

## Lecture for the UN Library

### The Art and Science of Chairing Major Inter-Governmental Conferences

#### Outline

1. I chaired UNCLOS III during its final two years, 1981 and 1982.
2. I was the Chairman of the Prep Com for UNCED (1990-1992).
3. I was also the Chairman of the Main Committee at UNCED (June 1992).
4. Based on those experiences and on the experience of chairing other major conferences, I have learnt the following lessons.

#### Lesson No. 1

5. Every conference is unique and is different from other conferences. Therefore, do not assume that just because you have successfully chaired one conference, chairing the next one will be a breeze. It is not. Thus, after chairing UNCLOS III, my MFA colleagues assured me that chairing the UNCED Prep Com would be easy. It was not easy at all.

#### Lesson No. 2

6. Master your brief.  
There is no substitute for hard work.  
As the chair, you must know every aspect of the agenda of the

conference. You have to put in an extra effort to be better informed than any of your colleagues.

You must become the intellectual leader of the conference and thereby earn the respect of your colleagues.

### Lesson No. 3

7. Try to be a neutral chairman.

Do not carry your country's agenda. Let someone else speak for your country.

Do not have a personal agenda.

Your only loyalty should be to the success of the conference.

Every delegation should trust you and be able to confide in you.

Do not violate their trust.

### Lesson No. 4

8. Work with the secretariat.

Spot the talented, the knowledgeable and hard working members of the secretariat and enlist them into your team.

Earn the trust and respect of the secretariat.

Do not keep the secretariat in the dark about your plans, strategies and proposals.

However, you may have to be firm if the secretariat does not carry out your request, eg, when the secretariat failed to carry out my request to have interpreters available for an all-night session of the Prep Com in New York.

### Lesson No. 5

9. Judge your colleagues wisely and choose those who are able, enjoy the confidence of their colleagues, and have the right temperament, to help you as chairman of committees or negotiating groups.

Include all of them in a collegium which represents the leadership of the conference.

Collegium should meet regularly and take all decisions by consensus.

### Lesson No. 6

10. Work with your bureau or general committee.

However, if your bureau is too large and unwieldy, you may have to invent a smaller “de facto” bureau to help you.

At the Earth Summit, I found that my bureau was too large to be useful.

I therefore constituted a group consisting of the chairs of the five regional groups and the chairs of the major interest groups and countries which do not belong to any regional group and the collegium. I met with this group every day to take stock and to plan the activities of the next day.

### Lesson No. 7

11. Be modest and humble.

Do not behave in an arrogant or haughty manner towards your

colleagues.

Be good at listening to your colleagues and taking their concerns into account.

Show as much respect for the delegations from the smaller and poorer countries as you do for delegations from the richer and more powerful countries.

Try, if you can, to remember the names of your colleagues.

### Lesson No. 8

12. Be scrupulously fair in chairing meetings.

If there is an agreed time limit for statements, be sure to apply the same time limit to all delegations.

If a delegate's statement is not clear or coherent, try to help him/her by summarising his/her point clearly and do not make derogatory remarks.

Call the speakers to speak in the order in which they are inscribed on the list and not arbitrarily allow some speakers to jump the queue.

### Lesson No. 9

13. Be open and transparent.

Do not be a party to "secret" negotiations.

Do not be the conduit for the views of any delegation, no matter how powerful.

Without integrity, no one will trust you.

## Lesson No. 10

14. When the time is right, you can ask the plenary for permission to move the negotiation to a smaller group.

The composition of the smaller group should be chosen by the different regional or interest groups.

The results of the small group negotiations should be submitted to the plenary for debate and approval.

If the whole process is transparent, it can be done.

Give examples from UNCLOS and UNCED.

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