

Effective participation in international negotiations

In international negotiations, only representatives of member governments can intervene in the debates. All others, including non-member countries, international organizations and non-governmental actors (e.g. environmental and industry organizations) can only make statements, usually at the end of the debate. However, much of the actual decision making takes place in informal working groups and talks behind the scenes rather than in the formal discussions. There is thus a number of ways for observers to intervene effectively.

The following points are intended for non-governmental actors, although some of them may also be also relevant for government delegates.

Preparation

- Get a good understanding of the political landscape of the negotiation, the main positions, the key players, and the controversial points, for example through reviewing the official reports of previous sessions of the process, and discussions with participants.
- Define the position of your organization in such a way that it will fit into this landscape. Find out who will be your likely supporters and your likely opponents. Consider not only the substantive and technical arguments to be made, but also the emotional appeal of your position, and consider the best ways to convey this.
- Discuss your position with like-minded non-governmental actors and consider joining forces with them.
- Contact key country delegations to seek a bilateral discussion with them, either before or during the meeting. This is more likely to be successful if done jointly with like-minded non-governmental actors. It is advisable to do this early on, when the country positions are still being discussed, and to approach not only key Ministries, but also others that may be influential (for example the Ministry of Trade).
- Prepare visual material (such as a flyer) explaining your position and its rationale; send this out to key players in advance.

During the meeting

- Distribute the visual material and make it available in the areas provided for this purpose at the venue of the meeting.
- Follow the initial debates to get a fresh perspective of the political landscape; verify the key players and their positions (the picture could be somewhat different from your initial understanding).
- Meet with like-minded non-governmental actors and continuously develop your common position, which you can jointly submit to the more informal discussion groups. Joining forces will not only make your position stronger but will also result in a larger group that can divide the tasks: for example, while one person follows the formal negotiations, another can spend time in informal talks with governments.
- Approach members of the key country delegations informally to share your position. Try to convince those whose position matches yours to include your points in their formal interventions, explaining how this can strengthen their argument. Try to explain your rationale and how your position can help move forward the issues to those who do not share your views.
- In many negotiations, regional groups meet in the mornings and evenings to discuss their regional position. Jointly with your like-minded partners, approach the chairpersons of these groups and ask to be invited to present your arguments, explaining how these will advance the issues under discussion.