



THE POWERFUL VOICES TOOLKIT

Youth-Friendly Guide on Writing Oral Statements at the United Nations

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INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO **OUR GUIDE!**

Hello hello! Welcome to another toolkit by CHOICE!

In this guide, we will explore how to write oral statements for various important international advocacy events , and particularly at the United Nations -such as Human Rights Council (HRC) sessions in Geneva or the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. Sounds amazing, right?

Delivering an oral statement at the United Nations (UN) is a fantastic opportunity to voice your concerns and advocate for issues you care about on a global stage. However, there is still a lack of youth-friendly information on how to engage in oral statements and what factors youth advocates should consider when having the opportunity to speak at the UN. This unequal access to information reinforces the existing challenges for young people from diverse backgrounds to actively participate in UN events and raise issues that are important to us.

WITH THIS TOOLKIT, WE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO: Navigate the process of writing and delivering oral statements

Support your mental health during this challenging time for activists from different parts of the world

And much more!

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed for youth advocates, emerging leaders, and anyone passionate about making their voice heard at the United Nations -and outside. Whether you're a first-time speaker or looking to sharpen your skills, this guide is for you if:

- → You're a Young Activist: Ready to speak up about issues that matter to you and your community.
- → You're an Emerging Leader: Eager to learn how to craft and deliver impactful statements.
- → You're Part of a Youth Organization: Seeking to better equip your team for global advocacy.
- → You're Passionate About Change: Motivated to overcome barriers and make a difference on the international stage.

This guide, while applicable to a wide array of events and types of oral statements, uses more of an UN-lens, examples and experiences that are UN-specific, as per our expertise.

To be more specific, an oral statement at the UN is quite different from other oral statement s in a few important ways.

First off,

UN oral statements are made during formal meetings, like those of the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council, and they come with rules and time limits.

The audience is also unique;

these statements are aimed at a diverse group of people



diplomats activists

and the goal is to influence global discussions and push for actions on important issues.

Additionally, speakers need to follow specific procedures, like getting accredited and submitting their statements ahead of time, which isn't usually the case for regular statements that allow for more freedom. The impact of UN oral statements can be huge—they often get international attention and can shape conversations worldwide while regular statements might not reach that level of visibility. Finally, UN statements typically focus on global issues and international law, while regular statements can cover a wider range of topics in more casual settings.

We hope that this toolkit will help you thrive at the UN's highly bureaucratic events and keep our hope alive that such events will provide more opportunities for youth to voice our ideas and struggles!

03 THE POWERFUL VOICES TOOLKIT CHOICE FOR YOUTH AND SEXUALITY



A UN oral statement is a formal speech delivered by civil society organizations at UN events, where they express their views on issues such as human rights, security, meaningful youth participation, the environment, sexual and reproductive health and rights and much more. There are many types of sessions and therefore, opportunities to deliver statements at the United Nations. This sounds quite accessible and inclusive, right? However, it's not entirely straightforward.

It's not just civil society organizations that can deliver statements; representatives of UN member and observer states¹, as well as intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), can also make oral statements, creating a long list of statements per meeting and minimizing the space for civil society to be heard.

Still sounds confusing? No worries!

Let's watch an example of an oral statement by -

Alex Sampaio-Cook

Youth Advocate from CHOICE
for Youth and Sexuality



during the **57th annual session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD57)** at the UN in New York to see what it can look like in practice.

1 An observer state at the United Nations (UN) is a country or entity that is not a full member of the UN but is allowed to participate in some of its activities. Observer states can attend UN meetings, speak at sessions, and participate in discussions, but they do not have the right to vote on resolutions or decisions.

As of 2024, there are only two observer states at the UN: the Holy See (Vatican) and Palestine. They can share their views and influence discussions but don't have the same level of decision-making power as full members.

In his powerful statement, Alex addressed various topics related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as meaningful and inclusive youth participation (SRHR and MIYP), highlighted the importance of giving more space to young people in the decision-making process, and presented many other strong points related to intersectional approaches in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action²

You can use an oral statement to:



Express concerns, ideas, or demands during critical international meetings



Interact with actors from various parts of the world



influence the decision-making processes within the UN



advocate or raise awareness about specific issue(s), in your country or in your advocacy niche



provide a space for marginalized or systematically underrepresented groups to be visible and raise their voices

Please remember that the delivery of an oral statement is a unique process because each of us has our own style, vision, and things to address! In the next sections, we will delve deeper into possible ways to structure and present your statement.

² Interested to find out more about what the ICPD Programme of Action is, and how it is relevant for young people today, check out CHOICE youth-friendly report and guide of engagement on the ICPD

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It's true that it is easier to deliver an oral statement at events like the HRC, CPD, or CSW at the United Nations (whether Geneva or New York) if your organization has ECOSOC status, but it's still possible to do so if you don't have it, by registering under an organization that does.

What is an ECOSOC status?

ECOSOC status is the consultative status that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can obtain with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Having ECOSOC status allows NGOs to participate fully in the United Nations system, send delegates, send statements, organize side-events, and more. Imagine the ECOSOC status being the main ID of an organization within the United Nations system!

There are three ECOSOC statuses that provide different levels of access to UN events for organizations: General, Special, and Roster. To obtain ECOSOC status, your organization should go through different stages of accreditation:

- 1. Profile registration
- 2. Online application
- 3. NGO branch screening
- 4. Review of the Committee on NGOs
- 5. ECOSOC final decision

BUT WHAT IF MY ORGANIZATION DOESN'T HAVE ECOSOC STATUS?

Don't worry! You are still eligible to deliver an oral statement! You can ask an NGO that has ECOSOC status to register you for the slot under their name. But, in general, the steps are as follows:

To kick things off, remember that registering for UN events can take a few days or even weeks, so it's best to start early—aim for at least a month before the event. Also, keep in mind that the registration process can vary depending on the UN body or event you're attending (differences between the UN in New York and Geneva or events like the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) versus the Human Rights Council (HRC). To make sure you have the most accurate info on how to register and participate, always check the latest guidelines from the relevant UN office.

Now, how do you register under another organization?



Follow these steps:			
/	Find an ECOSOC-status NGO willing to sponsor you:		
		The NGO with ECOSOC status must register for the oral statement slot first. If they are given a slot, then you can ask to speak on their behalf.	
		Then, they need to agree to let you speak on their behalf. If they do, follow the next steps.	
✓	Get proper accreditation		
		The sponsoring NGO must provide you with an accreditation letter. This letter is crucial for accessing UN buildings and delivering the statement.	
✓	Register as a speaker		
		The sponsoring NGO needs to register you as their designated speaker on the appropriate platform (e.g., Indico).	
✓	Prepa	Prepare your statement carefully:	
		Make sure that you are aware of the values and policies of a partner organization because the statement will be delivered in their name.	
		Adhere strictly to time limits (Usually between 1mn30 and 3 minutes).	
		Make sure the content is relevant to the specific UN	

agenda item (we will tell you more about this in Page 17).

For video statements, the steps are similar and outlined in section

"But what if I can't make it to the UN? Apply for a video statement"

W

CLICK TO VIEW PAGE

TIP

You can access the database of organizations with ECOSOC status. Don't hesitate to contact partner organizations in your community with ECOSOC status! The UN truly need more diverse voices and experiences of young people In New York, and there are civil society coalitions (such as the Womens Right Caucus) that help match ECOSOC organizations with people looking for accreditation, and opportunities to deliver oral statements.

CH4 HOW WRITE ORAL STATEMENT

Here we will discuss some important tips on writing your oral statement because preparation is key!

FIRST, LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ORAL STATEMENT!

When we meet new people, we usually provide some introduction and key information about ourselves to help each other get to know one another better. While oral statements are certainly more formal than casual conversations with friends, they follow somewhat of a similar structure: introduction, main body, and conclusion.

01

Let's explore each part, using previous CHOICE oral statements as examples:

Introduction:

Start with a brief introduction, including – if needed- your name and the topic of the statement.

→ Example:

"Thank you, Esteemed Chair. My name is [Name], and I am speaking on behalf of [Organization]. We wish to address the issue of [Topic]."

You can also start with a 'hook' to catch people's attention right away, as was done by Alex for his oral statement referring to the celebration of the 30 years of ICPD by saying: 'As young people, we love a good celebration, but as we come together to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action, I can't help but wonder whether we, as young people, truly have a reason to celebrate?'

02

Main body:

Clearly outline your main points.

→ Issue Overview:

Briefly describe the issue or problem at stake

Example:

CHOICE's oral statement at the CSW68 on youth-friendly funding:

"Numerous barriers exist for young people attempting to access funding. From the erosion of public services, discriminatory taxation regimes, to structural adjustment measures, the obstacles are multifaceted and systemic, especially for young feminists in the Global South. Moreover, burdensome legal requirements, language differences, divergent priorities between donors and young feminist activists, also hinder the access to funding..."

MAIN BODY

Key Arguments:

Present your main arguments or positions, supported by evidence (e.g. specific examples of how the issue affects your NGO's work) or by your own experiences.

Recommendations:

Offer specific recommendations or solutions. For example, CHOICE's oral statement at the CSW68 on youth-friendly funding emphasized the following

> Example:

CHOICE's oral statement at the CSW68 on youth-friendly funding

"In 2020, a mere 5.5% of official development assistance dedicated to gender equality reached individuals between 10 and 24. Current funding mechanisms often prioritize short-term projects, limiting the ability of youth organizations to create sustainable, long-term impact."

- + Promote trust-based, multi-year, flexible, un-earmarked funding for youth-led organizations and youth independent activists.
- + End aid and development assistance conditionalities and fiscal regulations that limit financing for youth organizations' work, including conditions related to SRHR, among others.
- + Promote targeted support for marginalized and disadvantaged groups such as young women, people living with disabilities, youth living under occupation and gender diverse youth to ensure no one is left behind.

Conclusion: Summarize your key points and emphasize your main message or call to action.

This above structure is just one example of an oral statement, and it is also the most classic version of it! You can imagine other ways to deliver your statement – don't be shy to experiment!

We can also recommend writing your statement in a storytelling format, where you can share personal impacts and how issues are affecting you or people in your communities. This approach can help listeners focus better on your main points and even resonate with your story. In that format, you can also share recommendations and explain in a more tangible way how small changes could benefit your situation and your community.

For example,

an activist from Ethiopia shared a compelling personal story about her mother, who raised 6 children as a single mother after being married aged 14. Her mum's drive to be educated shows the generational benefit of educating one woman. "It is evident in the lives that my siblings and I lead. It is thanks to my mother that I stand before you today."

She ended with a direct call:

"The power to bring about true change for these adolescent girls and young women lies with you, their trusted representatives, who expect you to bring the generational wealth of education to them."

It's definitely a good idea to start with something personal!

It doesn't have to be deeply personal or part of your life story, but connecting the statement to yourself or to challenges faced by your generation can really capture listeners' attention. After hours of statements, people tend to zone out, so beginning with something that's clearly yours can really make them listen. For example, our Boardie Lisa, opened her statement with "I wasn't even born yet in 1995.", while referring to the Beijing+30 anniversary celebration. These personal twists not only make it more relatable but also shift the mood and draw people in.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I TAKE INTO ACCOUNT FOR THE CONTENT OF MY ORAL STATEMENT?

When drafting your statement, it's important to stay relevant to the UN's mandate. Start by checking which UN body aligns best with your issue. For example, if you're talking about access to education for young women or gender equality, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) might be the right fit.

Use inclusive language by choosing words that don't reinforce power hierarchies. Instead of saying "minorities," use "marginalized groups," which better reflects how broader systems create inequalities. Also, avoid defining people solely by their conditions—say "people with impairments" instead of labeling them by their disabilities. It's also essential to challenge Eurocentric narratives in your statement. Move away from Western and colonial perspectives, and instead, focus on Indigenous self-determination and decolonial approaches. For instance, when discussing economic issues, don't just talk about empowerment—address equity and reparations to tackle historical injustices. Lastly, reflect on your biases. Remember that young people aren't a monolithic group, so be mindful of the diversity of experiences and perspectives when writing your statement.

Pro Tip from an Advocate

Avoid overused "UN language" like "full and equal human rights."

Phrases like these are repeated so often in negotiations that they can lose impact and make people tune out. Find fresh ways to describe issues or focus on specific problems. An oral statement is also the perfect time to say things that would never make it into official conclusions—use this opportunity to bring up the topics no one wants to talk about, like reparations, war crimes, or abortion. And remember the main goal: to be heard. An oral intervention is an amazing experience, but don't lose sight of why you're there. Do whatever it takes to make your voice and message reach as many people as possible!

Helpful Resources!

Check out these cool resources for preparing your oral statement

CHOICE UN Language guide

Disability inclusive language guide

CO-CREATING CO-WRITING A STATEMENT

Working together with other young activists, NGOs and youth-led organizations can make your statement more powerful. Here are some practical tips based on CHOICE's experiences, on co-writing:

Find the Right Partners

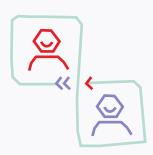


Look for youth activists, organizations, or networks that are working on similar issues. You don't have to limit yourself to NGOs—partner with other youth-led groups or grassroots initiatives from different regions, especially those representing underrepresented communities.

Diversity will help bring in fresh perspectives.

The <u>UN NGO</u> lists like can help identify accredited organizations. Also, civil society networks can help you find collaborators.

> Coordinate



Once you've identified potential partners, reach out early. Agree on shared goals and key messages and decide who will take the lead in writing the draft. In practice, one group often writes the draft, and others give feedback or support. You can make it more youth-friendly by translating the draft into different languages so everyone can provide input. CHOICE has done this before, and it really helped us make sure all voices are heard.

Establish a clear timeline for drafting, feedback, and finalization.

Focus on Shared Concerns

Highlight common concerns, but don't forget to show how these issues impact different people in different ways. For example, SRHR topics like comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) may affect everyone, but differently depending on where someone lives or their identity.

Include examples and recommendations that reflect diverse experiences.

→ Amplify the Message Together

It's not just about one statement—it's about echoing similar points across different statements to make the message louder. Instead of having multiple people read the same statement, encourage each coalition or youth group to mention similar themes.

This way, the message gets amplified from different voices and angles, and you avoid diluting your impact.

→ Make It Visible

After your statement is ready, it's time to spread the word! Use social media, newsletters, podcasts, and websites to share the statement widely. At CHOICE, for example, we have the "Young and Powerful" podcast (add link or QR?), where we share insights from UN events. You could create hashtags or tag influencers to reach a bigger audience. Use platforms like Instagram Reels or TikTok for fun, engaging content that draws attention to your cause. Don't be afraid to think outside the box—social media is your playground.

Share content that resonates with your audience and experiment with new formats, like TikTok challenges or Instagram stories, to engage more people.

You can also host webinars, panel discussions, or online forums to discuss the statement's content and implications further! **03** THE POWERFUL VOICES TOOLKIT



It's important to be able to deliver your statement in a clear way, and that you feel comfortable doing so. After all, you didn't spend all this time drafting this statement for nothing!

Here are some of our recommendations, mostly based on our experiences:

Adhere to Time Limits

- + Most statements range from 90 seconds to 3 minutes.
- + Strictly stick to the time limit to avoid your statement being cut off.

TIP: For the Human Rights Council (HRC), check the time allowed for statements on the HRC Extranet.

Prepare & Practice

- + Practice in front of colleagues or mentors, or record yourself on camera for feedback on pacing and clarity.
- + Aim to finish slightly under the time limit to avoid rushing during delivery.

Keep Your Statement Relevant

- + Ensure your statement directly addresses the agenda item being discussed.
- + At the UN in Geneva, irrelevant or off-topic statements can be interrupted by points of order, disrupting your flow.

Handle Unexpected Situations Gracefully

+ If technical issues or delays occur, stay calm, take a deep breath, and follow the session moderators' advice! Most audiences understand these situations, so don't stress yourself out!

Format and Language Tips

- Print your statement in a large, easy-to-read font so it's clear and simple to follow while you're speaking.
- + Keep your language straightforward—using shorter, easy-to-read words helps you stay confident and avoid slip-ups.
- + Use a respectful tone and avoid inflammatory language; this reduces the risk of interruptions.
- + Double-check your facts and references—make sure UN treaties, numbers, and any details you include are accurate, and try to skip jargon or acronyms that might be confusing.

Delivering your statement

- + Speak Slowly! Trust us—it's way better to speak slowly with clear, expressive intonation and eye contact, even if it means getting cut off. If you rush, your message can get lost, but when you pause and emphasize key words, people actually listen. Slow and clear always beats fast and forgettable!
 - Take Your Time to Emphasize Important Words. At a Beijing+30 review event, a coalition including CHOICE gave six statements. Only two speakers slowed down and spoke with intention—and those were the only statements featured in the official summary. This shows that when you take your time, your words have way more impact!

Adapt to Event-Specific Time Limits

+ Different events have different time limits. For example, HRC general debates allow 90 seconds, while the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) might allow 2 minutes.

TIP: Prepare multiple versions of your statement (e.g., 2-minute and 3-minute versions) in case the speaking time is shortened on the spot.

A note on safety, security, and safeguarding yourself

It can be stressful, daunting, and exciting to deliver a statement. Feeling like once you say it, you can't take it back, using the right words, having the right tone, delivering at an understandable pace, etc... These are all factors that make it a challenging task to do! Yet, it is an extremely rewarding process, and your voice matters – so you might as well make yourself heard! There are some things to keep in mind, though, for the sake of safety, and security.



- After delivering your statement, make sure you're surrounded by friendly faces and supported by friends. Sometimes opposition members might approach you to comment or chat. They may just want to let you know they heard you, but it's crucial never to be alone after your delivery.
- Always be mindful of your personal safety when making a statement. Consider how your words might provoke national actors and potentially endanger your return to your home country. Remember, even in international spaces, your safety at home isn't guaranteed. Statements can be broadcasted, and there are stories of activists needing to seek asylum after speaking out. For example, if discussing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a risk back home, avoid mentioning it here (at the UN, or international advocacy spaces). Steer clear of any language that could escalate tensions or provoke reactions from opposition or your country's delegation, for your own safety.
- Familiarize yourself with the guidelines for civil society organization (CSO) participation at the UN. Understanding what types of activism or protest are accepted is vital.
 - > For instance, you often can't bring banners, which is important to know if you're representing an ECOSOC-accredited organization, as violating these rules could jeopardize your status.
 - At the UN In Geneva, it's not allowed to take photos of individuals making statements, as these could be from opposition groups. Be aware of anyone you don't know taking photos. Ask colleagues to help keep an eye out while you're speaking.
 - Be cautious about sharing sensitive or confidential information related to your statement or involvement. Keep internal discussions and strategies within your trusted team circle.

But what if I can't make it to the UN?



Not everyone has the resources or the ability to physically attend UN events, but that doesn't mean your voice can't be heard! Many UN spaces allow the option to submit video statements, which is a great way to ensure everyone, especially young people from underrepresented regions, can participate. Video statements are particularly beneficial for youth activists who face financial, visa, or other barriers, allowing them to still make an impact. By using video, you're not just breaking down physical barriers—you're ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are heard at the UN.

Step-by-step guide on how to apply for a Video Statement at the UN:

To apply for a video statement at the UN, the steps are pretty similar to those you would undertake for a regular oral statement (see previous sections). Moreover, our tips on the delivery of your statements and on how to draft it are applicable for all types of statements; video, and offline! But to make it simpler, here's a step-by-step guide on how to apply and ensure your video statement gets heard:

STEP 1 ←

ENSURE YOUR
ORGANIZATION
IS ACCREDITED/
REACH OUT TO AN
ACCREDITED NGO

ECOSOC Status: NGOs with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) can register for video statements. If your organization does not have this status, reach out to an accredited NGO that can submit your statement on your behalf.

STEP 2 <

REGISTER ON INDICO

- Create an Account: Everyone delivering a video statement must be registered on the Indico platform. You will need either a UN grounds pass or an accreditation letter from the NGO that is submitting the oral statement.
- > Early Registration: Make sure to register well in advance (we advise to do it one month prior!), as processing can take several days.

STEP 3 <

PREPARE YOUR VIDEO STATEMENT

- Recording: Keep your video within the official time limits, usually somewhere between 90 seconds and 1 minute 30 seconds.
 - + Some people think that video statements are less cool than statements at the UN. We would argue differently! With a video statement, you can show, and not just tell.
 - + Visuals speak volumes: Wear clothing or use backgrounds that represent your culture or cause. It adds depth to your message.
- > Technical Specifications: Follow the technical guidelines for video resolution, audio quality, and file formats as specified by the UN.

STEP 4 <

CREATE SUBTITLES

> Accessibility: Adding subtitles is strongly encouraged to make your statement accessible to people with disabilities. Use tools like YouTube or iMovie to create captions and export them as an .srt file.

STEP 5 <-

UPLOAD YOUR VIDEO STATEMENT

- > Recording: When uploading your video through Indico, you will need:
 - + The transcript of your statement
 - A scanned copy of the speaker's passport
 - + The accreditation letter from the organization
 - + The video file itself

STEP 6 <-

SUBMIT BEFORE THE DEADLINE Timing: Ensure that you upload everything by 6 PM on the day before the debate or by Friday at 6 PM if it's scheduled for Monday. Late submissions will not be accepted. Deadlines are usually mentioned when you apply for the statement.

STEP 7 <

USE YOUR NETWORKS > If you're not sure how to submit or you're having trouble navigating the process, reach out to youth coalitions, networks, or NGOs that have experience delivering statements. For example, at CHOICE, we have experience collaborating with accredited organizations to deliver youth-led video statements at different UN events. Partnering with others can help you better understand the process and increase your chances of getting heard.

STEP 8 <

PREPARE FOR FOLLOW-UP

Once your statement is submitted, follow up with the relevant UN body to confirm they've received it and ask when it will be delivered during the session. Keep an eye on any communication or updates from the UN on when your statement will be shown.

STEP 9 <

SHARE IT WIDELY

> Even after your video is delivered at the UN, the work doesn't stop! Make sure to share the video across your social media platforms and encourage your network to amplify it. Use the UN event's official hashtags or create your own to help spread your message further. Use your video as a conversation starter for local advocacy efforts.

TECH TIP

You don't need fancy equipment! A smartphone camera can work well if you record in a quiet space with good lighting. Hold the camera steady or use a tripod to avoid shaky footage, and make sure the sound is clear. A smartphone on a makeshift tripod (stack of books, anyone?) can work wonders!

A note on healthy activism!

Writing and delivering a statement can be quite stressful, and often involves last-minute planning and arrangements. It's essential to prioritize self-care before and after the process. Ensure you are well-prepared by starting your work on the statement early, which can significantly reduce stress and anxiety. Make the statement your primary focus for the day, avoiding the temptation to schedule too many other activities around it. After delivering your statement, you may feel a wave of exhaustion from the adrenaline rush. Taking time for yourself is crucial—step outside the UN space, rest, or engage in something enjoyable with friends or colleagues. This allows you to recharge and maintain your overall well-being.

Healthy activism thrives in a supportive community, so it's important to foster an environment where everyone feels encouraged and cared for. Check in on one another during this high-pressure time, celebrating each other's efforts and achievements, no matter how small. Open communication within your team can alleviate stress!

ICONIC UN STATEMENTS

For inspiration on delivering oral statements, we have included some iconic UN statements!

- > "Frankie the Dinosaur"
 speech (2021): The United
 Nations Development
 Programme (UNDP) produced a
 video featuring a CGI dinosaur
 named Frankie addressing
 the General Assembly. This
 creative method was used
 to warn about the dangers
 of fossil fuel subsidies and
 climate change.
- Youth Advocate Anna Devereux



> Greta Tunberg



SOURCES

- > United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). "Consultative Status with ECOSOC." https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/ngo/consultative-status
- > United Nations. "Rules of Procedure for UN Meetings and Conferences. https://www.un.org/en/conferences

