technique illustrated above. The term 'pdf' was included in the query because that brings up research papers and scholarly studies in the search results which are much more comprehensive and reliable than regular news sites, blogs, and video results.

For guidance on which sources will be treated as more reliable in comparison to others, please refer to the sub-section on hierarchy of evidence in the section 'Specific contentious rules' within this guide.

Diplomacy a.k.a “lobbying”

In MUNs, you learn how to work with individuals from different backgrounds and diverse ideas in order to build consensus and find lasting solutions to real world problems. This process is called ‘diplomacy’ in the real world and ‘lobbying’ in MUNs.

As the delegate of a country in a United Nations body, you must find a way to convince the other delegates in your committee to work towards solutions that benefit both of you. In case there are differences in two countries’ foreign policies, as a diplomat, you must work to find a way past the differences and build a consensus; such a consensus might require a compromise, concession, or conciliation.

Documentation

At the end of most MUN simulations, the delegates are expected to work together and create formal documents that encapsulate the gist of proceedings over the course of past days and provide solutions to the issues discussed. To make such a document, you must familiarise yourself with the syntax, structure, and purpose of those documents.

You shall find in the ‘About the WTO’ section a sub-section dedicated to explaining in brief what forms of documentation can be allowed in the committee and their purpose. Once you know that, just head over to <https://digitallibrary.un.org> and search for a sample of those documents to familiarise yourself with their syntax and structure.

- General tip

We know all this may seem daunting at first but trust us — it is very simple and easy. All that you need to do is leave your fears and anxieties at home and give your best with the utmost aplomb you can muster.

FOREIGN POLICY BASICS

What is foreign policy?

Foreign policy, in simple terms, is what your country aims to achieve with regards to the issue at hand or in general with its relations with other countries.

What role must foreign policy play in your research?

Understanding the foreign policy of your country must be a checkbox that you tick off at the very beginning of your research.

Your foreign policy should dictate everything from the arguments you make, the reasoning you give for making those arguments, and the actions you take in the Council.

Where do I look to find foreign policy?

Most of the time, foreign policy is not explicitly stated. It must be inferred from the actions and statements issued by the country.

Pro tip: start reading the meeting records from previous meetings of the World Trade Organization (or any other UN body where your country might have spoken on the issue). If such records are unavailable, look for statements from your country's Foreign Ministry (or equivalent like Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs etcetera) and top leadership (PM, Pres., Secretary of State, Defense Minister).

How shall the EB analyze your understanding of foreign policy?

This Executive Board shall focus on *foreign policy representation* rather than *foreign policy advancement*. To those that do not know the difference between the two, a proper explanation will be provided on the first day of the conference.

About the Committee

WHAT IS WTO?

The World Trade Organization is an international organization that was created by the 'Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization' of 15 April 1994. The WTO operates a global system of trade rules, it acts as a forum for negotiating trade agreements, it settles trade disputes between its members and it supports the needs of developing countries. The overall objective of the WTO is to help its members use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and improve people's lives.

FUNCTIONS OF THE WTO

The main functions of the WTO include:

- negotiating the reduction or elimination of obstacles to trade (import tariffs, other barriers to trade) and agreeing on rules governing the conduct of international trade (e.g. antidumping, subsidies, product standards, etc.)
- administering and monitoring the application of the WTO's agreed rules for trade in goods, trade in services, and trade-related intellectual property rights
- monitoring and reviewing the trade policies of our members, as well as ensuring transparency of regional and bilateral trade agreements
- settling disputes among our members regarding the interpretation and application of the agreements
- building capacity of developing country government officials in international trade matters
- assisting the process of accession of some 30 countries who are not yet members of the organization
- conducting economic research and collecting and disseminating trade data in support of the WTO's other main activities

STRUCTURE OF WTO

The WTO's main decision-making body is the Ministerial Conference, which meets usually every two years. Below this is the General Council, which meets several times a year in Geneva. The General Council acts on behalf of the Ministerial Conference in between ministerial conferences. It meets as the Dispute Settlement Body to oversee procedures for settling disputes between members and as the Trade Policy Review Body to analyze members' trade policies and practices. Numerous councils, committees, working groups and working parties deal with the individual WTO agreements and other specific issues, such as the environment, development and membership applications.

Decisions are made by the entire membership. This is typically by consensus. Where a Decision cannot be arrived at by consensus, the matter at issue shall be decided by voting. The WTO's agreements have been ratified in all members' parliaments.

Further reading:

1. What is WTO—Overview
2. Who We Are – WTO
3. Organization Chart – WTO
4. WTO in Brief
5. Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization
6. Legal texts – WTO

Agenda: Re-evaluating existing tariff structures in light of growing concerns regarding unsustainable external debt burdens in both developing and developed nations

Since Donald Trump became the 47th President of the United States of America and imposed exorbitant tariffs on most of

America's major trading partners, tariffs have become a hot button topic. But what really are tariffs and what is their relation with external debt of a country? To understand these, let us understand what tariffs and external debt are.

A customs duty – or tariff – is tax levied at the border on imported goods. There are different types of customs duties – such as ad valorem tariffs (percentage of import value) and specific tariffs (based on weight or volume of goods).

External debt, on the other hand, refers to the portion of a country's debt that is borrowed from foreign lenders, including commercial banks, governments, or international financial institutions. The relation between external debt and tariffs can be seen when people started realizing that one of the reasons why a country's external debt is high is because of the foreign trade it undertakes – by buying more from outside, a country might slow down the growth of its domestic industries and simultaneously need to borrow large sums of money from other countries to pay for the goods or services it is buying from those foreign countries.

Some believe that tariffs, by discouraging foreign trade and promoting domestic industries, reduces the increase in external debt and boosts economic development which would help pay off the existing external debt.

But many others argue that by imposing tariffs a country shoots itself in the foot as it makes buying necessary goods that cannot be produced domestically prohibitively expensive and thereby creating a ripple effect that reduces economic growth while having little to no effect on the external debt.

Regardless of what one believes is true, one cannot argue with the idea that unsustainable external debt is the specter haunting developing and developed countries alike – threatening economic meltdowns and bloodbaths of catastrophic proportions with potential defaults, exchange rate risks, and ruined credit ratings.

Approach tariffs as a policy tool while also fulfilling their obligations, as members of the WTO by reducing trade barriers, combatting unfair trade practices, and adhering to the principle of non-discrimination.

Venture forth and dive deep into your exploration of how national and international policies on tariffs can affect external debt of an economy and what ought to be done to ensure an increase in openness to trade globally without exposing countries to an unnecessary risk of financial failure. The resources linked below will help you begin your journey but do not limit yourselves to just these. All the best for your preparation.

Further reading:

1. Glossary of the WTO
2. Macroeconomic Consequences of Tariffs
3. An anatomy of tariffs
4. Are trade deficits good or bad, and can tariffs reduce them?
5. The Macroeconomy After Tariffs
6. Macroeconomic impact of tariffs and policy uncertainty
7. Tariffs, Deficits, and Debt
8. Tariffs Will Destroy the Best Cure for the Trade Deficit

SPECIFIC CONTENTIOUS RULES

This section covers the Executive Board's views on some of the contentious rules that usually create confusion, conflict, and consternation when not explicitly stated in advance. The judgement and scoring during the MUN will be based on the views expressed here.

REGARDING THIS GUIDE AND EVIDENCE

Just because a resource has been mentioned in the background guide, *does not mean that it can surely be used as evidence to your argument in the Council.* Why? Because:

Eclectic nature of the resources:

The guide has resources of wide variety. Some of the resources could be opinion-based articles, some may be from sources sympathetic to one party in the conflict, some could be out dated (we will try our best to not share such resources but we cannot control for things such as emergence of new facts post guide publication).

Foreign policy commitments:

To explain this point, we'll be using an example. Pakistan claims Kashmir is legally theirs. India claims, contrary to Pakistan, that Kashmir is theirs. Both sides, many-a-times, use the same evidence to argue their case but still derive completely different conclusions. In such cases, the Executive Board can not accept the claims of one country while rejecting the claims of the other when both of those claims are backed by acceptable and equivalent evidence.

Hierarchy of evidence

Evidence can be presented from a wide variety of sources but not all sources are treated as equal. Here's the hierarchy in which evidence is categorized:

Tier 1: Includes: any publication, statement, resolution, or document released by any of the United Nations' official organs or committees; any publication, statement, or document released by a UN member state in its own capacity.

The evidence falling in this tier is considered most reliable during the simulation.

Tier 2: Includes: any news article published by any official media source that is owned and controlled by a UN member state. E.g.: Xinhua News (China), Prasar Bharti (India), BBC (United Kingdom) etcetera.

The evidence falling in this tier is considered sufficiently reliable in case no other evidence from any Tier 1 source is available on that particular fact, event, or situation.

Tier 3: Includes: any publication from news sources of international repute such as Reuters, The New York Times, Agency—France Presse, etcetera.

The evidence falling under this tier is considered the least reliable for the purposes of this simulation.

PLAGIARISM AND MACHINE-GENERATED CONTENT

Any and all drafts submitted to be published as outcome documents for the Council shall be checked for plagiarism and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Due to the nature of UN legal writing, a 20% plagiarism rate will be tolerated. But plagiarism of any higher rate will render the draft outcome document inadmissible.

If the draft outcome document is a draft resolution, only the operative clauses will be checked for plagiarism.

No use of AI shall be tolerated. Even if we detect rates of AI use as low as 5%, we shall reject the submitted document out right.

Personal pronouns

This particular Executive Board does not care very much about whether a delegate uses personal pronouns to refer to her self/himself. As long as the language employed by the delegate is diplomatic in both tone and content, we will not mind the usage of personal pronouns.

Cheat-sheet on ROP

For the purpose of making the simulation easier to the procedure rally-unacquainted, the following ROP cheat-sheet is being made available.

Motions

Setting the agenda

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to set the agenda as _____.

ESTABLISHING A GSL

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to establish the general speakers' list with an individual speaker's time of ____.

Moderated caucuses

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to suspend formal debate and move into a moderated caucus on the topic _____ for a total time period of ____ minutes with individual speaker's time being ____.

Unmoderated caucuses

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to suspend formal debate and move into an unmoderated caucus for a total time period of ____ minutes.

Extension to informal debate

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to extend the current moderated/unmoderated caucus by _____ minutes.

Introduction of documentation

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to introduce draft resolution/press statement/Presidential statement [number].

Voting on introduced document(s)

Delegate of _____ would like to raise a motion to table formal debate and move into voting on [document name].

POINTS

Point of personal privilege

- Personal inconvenience e.g. inaudibility of some part of the speech of another delegate
- CAN interrupt an active speaker

Point of parliamentary inquiry

- Used to clarify doubts on the rules of procedure • CANNOT interrupt a speaker

Point of information

- Used to ask questions to other delegates on their speeches • CANNOT interrupt an active speaker

Point of order

- Used to point out inaccuracies in procedure and if allowed, even on factual inaccuracies within the speeches of other delegates
- CANNOT interrupt an active speaker

YIELDS

Yield to points of information

Yielding the remaining time to other delegates so that they can question you on the speech you made.

Yield to another delegate

Yielding remaining time to some specific delegate to let her/him make her/his speech.

Yield to the executive board

Yielding the remaining time to the EB. Such yielded time is deemed elapsed by the EB but not always. Such time's usage is up-to the discretion of the EB.



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