

# Power, Process and Participation: The Search for the Next Secretary-General

2026, No. 3  
15 April 2026

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Secretary-General António Guterres speaks with one of his team members between meetings during the high-level week of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly.  
UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



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Security Council Report would like to thank the government of Japan and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung for their generous support of this project. We also express our gratitude to all colleagues who generously shared their perspectives on the topics and issues covered in this report.

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## Acronyms

ACT Group	Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group
AHWG	Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly
AOB	Any Other Business
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
E10	The ten elected members of the Security Council
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EEG	Eastern European Group
ESS	Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly
EU	European Union
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
GRULAC	Latin American and Caribbean Group
I5	Incoming five elected members of the Security Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IWG	Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NGLS	UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service
NOP	No Objection Procedure
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
P5	The five permanent members of the Security Council
PGA	President of the General Assembly
PSC	President of the Security Council
SCAD	Security Council Affairs Division
SCR	Security Council Report
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNSC	UN Security Council
WEOG	Western European and Others Group

*All URLs last accessed on 6 April 2026.*

# I. Introduction

## Setting the Context

In 2026, the Security Council and the General Assembly will participate in a process that will shape the future direction of the UN and international diplomacy. The issuance of a joint letter from the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly on 25 November 2025 marked the formal start of the process to find the successor to the current Secretary-General, António Guterres, whose term concludes on 31 December 2026.

The search for the next Secretary-General will unfold against a background of shifting global power dynamics and heightened geopolitical uncertainty. The international landscape is changing, but its contours and boundaries have yet to be defined. Some view recent developments as evidence of an ongoing transition toward a new global order, while others have argued that “rupture”, rather than “transition”, better describes the current state of affairs—underscoring the uncertainty and instability characterising the present moment.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, we are seeing the rise of transactional diplomacy—characterised by an emphasis on short-term, bilateral, and interest-driven deals. At the same time, the return to spheres of influence politics reflects renewed great power competition and the erosion of international frameworks.

The next Secretary-General will inherit an organisation grappling with significant financial constraints, institutional reform pressures, and mounting global crises. Candidates will need to articulate not only their vision for revitalising the UN, but also concrete strategies to contend with the high incidence of armed conflict, surging levels of civilian casualties,<sup>2</sup> rising military expenditure,<sup>3</sup> and vast humanitarian needs affecting millions of people<sup>4</sup>—all amidst constrained resources and waning multilateral solidarity.

Persistent divisions within the Security Council are expected to influence the selection process. The Council’s credibility and authority have been increasingly questioned in light of its inability to effectively address major crises in Gaza, Myanmar, Ukraine, Haiti, and Sudan, among others. Rising geopolitical rivalries, frequent disregard for core provisions of international law—including by some permanent Council members and their allies—and a declining accountability for Charter violations continue to undermine the Council’s ability to act decisively.

In parallel, the General Assembly has become more assertive, signalling a readiness to play a more active role when the Security Council fails to fulfil its responsibilities. The introduction of the veto initiative, which mandates a General Assembly discussion following any Council veto, has enhanced the Assembly’s influence in UN decision-making.<sup>5</sup> The Assembly’s recent actions—ranging from seeking Advisory Opinions from the International Court of Justice<sup>6</sup> to expanding

the powers of the State of Palestine,<sup>7</sup> suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council,<sup>8</sup> mandating an international conference on the implementation of UN resolutions on the question of Palestine and the two-state solution,<sup>9</sup> and recommending the establishment of a register of damages caused by Russia’s violations in Ukraine<sup>10</sup>—illustrate its growing engagement in peace and security issues.

As geopolitical rivalries have intensified, within the Council new patterns of alignment have emerged among the permanent members. On thematic issues such as women, peace and security, and climate, peace and security, shifts in US policy have brought Washington’s position closer to Moscow’s than to any of its traditional allies. More broadly, the shifts in US policy on Ukraine, the US-Israeli attacks on Iran and resulting escalation in the region, among other actions and policies during the first year of the second Trump administration have strained the relationship between Europe and the US. This has led to an evolving landscape in which coalitions are less predictable. Analysts, diplomats and other close observers of the Council have noted that China, Russia and the US have at times expressed similar positions and, the US has been less aligned with its traditional allies, France and the UK. These dynamics may, in turn, shape interactions among Council members, and between the Council and the General Assembly, during the selection process of the next Secretary-General. In addition, they will likely influence how candidates navigate the process and might have an impact on the Security Council straw polls.

The selection of the next Secretary-General will unfold against the complex interplay of power politics, shifting alignments, and weakened multilateral institutions. At the same time, and as this report describes, many member states have come together during the negotiations of key documents that preceded the official start of the process to push the bar of transparency, predictability and representation higher—often in the face of resistance of the permanent Council members. Civil society actors, including the 1 for 8 Billion campaign, national UN associations, such as UNA-UK, and GWL Voices, an organisation of women leaders, have already made clear their expectations, adding a key additional layer of public scrutiny and expectations for transparency, inclusivity, and participation.<sup>11</sup> Whether the process will yield a Secretary-General who transcends—rather than reflects—the limitations of these difficult times remains, for now, an open question.

## Objectives and Outline of the Report

This report provides a foundation for understanding the rules, evolving informal practices, and the key actors shaping the selection and appointment process. It reflects on the key changes in this process in

1 World Economic Forum, 2026 Annual Meeting, statement by Mark Carney (20 January 2026) <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-special-address-by-mark-carney-prime-minister-of-canada/>

2 OHCHR recorded a 40 percent increase in civilian deaths in conflict in 2024 compared to the previous year. “UN data shows surge in civilian deaths in conflict globally, highlights pervasive discrimination” (18 June 2025) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/un-data-shows-surge-civilian-deaths-conflict-globally-highlights-pervasive>

3 Report of the Secretary-General, “The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future” (9 September 2025) [https://front.un-arm.org/MilExSDG-Study/SG\\_Report\\_TheSecurityWeNeed.pdf](https://front.un-arm.org/MilExSDG-Study/SG_Report_TheSecurityWeNeed.pdf)

4 Approximately 239 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance in the world. OCHA, “Global Humanitarian Overview 2026” (8 December 2025) [https://www.unocha.org/attachments/cdccb8f4-11b0-4999-bb3f-d1c54c8ff21c/GHO2026\\_At\\_a\\_glance\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/attachments/cdccb8f4-11b0-4999-bb3f-d1c54c8ff21c/GHO2026_At_a_glance_EN.pdf)

5 UNGA resolution 79/262 (26 April 2022) A/RES/76/262. This resolution decided that the PGA shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within 10 working days of the casting of a veto, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an ESS on the same situation.

6 UNGA resolution 77/247 (30 December 2022) A/RES/77/247; UNGA resolution 79/232 (19 December 2024) A/RES/79/232.

7 UNGA resolution ES-10/23 (10 May 2024) A/RES/ES-10/23.

8 UNGA resolution ES-11/3 (7 April 2022) A/RES/ES-11/3.

9 UNGA resolution ES-10/24 (18 September 2024) A/RES/ES-10/24.

10 UNGA resolution ES-11/5 (14 November 2022) A/RES/ES-11/5.

11 <https://1for8billion.org> <https://una.org.uk/about-us/> <https://www.gwlvoices.org/>

# I. Introduction

2015/2016. It also covers developments in the current cycle, including the 2025 General Assembly resolution on the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly, and the 25 November 2025 joint letter from the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly inviting member states to submit nominations for the position of UN Secretary-General. The report analyses the dynamics in the negotiation of the revitalisation resolution and the joint letter, as well as in the 15 December 2025 Security Council open debate on “Leadership for Peace”, providing a possible preview of members’ positions as they address potential issues that may arise in connection with the selection and appointment process. Finally, the report maps the anticipated key issues related to the nomination, qualities, and interactions with candidates—including the interactive dialogues at the General Assembly; the conduct and transparency of the Security Council straw polls; the Council’s recommendation, and the General Assembly’s role in appointing the UN Secretary-General, providing options for addressing these challenges.

## Methodology

This report draws on an extensive review of primary sources—including official UN documents and draft resolutions and letters—as well as Security Council Report’s (SCR) archival material and

prior analytical work. This includes three research reports covering the 2015/2016 Secretary-General selection process as well as several *What’s in Blue* stories, which together provide essential historical background.<sup>12</sup> It also incorporates insights gathered through a mix of semi-structured interviews and in-depth conversations with key stakeholders, such as representatives of member states, the UN, and civil society. The majority of interviewees were representatives of member states, reflecting a diversity of regional groupings and political positions. The interviews, conducted on a non-attribution basis, focused on ascertaining negotiating positions and dynamics, as well as expectations for the current process—including regarding possible challenges that may emerge. While the insights in this report also rely on interviews carried out between 2015 and 2017, the most recent set of interviews and conversations was conducted between August 2025 and February 2026.

While we cross-checked the information contained in this report to the best of our ability, specific details regarding the confidential steps of the selection and appointment processes are often difficult to verify, particularly in relation to older processes, and should therefore be viewed as indicative. This has reinforced our belief that systematic record-keeping and transparency are essential to strengthen institutional memory and the quality of analysis of these processes.

# II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

## The Appointment and Functions of the UN Secretary-General

Article 97 of the UN Charter states that the “Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council”.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Security Council makes the recommendation, allowing the permanent members to use their veto to ensure that there is a candidate acceptable to all five, while the General Assembly makes the actual appointment.

Over the years, the Assembly’s role has largely been limited to the formal act of appointment, with the Security Council choosing the candidate to be appointed. A notable exception occurred in 1950, when the Council was not able to agree on a recommendation of a candidate to the General Assembly. On 1 November 1950, the General Assembly adopted a resolution in a majority vote extending the term of Secretary-General Trygve Lie for three years, without a Council recommendation.<sup>14</sup>

On 24 January 1946, the General Assembly adopted resolution 11(I), which established the initial procedural framework for the

selection and appointment process for both the Council and the General Assembly.<sup>15</sup> It provided that the Council’s recommendation and the Assembly’s appointment should take place in private meetings, and that any vote, if taken, should be conducted by secret ballot. The resolution also specified that a simple majority of those present and voting in the General Assembly and the affirmative vote of seven members, including the concurring votes of the permanent members in the Council, was required.<sup>16</sup> In addition, it reflected an understanding that the Security Council would recommend a single candidate to the General Assembly.<sup>17</sup> While resolution 11(I) is still the foundation of many of the procedures used in the selection and appointment process, recent developments have led to a modification of some of the practices and added new ones.

With regard to the functions of the Secretary-General, Article 97 of the Charter says the Secretary-General “shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization”, while Article 99 empowers the Secretary-General to bring to the attention of the Security Council

<sup>12</sup> SCR, “Appointing the UN Secretary-General” (2015); SCR, “Appointing the UN Secretary-General: The Challenge for the Security Council” (2016); SCR, “The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows” (2017). See <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/appointment-of-the-secretary-general/>

<sup>13</sup> UN Charter, Art 97.

<sup>14</sup> UNGA resolution 492(V) (1 November 1950) A/RES/492(V). The result of the vote on General Assembly resolution 492(V) to extend Lie’s term was 46 in favour, 5 against, and 8 abstentions. The resolution was submitted jointly by fourteen countries, including eight of the nine that had voted for Lie to be recommended for a second term in the Security Council: Canada, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Greece, India, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, the US, the UK, and Yugoslavia.

<sup>15</sup> UNGA resolution 11(I) (24 January 1946) A/RES/11(I).

<sup>16</sup> A/RES/11(I) [4(c)].

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the number of candidates recommended by the Council, the resolution said that it “would be desirable” for the Council to “proffer one candidate only for the consideration of the General Assembly”. A/RES/11(I) [4(d)]. The resolution noted and approved the report of the Preparatory Commission, Chapter VIII, Section 2 [18]–[21]. Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations (23 December 1945) PC/20.

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

“any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”.<sup>18</sup>

In 1945, the criteria and qualifications for the appointment of the Secretary-General were discussed in some detail and presented in the report by the UN Preparatory Commission.<sup>19</sup> It showed that member states had in mind a wide-ranging political and representational role that went beyond a purely administrative function and that many of the issues that are debated today were raised from the very beginning.

The report emphasised the importance of strong administrative and executive qualities, noting that the Secretary-General must be capable of integrating the activities of the complex network of UN organs.<sup>20</sup> The Secretary-General was expected to provide leadership that would determine the character and efficiency of the Secretariat, including the ability to guide and inspire an international staff recruited from many different countries, and to foster the necessary *esprit de corps* within a diverse and multinational team.<sup>21</sup>

The report further underscored the need for moral authority, particularly in light of Article 100 of the Charter, which requires the Secretary-General and staff to maintain independence from member states.<sup>22</sup> The Secretary-General was expected to embody and model this independence, reinforcing the international character of the Secretariat.

Beyond administrative leadership, the Preparatory Commission envisaged a significant diplomatic role. The Secretary-General was expected to possess the ability to act as a mediator,<sup>23</sup> and to serve as an informal adviser or confidant to governments.<sup>24</sup>

The report stressed that the office required the highest qualities of political judgment, tact, and integrity. This was because a political role was anticipated, with the Secretary-General being required “to take decisions which may justly be called political”.<sup>25</sup> These qualities were also needed because of the authority under Article 99 of the UN Charter to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter—not merely any dispute or situation—which “in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the Preparatory Commission highlighted the importance of communication and representational skills. The Secretary-General was expected to represent the UN to the public at large and to secure the “active and steadfast support of the peoples of the world”, without which “[t]he United Nations cannot prosper” nor its aims be realised.<sup>27</sup> The Secretary-General was expected to stand for the UN, and in the “eyes of the world” and his staff, “he must embody the principles and ideals of the Charter to which the Organization seeks to give effect”.<sup>28</sup>

Taken together, these criteria illustrate that, from its inception, the role of Secretary-General was conceived as combining executive leadership, diplomatic engagement, political judgment, and moral authority within the framework of the UN Charter.

Member states, however, appear to have discussed in some detail the idea of agreeing on and developing a set of criteria and qualifications that could be used in the selection and appointment process only in 2006. In that year, Canada circulated a non-paper that called for the General Assembly to revisit the appointment process, including the need for an agreed set of “criteria/qualifications”.<sup>29</sup> While this initiative did not lead to a list of qualifications at the time, it led to a broader discussion around what members were looking for in the next Secretary-General.

This interest continued into the 2015/2016 process and was reflected in General Assembly resolution 69/321 adopted on 11 September 2015. The resolution highlighted the importance of “proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communications and multi-lingual skills” as important criteria.<sup>30</sup>

### Term of Office

While the UN Charter, in Article 97, does not specify a term of office for the Secretary-General, the General Assembly decided in resolution 11 (I) of 1946 that the first Secretary-General would have a term of five years, renewable for a further five years. At the same time, the resolution specifically provided that “the General Assembly and the Security Council are free to modify the term of office of future Secretaries-General in the light of experience”.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the convention of a five-year renewable term, the term of office has varied on several occasions. Trygve Lie’s first term was extended in 1950 for three years, and U Thant was appointed for just under four years in November 1962.<sup>32</sup> He had at the time already served for just over a year as Acting Secretary-General, the remaining term of office following Dag Hammarskjöld’s death in a plane crash in highly suspicious circumstances.<sup>33</sup> On 1 November 1966, U Thant’s term was briefly extended by almost two months pending a final decision on a second full term.<sup>34</sup> On 2 December 1966, he was reappointed for a term lasting just over five years, to align the term of office with the calendar year.<sup>35</sup>

The term of office for most Secretaries-General has been determined by the Council, including specific dates, in its recommendation to the General Assembly. As discussed above, the terms of the first three Secretaries-General showed considerable variation. What

18 UN Charter, Arts 97, 99.

19 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2(B).

20 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2 [12].

21 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2 [15].

22 Ibid.

23 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2 [16].

24 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2 [16], [19].

25 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2 [16].

26 Ibid, citing UN Charter, Art 99.

27 PC/20 Chapter VIII, Section 2 [17].

28 Ibid.

29 “Canadian Non-Paper on the Process for the Selection of the Next Secretary-General” (15 February 2006). A copy of the non-paper is reproduced in Simon Chesterman (ed), “Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics” (Cambridge University Press 2007) 254.

30 UNGA resolution 69/321 (11 September 2015) A/RES/69/321 [39].

31 A/RES/11(I) [4(a)].

32 UNGA resolution 1771(XVII) (30 November 1962) A/RES/1771(XVII).

33 UNGA resolution 1640(XVI) (3 November 1961) A/RES/1640(XVI).

34 UNGA resolution 2147(XXI) (1 November 1966) A/RES/2147(XXI). Thant’s term was extended until the end of the 21st session of the General Assembly.

35 UNGA resolution 2161(XXI) (2 December 1966) A/RES/2161(XXI).

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

is now a practice of the Security Council specifying the start and end dates for a five-year period appears to have begun with resolution 400 of 7 December 1976, which recommended that the fourth Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, be appointed “for a second term of office from 1 January 1977 to 31 December 1981”.<sup>36</sup>

The question of the Secretary-General’s term of office was discussed in the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System.<sup>37</sup> There was initially strong support for a maximum term limit of seven years for any individual serving as Secretary-General.<sup>38</sup> However, following opposition in 1996 to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s second term by the US, the term of office was deemed a controversial issue and was not included in the Working Group’s 1996 recommendations.<sup>39</sup> In 1997, following the appointment of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Working Group agreed that “[t]he duration of the term or terms of appointment, including the option of a single term, shall be considered before the appointment of the next Secretary-General”.<sup>40</sup>

While there was some discussion of the length of the term of office in 2006, this issue was more actively pursued in the 2015/2016 process. Some members of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group, notably Liechtenstein and Costa Rica, wanted to include substantive language in the General Assembly resolution for the appointment of the Secretary-General, including regarding a single, non-renewable term of office. It seems, however, that they faced some opposition, both within ACT and the larger General Assembly membership, and were unable in the short time between the Council’s recommendation and the appointment resolution that year to garner enough support.

As discussed below, member states considered proposals regarding the length of the term of office during the negotiations in 2025 of the General Assembly revitalisation resolution. None of these proposals were apparently acceptable to the permanent members, and were not included in the resolution.

In December 2025, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his briefing at the Security Council open debate on “Leadership for Peace”, advocated for a single, non-renewable seven-year term, noting that two five-year terms leave Secretaries-General “overly dependent on the Council’s permanent members for an extension”.<sup>41</sup>

### Timing of the Decision

There is nothing in the Charter or the General Assembly’s Rules of Procedure that specifies when the appointment of the Secretary-General has to be made.

The first three Secretaries-General, did not serve typical terms and the practice relating to their appointment does not provide useful guidance.<sup>42</sup> The appointment dates of the fourth to the seventh Secretaries-General tended to be in December, leaving little transition time before the incumbent leaves the post on 31 December.

Kofi Annan’s appointment in 1996 appears to have sparked discussion of the need for an earlier appointment. The following year, General Assembly resolution 51/241, which endorsed the conclusions of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, said that, to ensure an efficient transition, the Secretary-General should be appointed “as early as possible, preferably no later than one month” before the incumbent’s term ends.<sup>43</sup>

Ever since, the appointment and reappointment of Secretaries-General have occurred in October and June, respectively. Kofi Annan was reappointed on 29 June 2001,<sup>44</sup> just over six months before the expiry of his first term, and in 2006 Ban Ki-moon was appointed on 13 October.<sup>45</sup> John Bolton, then US permanent representative to the UN, in recalling the 2006 process stated that a US objective was to hold the Secretary-General “election much earlier than usual, perhaps even in the summer of 2006” in order to have a long transition period, and that this was discussed with the other permanent members in January 2006.<sup>46</sup> Ban was reappointed on 21 June 2011.<sup>47</sup> António Guterres was appointed as the ninth Secretary-General on 13 October 2016,<sup>48</sup> and reappointed on 18 June 2021.<sup>49</sup>

The President of the 70th session of the General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft (Denmark), who was largely responsible for many of the innovations of the process in the General Assembly in 2015/2016, sent a letter at the end of his term to the President of the Security Council providing an overview of the process, which included his observations on ways of improving future selection and appointment processes. Lykketoft suggested that the issue of adequate lead-in time for preparation and handover to the incoming Secretary-General could be addressed by setting a deadline and a more specific timeline for the overall process and that it would “seem both desirable and feasible for the membership to commit to concluding the process on entering the final quarter of the calendar year preceding the beginning of the new Secretary-General’s term”.<sup>50</sup>

36 UNSC resolution 400 (7 December 1976) S/RES/400.

37 The Open-Ended Working Group met between September 1995 and July 1997.

38 Colin Keating, “Selecting the world’s diplomat” in Simon Chesterman (ed), “Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics” (Cambridge University Press 2007)

50. Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers had also proposed a single seven-year term. See Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers, “A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow’s United Nations” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 1990) 28.

39 Keating, “Selecting the world’s diplomat” 50. Report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System (23 July 1996) A/50/24.

40 Report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System (18 July 1997) A/51/24 Annex [58]. The General Assembly adopted the Working Group’s report in UNGA resolution 51/241 (31 July 1997) A/RES/51/241.

41 UNSC 10067th meeting (15 December 2025) S/PV.10067.

42 Because the first Secretary-General stepped down before the end of his mandate, and the second died in office, member states had to appoint successors before the expected end of their terms. The tenure of the third Secretary-General, U Thant, was also atypical, as it followed Hammarskjöld’s death. It also involved a short extension of Thant’s first term. SCR, “Appointing the UN Secretary-General” (2015) 5.

43 A/RES/51/241 Annex [61].

44 UNGA resolution 55/277 (29 June 2001) A/RES/55/277.

45 UNGA resolution 61/3 (13 October 2006) A/RES/61/3.

46 John Bolton, “Surrender is Not an Option” (Simon & Schuster 2008) 279.

47 UNGA resolution 65/282 (21 June 2011) A/RES/65/282.

48 UNGA resolution 71/4 (13 October 2016) A/RES/71/4.

49 UNGA resolution 75/286 (18 June 2021) A/RES/75/286.

50 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to the President of the Security Council (13 September 2016) S/2016/784.

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

### DATES OF SECURITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY APPOINTMENTS SINCE 1971

SECRETARY-GENERAL	SECURITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION	GENERAL ASSEMBLY APPOINTMENT
Kurt Waldheim (appointment)	21 December 1971	22 December 1971
Kurt Waldheim (reappointment)	7 December 1976	8 December 1976
Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (appointment)	11 December 1981	15 December 1981
Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (reappointment)	10 October 1986	10 October 1986
Boutros Boutros-Ghali (appointment)	21 November 1991	3 December 1991
Kofi Annan (appointment)	13 December 1996	17 December 1996
Kofi Annan (reappointment)	27 June 2001	29 June 2001
Ban Ki-moon (appointment)	9 October 2006	13 October 2006
Ban Ki-moon (reappointment)	17 June 2011	21 June 2011
António Guterres (appointment)	6 October 2016	13 October 2016
António Guterres (reappointment)	8 June 2021	18 June 2021

### Regional Rotation

Since the 1980s, the regional distribution of past Secretaries-General—particularly the fact that not all regional groups have been equally represented—has become a more prominent point of discussion among member states.<sup>51</sup>

The lack of guidance in the Charter combined with the historical pattern of how Secretaries-General have hailed from the UN’s regional groups has led to differing views on whether there is any real requirement for regional rotation.<sup>52</sup> Current views by member states on regional rotation and other geography-related references in relation to the Secretary-General’s appointment are discussed further below. Generally, however, three main views on regional rotation have long been discernible among Council members:<sup>53</sup>

- There is a principle of rotation, and it should be adhered to;
- There is no strict principle of rotation that the Security Council follows, but in practice members of this group are prepared to vote on an ad hoc basis in a manner that supports wider regional diversity; or
- There is no principle of rotation and the Secretary-General should be chosen solely on merit, allowing members to champion a candidate from any region.

No formal notion of regional rotation was invoked during the early selections, with three of the first four Secretaries-General coming from Western Europe, and one from Asia. Following Dag Hammarskjöld’s death and amid mounting Cold War tensions, U Thant’s appointment as Acting Secretary-General in 1961, though not articulated in terms of a principle of regional rotation, reflected strong support from the Afro-Asian states and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) for a candidate hailing from this bloc.<sup>54</sup>

In 1981, the race initially was between Kurt Waldheim (Austria), seeking a third term, and Salim Ahmed Salim of Tanzania, the Organisation of African Unity’s (OAU) candidate supported by the nonaligned countries, who were advocating for a Secretary-General from the Global South. The June 1981 OAU decision approving Salim’s candidature asserted the view that it was then “the time for Africa to contest for the post”.<sup>55</sup> Following 16 rounds of inconclusive voting, however, Council President Ambassador Olara Otunnu (Uganda), persuaded both candidates to step aside.<sup>56</sup> Nine other candidates were nominated, largely from Latin America, which reflected the view that it was this region’s “turn”. Eventually, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (Peru) emerged as the Secretary-General.

51 The distribution of Secretaries-General’s terms by region has thus far been: Western Europe, 8 terms; Africa, 3 terms; Asia, 4 terms; Latin America, 2 terms; and Eastern Europe, no terms.

52 For a broader discussion of regional rotation see Loraine Sievers, “Appointing the next Secretary-General: The relevance of regional rotation” (25 October 2025) <https://www.scpprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5o> update website of Loraine Sievers and Sam Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014).

53 These three positions were already discernible in 2006 and in 2015. SCR, “Appointment of a New Secretary-General” (2006) 11; similarly in Keating, “Selecting the world’s diplomat” 60. SCR, “Appointing the UN Secretary-General” (2015) 6.

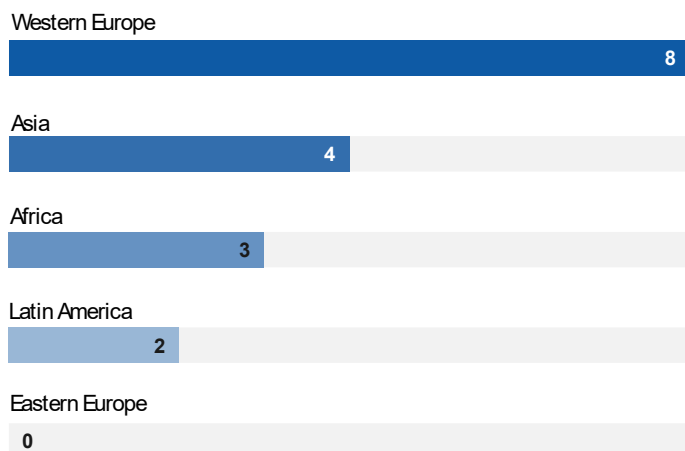
54 Thant Myint-U, “Peacemaker: U Thant and the Forgotten Quest for a Just World” (Norton 2025) 18-24.

55 OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, “Decision on the Candidature of Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim to the Post of the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organisation” (1981) PL/GPA/1(V)53.81. A copy is available in the Salim Ahmed Salim digital archives <https://www.salimahmedsalim.com/digital-archives/milestones/oau-unanimously-endorses-dr-salims-candidacy-for-un-secretary-general>

56 Interview with Olara Otunnu, UN Oral History Project (24 September 1990) 13. A copy is available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/487440/?v=pdf>

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

### Distribution of Secretaries-General's Terms by Region



In 1991, Africa strongly asserted a regional claim, with the OAU endorsing six candidates. Although the majority of candidates were from Africa that year, there were also candidates from Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, and the Philippines, among others. The outcome of the voting, with Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt) being appointed as the Secretary-General, indicated that there was some acknowledgement that it was Africa's turn.

After it became clear that Boutros-Ghali would not be appointed for a second term, there was a general acceptance that his successor should come from Africa, with member states from other regions holding back from offering candidates.<sup>57</sup> After eight rounds of straw polls, Kofi Annan (Ghana) was appointed in December 1996.

Following these developments, in July 1997, the General Assembly for the first time mentioned regional rotation in a resolution when it endorsed the conclusions of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System.<sup>58</sup> The conclusions stated that, in "the identification and appointment of the best candidate for the post of Secretary-General, due regard shall continue to be given to regional rotation and shall also be given to gender equality".<sup>59</sup> This affirmed competence as the primary criterion but also introduced regional rotation and gender equality as principles to which "due regard" should continue to be given.

In 2006, Asian countries were firmly of the view that there was an applicable principle of rotation and that it was now Asia's turn for a Secretary-General. The NAM adopted a formal position that the next Secretary-General should be appointed from the Asian region and communicated this to the Security Council in a letter from Malaysia,

the then Chair of the NAM Coordinating Bureau.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, the Eastern European Group (EEG) had begun to show interest in having the next Secretary-General come from their region, a view it had held since before Annan's second term.<sup>61</sup> According to then US permanent representative Bolton, the idea that it was Asia's turn was "the result of a 2001 political deal between the African and Asian groups for Asia to support Annan for a second term (Africa's third consecutive term), in exchange for Africa's committing to vote for an Asian [candidate] in 2006".<sup>62</sup> In that year, with the exception of one candidate, all the other candidates were from the Asia Group, with Ban Ki-moon (Republic of Korea) chosen as the Secretary-General.

In anticipation of the end of Ban's term in December 2016, Georgia, as the then chair of the EEG, in a 27 November 2014 letter, reiterated the group's interest in the position because it had never produced a Secretary-General.<sup>63</sup> In 2016, the general view was that it was Eastern Europe's turn to provide a Secretary-General. The large number of candidates from Eastern Europe showed that the EEG took this claim seriously. This was to some extent reflected in the results of the straw polls which showed that some Council members were mindful of the Eastern European claim.<sup>64</sup> However, ultimately, a Western European candidate, António Guterres (Portugal), was chosen. Interviews conducted by SCR following Guterres' appointment pointed to members prioritising the qualities of the candidates rather than regional rotation.<sup>65</sup> At end of the 2015/2016 selection process, it was unclear if the concept of regional rotation would still carry weight in future selection processes, and if so, whether in 2025/2026 it would be the turn of Eastern Europe or Latin America.

### Gender Balance

Prior to the 2015/2016 selection process, it appears that only three women had ever been nominated as candidates to the post of UN Secretary-General.<sup>66</sup> The first was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (India), who was nominated by the Soviet Union in 1953 following Trygve Lie's resignation. In 1991, Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway) was among the candidates in the search for Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's successor. In 2006, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (Latvia) was nominated jointly by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

In 2015, there was a clear focus on gender at the start of the process. There were seven women candidates out of the 13 candidates.<sup>67</sup> This can be partly attributed to the highly visible campaigns by groups advocating for a woman Secretary-General, such as the Campaign to Elect a Woman UN Secretary-General (WomanSG),<sup>68</sup> and the Group of Friends to Elect a Woman Secretary-General.<sup>69</sup> However, the voting pattern in the straw poll results did not reflect a strong inclination among Council members to take gender

57 Sievers, "Appointing the next Secretary-General: The relevance of regional rotation".

58 Keating, "Selecting the world's diplomat" 60.

59 A/RES/51/241 Annex [59].

60 Letter from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the President of the Security Council (20 April 2006) S/2006/252.

61 Sievers, "Appointing the next Secretary-General: The relevance of regional rotation".

62 Bolton, "Surrender is Not an Option" 276. Bolton's account is also cited in Loraine Sievers and Sam Daws, "The Procedure of the UN Security Council" (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014) 414.

63 Letter from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the UN to all Permanent Representatives and Observers to the UN (27 November 2014).

64 SCR, "The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows" (2017) 8.

65 SCR, "The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows" (2017) 13.

66 Before the 2015/2016 process, the Secretaries-General selections were fairly secretive processes. This figure refers to the women candidates known as having been nominated. For more details see SCR, "Appointing the UN Secretary-General" (2015) 6.

67 Vesna Pusić (Croatia); Irina Bokova (Bulgaria); Natalia Gherman (Moldova); Helen Clark (New Zealand); Susana Malcorra (Argentina); Christiana Figueres (Costa Rica); and Kristalina Georgieva (Bulgaria).

68 WomanSG is a group comprising women and men from academia and civil society with a connection to the UN. It continues to be actively involved in the current selection process.

69 This is a group of UN member states now known as the Group of Friends on Gender Parity. The group has the goal of promoting gender parity and women's leadership.

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

particularly into account. In the final straw poll (5 October 2016), the first woman candidate ranked only fourth out of the ten candidates that were voted on.

In the current selection process, 1 for 8 Billion, which played a pivotal role in opening up the selection process in 2015/2016, is focusing on the appointment of the first woman Secretary-General as a key issue.<sup>70</sup> Together with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and the Center for Global Affairs, School of Professional Studies, New York University (NYU CGA), it has created a Statements Tracker that maps member state support for a feminist woman as the next UN Secretary-General.<sup>71</sup> GWL Voices, an organisation of almost 80 women leaders whose three founders were candidates in the 2015/2016 selection process, initiated a “Madam Secretary-General” campaign several years ago focused on promoting the idea that a woman Secretary-General would not only make history but reflect half the world’s population and bring new perspectives to global governance.

### Multiple Candidates

The Security Council has never recommended more than one candidate to the General Assembly. Article 97 of the UN Charter does not make clear what is meant by “recommendation”. In 1946, approving a recommendation of the Preparatory Commission, General Assembly resolution 11(I) declared that it “would be desirable” for the Council to proffer one candidate only for the consideration of the General Assembly.<sup>72</sup> While this has generally been understood to mean that only one candidate should be offered, the phrasing used also implies the possibility of doing otherwise.

During the negotiation of resolution 69/321 in 2015, there was interest from some NAM members in having the Council recommend multiple candidates, but there was not enough agreement within the group for how to pursue this. During the 2015/2016 selection process this issue was raised by several groups, including The Elders and 1 for 7 Billion.<sup>73</sup>

### The Straw Polls

One of the more notable innovations in the Secretary-General selection process since 1981 has been the use of straw polls to gauge candidate viability. Prior to 1981, the Security Council used secret ballots conducted in a private meeting, in accordance with Rule 48 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council, which provides that such recommendations “be discussed and decided at a private meeting”.<sup>74</sup> Pursuant to Rule 55, the Secretary-General would issue a communiqué summarising the outcome on behalf of

the Council. Some of these communiqués contained details on the number of votes cast, the names of candidates, and whether a veto had been used. This was the case, for example, during the series of votes held in March 1953 to select a successor to Trygve Lie. In later practice, however, communiqués typically provided only minimal information.

### Origins of the Straw Polls

Straw polls emerged from the deadlock in 1981 between Kurt Waldheim, who was seeking an unprecedented third term as Secretary-General, and Salim Ahmed Salim, who had been endorsed by the OAU. Waldheim had faced vetoes by China in 1971 and 1976, although China ultimately abstained in later ballots, allowing his appointment. In 1981, however, China vetoed Waldheim while supporting Salim, who in turn was blocked by a US veto.<sup>75</sup> This stalemate led to 16 inconclusive formal ballots between 27 October and 17 November 1981.

This impasse prompted Otunnu to use an informal system to identify candidates acceptable to all permanent members after persuading Salim and Waldheim to step aside.<sup>76</sup> The five permanent members (P5) received blue ballot papers listing nine new candidates and had to indicate those they would “discourage”.<sup>77</sup> All 15 Council members then received white ballot papers with the same list of candidates and were asked to indicate which they would “encourage”.<sup>78</sup> The process showed that Javier Pérez de Cuéllar was a broadly acceptable candidate to Council members. He was recommended by the Council on 11 December in a formal vote<sup>79</sup> and subsequently appointed Secretary-General by the General Assembly.<sup>80</sup> This informal survey evolved into the system of straw polls that has been used in all subsequent selections.

In the 1991 selection process, the format that members used to vote on candidates during the straw polls evolved as the process unfolded. According to the account of Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, then permanent representative of India to the UN and Council President for the month of October, during early straw polls, members were provided a list of candidates and were asked to indicate with an “X” those that they wished to support.<sup>81</sup> As the process progressed, members apparently moved to voting on individual ballots where, for each candidate, they could indicate “yes”, “no”, or “abstain”.<sup>82</sup>

Members were also given the option to introduce new names during the straw polls to the list of candidates under consideration.<sup>83</sup> This could be done by writing the name of the new candidate on a blank ballot sheet which was provided to members alongside the ballots with the names of candidates already under consideration.<sup>84</sup>

70 Formerly known as 1 for 7 Billion, this is a global campaign led by a steering committee of organisations from different regions.

71 <https://1for8billion.org/tracking-state-support-for-a-woman-sg>

72 A/RES/11(I) [4(d)].

73 The Elders is a group of global leaders working on peace, justice, human rights and other global issues. For more details on The Elders' 2015 proposal see Loraine Sievers, “Proposals by The Elders for ‘a more independent Secretary-General’” (7 February 2015) <https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5> update website of Loraine Sievers and Sam Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014).

74 Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council (1982) S/96/Rev.7 Rule 48.

75 France might have cast some of the vetoes that blocked Salim, Bhaskar Menon (ed), *International Documents Review*, 7, 45 (23 December 1996) cited in Sievers and Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” 411 fn 147.

76 Interview with Olara Otunnu, UN Oral History Project (24 September 1990) 13.

77 Interview with Olara Otunnu, UN Oral History Project 14.

78 *Ibid.*

79 UNSC 2312th meeting (11 December 1981) S/PV.2312; UNSC resolution 494 (11 December 1981) S/RES/494.

80 UNGA resolution 36/137 (15 December 1981) A/RES/36/137.

81 Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, “The Horseshoe Table: An Inside View of the UN Security Council” (Longman 2006) 269.

82 Gharekhan, “The Horseshoe Table” 276.

83 Gharekhan, “The Horseshoe Table” 268.

84 Gharekhan, “The Horseshoe Table” 271.

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

During the process, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Bernard Chidzero (Zimbabwe) emerged as leading contenders. On 12 November 1991, colour-coded ballots (blue for permanent members and white for elected members) were used to test for possible vetoes.<sup>85</sup> While ballot papers of different colours were already utilised in 1981 to test candidate viability, this marked the first use of differentiated ballots in an informal vote involving all Council members.

Once it was established that neither candidate faced opposition from the P5, the Council proceeded to formal voting, where Chidzero received seven positive votes, resulting in the selection of Boutros-Ghali, who had received 11 positive votes, four abstentions and no negative votes.<sup>86</sup> The Council then adopted a resolution recommending Boutros-Ghali be appointed Secretary-General.<sup>87</sup>

Straw polls were used again in 1996 when Boutros-Ghali ran for a second term, even though he was the sole candidate. This appears to be the point where the straw polls moved from “yes” or “no” to “encouraged” and “discouraged”.<sup>88</sup> It seems that the “no opinion expressed” may have also been used in later rounds. Two straw polls

were held on 18 November, with Boutros-Ghali receiving a negative vote from one member believed to be the US. The following day, the Council held a formal vote in a private meeting on a draft resolution to recommend Boutros-Ghali.<sup>89</sup> Having received a veto, apparently from the US, Boutros-Ghali withdrew as a candidate. This led to the entry of four new African candidates. In the first straw poll on 10 December, Kofi Annan (Ghana) and Amara Essy (Côte d’Ivoire) received the strongest support. A second poll, this time colour-coded, was held the same day. It indicated that a permanent member, widely believed to be France, opposed Annan, while two permanent members opposed Essy.<sup>90</sup> In the next five rounds of colour-coded balloting, Annan’s numbers increased, but he continued to receive a “discourage” vote from a permanent member. On the eighth round of straw polling held on 13 December, Annan secured the support of all Council members, at which point it was understood that he would not receive a veto in a formal meeting.<sup>91</sup> The general understanding is that the French position shifted following a promise of a senior-level position in the UN.<sup>92</sup>

### The Conduct of the Straw Polls

#### The 2016 Straw Polls<sup>93</sup>

##### Setting

- Conducted in the Security Council consultations room.
- Two tellers chosen from among Council members by drawing lots the day before.<sup>94</sup>
- Each delegation consisted of permanent representative (or his/her representative) +1, except for the Council President and tellers who were allowed permanent representative +2.
- Only Council delegates participating in the polls could access the consultations room, quiet room and NAM caucus room during the polls.
- No Secretariat staff were present.

##### Timing

- Undifferentiated straw polls took place on 21 July, 5 August, 29 August, 9 September and 26 September.
- Only colour-coded ballot was on 5 October.

##### The Ballot

- White ballots for all members in the undifferentiated straw polls; red for P5 members in the colour-coded round.
- Members received one ballot paper for each candidate, in the six UN official languages.<sup>95</sup>
- Three options in each ballot paper: Encourage/Discourage/No Opinion Expressed.
- Each member had ten minutes to fill in the ballots in either the consultations room, quiet room or NAM caucus room.
- Ballots were filled out by putting a checkmark in one of the boxes, using identical pens provided by the presidency.
- Invalid ballot if more than one option marked or no mark at all.

- Ballots folded three times before being cast.
- Ballots were cast in the consultations room with each member casting a maximum of three ballots at a time.
- To count the votes, the Council President announced each vote cast while displaying the ballot paper to Council members under the supervision of the two tellers.
- The Council President announced final tallies for each candidate at the end of the counting.
- The president completed a tally-sheet and members were allowed to complete personal tally sheets.
- Ballot papers were shredded by the Council President in the consultations room after each round.

##### Next Steps

- At the end of each round, members discussed the date of the next straw poll.

##### Announcing the Results

- Following each straw poll, the Council President informed the PGA orally that a poll had occurred, without disclosing the results, and the date of the next straw poll, if decided.
- The Council President then spoke at a press stakeout announcing which round of the straw polls had taken place and that the candidates would be informed through the permanent representatives of the nominating states. The press was also told that the PGA had been informed. No questions were taken.
- The Council President then informed the permanent representatives of the nominating states of the total votes received by their candidate, as well as the highest and lowest numbers of “encourage”, “discourage” and “no opinion expressed” votes received across candidates, without attributing those scores to particular candidates.

85 Paul Lewis, “Egyptian Leads Voting for U.N. Post” (*The New York Times* 12 November 1991).

86 Sievers and Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” 412.

87 UNSC resolution 720 (21 November 1991) S/RES/720.

88 “The ‘Wisnumurti Guidelines’ for selecting a candidate for Secretary-General” (November 1996) <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/230001?v=pdf>

89 UNSC draft resolution (18 November 1996) S/1996/952; UNSC 3714th meeting (19 November 1996) S/PV.3714.

90 Sievers and Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” 413.

91 Ibid.

92 Abiodun Williams, “Kofi Annan, 1997–2006” in Manuel Fröhlich and Abiodun Williams (eds), “The UN Secretary-General and the Security Council: A Dynamic Relationship” (Oxford University Press 2018) 163.

93 The information contained in this section is based on non-papers circulated by Council members at the time of the 2016 straw polls as well as correspondence confirming these modalities collected by the authors.

94 The President of the Security Council and any member with a candidate could not be a teller.

95 As Ambassador Koro Bessho pointed out in his 1 February 2017 letter, this was an alteration from the 2006 selection process in which all candidates were listed on one ballot paper. The change was made in order to avoid the pattern of voting revealing the Council member who had cast that particular ballot. Letter from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (1 February 2017) A/71/774-S/2017/93.

## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

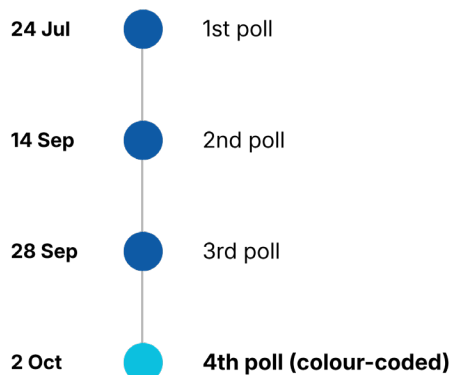
In the 2006 selection, straw polls were used again, with the “encourage” and “discourage” categories together with the option of a “no opinion” category, signalling an abstention. After four straw polls, Ban Ki-moon emerged as the leading candidate. Although he received one “discourage” vote in each of the first three rounds, the fourth straw poll—using colour-coded ballots—resulted in 14 “encourage” votes and one “no opinion expressed” from an elected member, paving the way for his formal appointment.

In 2016, six straw polls were held between 21 July and 5 October, with the sixth using colour-coded ballots. There were 13 candidates;

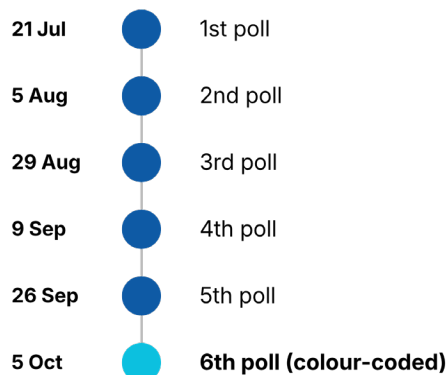
one was a late entrant, coming in at the end of September, and three withdrew before the end of the process. The results of the straw polls indicated that António Guterres was a leading candidate although several other candidates received a high number of “encouragement” votes in different straw polls. Guterres received no “discouragement” votes in the first straw poll but had two or three members casting “discouragement” votes in the second to fifth polls. The sixth round was a colour-coded ballot where Guterres, received thirteen “encourage”, no “discourage”, and two “no opinion expressed”, including one from a P5 member.

### Comparison of 2006 and 2016 Straw Polls Timelines<sup>96</sup>

#### 2006



#### 2016



### The Council’s Recommendation

In accordance with Rule 48 of the Security Council Provisional Rules of Procedure, the Council has always considered its recommendation regarding the appointment of the UN Secretary-General at a private meeting. Following the meeting, in accordance with Rule 55, the Council has issued a communiqué indicating that it had held a private meeting on the question of the recommendation for the appointment of the Secretary-General.

The Council’s decision to recommend the first Secretary-General was reflected only in a communiqué. In 1961, the Council’s decision to recommend the appointment of U Thant as Acting Secretary-General was the first to be contained in a resolution as well as in a communiqué.<sup>97</sup> In 1962, while a communiqué was issued containing the Council’s decision to recommend Thant for his first term,<sup>98</sup> the Council also adopted a resolution. However, due to an error during a renumbering exercise, the resolution was not assigned an official number.<sup>99</sup> Both the Council’s decision on Thant’s short temporary extension and on his second term in 1966 were reflected in a resolution as well as a communiqué.<sup>100</sup> Since then, while continuing to meet in private and issue a communiqué, the Council has also adopted a formal resolution recommending the candidate. The recommendation has always been transmitted by a letter from the

President of the Council to the President of the General Assembly. Whenever a draft resolution containing the Council’s recommendation has been voted on, the vote was conducted as a secret ballot.

### Possible Scenarios for a Formal Vote

In early October 2016, ahead of the sixth colour-coded ballot, at the request of Russia as Council President, the Secretariat circulated a non-paper on the procedure for the formal vote on the Council’s recommendation. The paper provided background on the procedures based on the Charter and resolution 11 (I). It outlined three possible scenarios for the formal vote:

- (i) In a situation with one candidate, the Council could proceed with the recommendation without a vote (i.e. by acclamation);
- (ii) In a situation with one candidate, the Council could proceed with a vote; or
- (iii) In a situation with multiple candidates, the Council would need to vote on each candidate.

In scenarios (ii) and (iii), the candidate would need at least nine affirmative votes and no negative votes from a permanent member to be recommended to the General Assembly. In scenario (ii), if the candidate failed to secure nine votes or received a negative vote from a permanent member, the paper suggested that the meeting would

<sup>96</sup> Timelines for the 2006 straw polls are based on Keating, “Selecting the world’s diplomat” 64, 65.

<sup>97</sup> UNSC resolution 168 (3 November 1961) S/RES/168; UNSC 972nd meeting (3 November 1961) S/PV.972.

<sup>98</sup> UNSC 1026th meeting (30 November 1962) S/PV.1026.

<sup>99</sup> Loraine Sievers, “Extending the term of Secretary-General U Thant: The case of the missing resolution” (2 April 2018) <https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-3b> website of Loraine Sievers and Sam Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014).

<sup>100</sup> UNSC resolution 277 (28 October 1966) S/RES/277; UNSC 1311th meeting (28 October 1966) S/PV.1311; UNSC resolution 229 (2 December 1966) S/RES/229; UNSC 1329th meeting (2 December 1966) S/PV.1329.

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## II. Evolution of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Framework

be suspended and that members would then hold consultations on next steps. This would also be the case in scenario (iii) if more than one candidate receives nine votes and no veto, or no candidate does so. In the case of Kofi Annan (1996), Ban Ki-moon (2006), and António Guterres (2016), the resolution recommending these candidates was adopted by acclamation. In 2016, the Council moved to the formal vote on 6 October, the day after the only colour-coded ballot. Just ahead of the formal vote, Council members held consultations to agree on the candidate to recommend to the General Assembly as the next Secretary-General. At this meeting members also considered drafts of:

- the resolution recommending the candidate;
- the communiqué to be issued following the private meeting (Rule 55); and
- the draft letter communicating the Council's decision to the President of the General Assembly.

### The Role of the General Assembly in Appointing the Secretary-General

Article 97 of the UN Charter provides that “[t]he Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council”.<sup>101</sup> Rule 141 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly stipulates that, when the Council has submitted its recommendation on the appointment of the Secretary-General, “the General Assembly shall consider the recommendation and vote upon it by secret ballot in private meeting”.<sup>102</sup> Resolution 11(I) of 1946 provided that a simple majority of member states present and voting “is sufficient, unless the General Assembly itself decides that a two-thirds majority is called for”.<sup>103</sup> In practice, however, the General Assembly has never held the vote in a private meeting, and last voted by secret ballot in 1966,<sup>104</sup> with most resolutions being adopted by acclamation.

Recent General Assembly resolutions appointing the Secretary-General have been concise texts which have included references to the following:

- Article 97 of the UN Charter;
- The Security Council resolution recommending the candidate; and
- The term of office.

In 2016, ACT and NAM sent letters to the President of the General Assembly on 18 May and 29 June, on the matter of a more substantial resolution.<sup>105</sup>

The PGA invited the co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on the Revitalisation of the work for the General Assembly to explore the issues raised in the two letters. Lykketoft, in his 13 September handover letter to the PGA of the 71st session, Peter Thomson, noted that the co-chairs had conveyed that there were two main positions among the membership.<sup>106</sup> There were members who wanted co-facilitators to be appointed to start consideration of the General Assembly appointment resolution well ahead of the Council's recommendation. These members were interested in having a substantive resolution which could address issues such as the term of appointment of the Secretary-General and the process of appointing senior officials, and to have this negotiated before the Council made its recommendation. Conversely, there were others who were keen to avoid any course of action that could cause division and jeopardise the unity of the membership for the next Secretary-General. It seems that all the permanent members, with the exception of Russia, raised concerns about this possibly becoming a divisive process, and it was ultimately abandoned.

The appointment resolution, which was adopted by acclamation, included new language welcoming the selection and appointment process, highlighting that it had been guided by “the principles of transparency and inclusivity” as set out in General Assembly resolutions 69/321 and 70/305, including informal dialogues with all candidates.<sup>107</sup> The resolution for the first time recalled Chapter XV of the Charter, which includes Article 100 on the independence of the Secretary-General. It also reaffirmed “the role of the General Assembly under Article 97”.<sup>108</sup>

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## III. The 2015/2016 Selection and Appointment Process

The 2015/2016 selection process has been the most transparent in the history of selecting and appointing a UN Secretary-General. The campaigns of some member states and civil society organisations were catalytic in bringing about this change. While they did not all have the same positions, their work shared a common desire to achieve greater transparency and inclusiveness. As a result, that process for the first time featured a joint letter from the Presidents of the Security Council and General Assembly launching

the nomination process, public dialogues with the candidates, and meetings between candidates and Council members. While the Council's core modalities for conducting the search—straw polls and a private meeting to vote on the recommendation—remained largely unchanged, the environment created by a more open process positively influenced Council decision-making by creating the conditions to assess the candidates.

101 UN Charter, Art 97.

102 Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, Rule 141 A/520/Rev.21.

103 A/RES/11(I) [4(c)].

104 The draft General Assembly resolution concerning the reappointment of U Thant as Secretary-General was voted on by secret ballot, it was adopted with 120 votes to none. A/RES/2161(XXI).

105 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to the co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly (15 July 2016). The letter forwarded letters from ACT and NAM dated 18 May and 29 June 2016, respectively.

106 Letter from the President of the 70th session of the General Assembly to the President of the 71st session of the General Assembly (13 September 2016) <https://www.un.org/pga/70/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2016/01/PGA70-to-PGA71-hand-over-letter-on-SG-selection-2.pdf>

107 A/RES/71/4.

108 Ibid.

### III. The 2015/2016 Selection and Appointment Process

#### Overview of the Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: 2015/2016 and 2025/2026

##### 2015/2016

- 11 Sep 2015 ● Adoption of General Assembly resolution 69/321
- Early Oct 2015 ● PGA presents elements of a draft joint letter to PSC
- 16 Nov 2015 ● Draft joint letter by the PGA/PSC circulated to Council members
- 18 Nov 2015 ● Council discussion of the joint letter under AOB
- 15 Dec 2015 ● Joint letter circulated to member states
- Apr–Oct 2016 ● General Assembly informal dialogues with candidates
- 25 May 2016 ● Security Council discussion under AOB on modalities for meeting candidates
- Jun–Oct 2016 ● Informal meetings of the Council with candidates
- 12 Jul 2016 ● Global Town Hall event with Secretary-General candidates
- Jul–Sep 2016 ● Five rounds of straw polls
- 5 Oct 2016 ● Sixth round of straw polls with colour-coded ballots
- 6 Oct 2016 ● Adoption of Council resolution recommending António Guterres as the next Secretary-General
- 13 Oct 2016 ● Adoption of General Assembly resolution 71/4 appointing Guterres as the ninth Secretary-General
- 12 Dec 2016 ● Guterres takes oath of office in the General Assembly

##### 2025/2026

- 5 Sep 2025 ● Adoption of General Assembly resolution 79/327
- 3 Oct 2025 ● The PGA approached the PSC with an initial draft of the joint letter
- 22 Oct 2025 ● P5 draft joint letter announced to other members during an AOB meeting and later circulated
- 20 Nov 2025 ● Meeting under AOB to discuss the draft joint letter
- 25 Nov 2025 ● Joint letter circulated to member states
- 21 Apr 2026 onwards ● General Assembly interactive dialogues begin and continue as candidates come in
- Jun 2026 ● Informal meetings of candidates with Council members
- Jul 2026 onwards ● Straw polls
- Oct 2026 ● Final round of straw polls
- Oct 2026 ● Adoption of Council resolution recommending the 10th Secretary-General
- Oct 2026 ● Adoption of General Assembly resolution appointing the 10<sup>th</sup> Secretary-General
- Dec 2026 ● The new Secretary-General takes oath of office in the General Assembly

### III. The 2015/2016 Selection and Appointment Process

#### The 2015 Resolution on the Revitalisation of the General Assembly

On 11 September 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/321, establishing the framework for reforms in the 2016 process. The resolution called for a process guided by transparency and inclusiveness and the broader participation of member states.

Notably, it requested the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly to jointly initiate the process through a common letter outlining the procedures and inviting the timely nomination of candidates. This marked a departure from past practice, in which the process was largely initiated within the Council with limited formal engagement of the Assembly. The resolution also requested the two presidents to jointly, and on an ongoing basis, circulate information on candidates, giving the Assembly visibility into what had previously been an opaque process.

The text further stressed “the need to ensure equal and fair distribution based on gender and geographical balance” and explicitly invited members to consider presenting women as candidates.<sup>109</sup> This language elevated political expectations around diversity and representation.

The resolution stressed the need to “ensure the appointment of the best possible candidate” who “embodies the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity”.<sup>110</sup> It also invited members to present candidates with “proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills”.<sup>111</sup>

Importantly, the resolution decided that the General Assembly would conduct informal dialogues or meetings with candidates, while underscoring that non-participation should not prejudice any candidate. It also tasked the presidents of the relevant General Assembly sessions with actively supporting the process, reinforcing the Assembly’s institutional role.

While there were clear divisions during the negotiations, the fact that the resolution respected the authority of the Council in the selection process allowed the permanent members to eventually support the resolution and adopt it by consensus. Overall, resolution 69/321 represented an incremental but significant shift toward greater General Assembly engagement and procedural transparency.

#### The Joint Letter

Pursuant to resolution 69/321, the selection process began with a joint letter from the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly to all member states, describing the process and inviting the timely presentation of candidates. Initial elements were presented by Lykketoft as President of the 70th session of the General Assembly, at the monthly meeting of the two presidents at the start of the Spanish Council presidency in October 2015. A draft incorporating these elements was presented by the UK, as Council President in November, to Lykketoft. Following input from Lykketoft, the UK circulated the draft letter to Council members on 16 November, and an initial discussion was held on 18 November. After

several revisions, the text was placed under silence on 3 December, which was broken by Russia. Following further negotiations involving Russia, the UK and Lykketoft, a revised draft was placed under silence on 12 December, which it passed. The joint letter was issued on 15 December 2015, signed by Lykketoft and the Council President for December, Ambassador Samantha Power (US).<sup>112</sup>

Among the contentious issues that arose in the negotiations among Council members were the inclusion of a timeline for the different steps in the appointment process, how to specify the qualities expected of a Secretary-General, geography-related references, which members could organise Council meetings with candidates, and whether only member states could nominate candidates.

#### Nominating the Candidates

The 2016 joint letter provided guidance to member states and candidates on the nomination process as follows:

- Candidates would be nominated through a letter to the Presidents of the Council and Assembly;
- Candidates’ names would be jointly circulated by the Presidents of the Council and Assembly; and
- Candidates would be offered opportunities for informal dialogues or meetings with members of both bodies; those who chose not to participate would not be prejudiced.

While the joint letter encouraged early presentation of candidates, it also made clear that this should not stop others from coming in throughout the process.

The letter stated that the Secretary-General post requires “the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity”, consistent with Charter language on appointment of UN staff.<sup>113</sup> In line with resolution 69/321, the letter invited nominees with leadership, managerial, diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills, as well as extensive experience in international relations. The letter encouraged member states, in making nominations, to consider presenting women, “as well as men” as candidates. It also “note[d]” regional diversity “in the selection of previous Secretaries-General”.<sup>114</sup>

The timelines for different stages of the process having been one of the most contentious elements of the negotiation, the joint letter provided only a vague indication of the start of the informal dialogues by stating that they could be held before the Council begins its selection by the end of July 2016. Similarly, the joint letter did not provide a specific timeline for the selection but indicated that the Council planned to make its recommendation to the General Assembly in “a timely manner” to allow the newly appointed Secretary-General sufficient time to prepare for the job.<sup>115</sup>

Many of the elements of the 2015 joint letter were replicated in the first draft of the 2025 joint letter which was issued on 25 November. (For more information on this, please refer to Section V on the 2025 joint letter.)

109 UNGA resolution 69/321 (11 September 2015) A/RES/69/321 [38].

110 A/RES/69/321 [39]. This also reflects the language in Article 101.3 of the UN Charter.

111 A/RES/69/321 [39].

112 Letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations (15 December 2015) A/70/623-S/2015/988.

113 A/70/623-S/2015/988; UN Charter, Article 101.3.

114 A/70/623-S/2015/988.

115 Ibid.

### III. The 2015/2016 Selection and Appointment Process

#### Informal Meetings Organised by the President of the General Assembly

The most significant innovation of the 2015/2016 selection process was the organisation of informal dialogue sessions by the President of the General Assembly, generally referred to as hearings, and held in the Trusteeship Council.

Hearings for the first nine candidates were held in April 2016,<sup>116</sup> and for the four later candidates shortly after they were nominated in June, July and October respectively.<sup>117</sup> Candidates were thus exposed to the larger membership, as well as to a worldwide audience through the UN webcasts. Ten of the then twelve candidates participated in a Global Town Hall meeting organised by the PGA held on 12 July 2016 and broadcast live on Al Jazeera TV.<sup>118</sup>

The transparency of the 2015/2016 process is in sharp contrast to earlier decades, where names of candidates were often not publicly confirmed and there was no clear nomination process. The hearings provided an insight into member states' expectations for the next Secretary-General and allowed for an assessment of the candidates' priorities in addressing the challenges facing the UN. While *realpolitik* considerations most likely played a role in the selection process, having the opportunity to assess the candidates in these different settings proved influential in shaping Council members' positions.<sup>119</sup>

#### Informal Meetings with Council Members

By May 2016, a number of candidates had requested a meeting with Council members and members had begun to discuss the modalities for meeting with the candidates and responding to their requests. Although the UK had proposed in 2015 the use of the Arria-format for interacting with the candidates,<sup>120</sup> by May, members agreed that a more confidential, informal format would allow for a more interactive exchange of views and for further insights into how the candidates would perform in the role of UN Secretary-General.

Council members held three informal meetings with candidates in June under the presidency of France, nine in July under the presidency of Japan, and one in October under the presidency of Russia. Council members, at times, met with more than one candidate in a day. The modalities for the meetings were as follows:

- Held at the permanent mission of the Council President of the month;
- Lasted for one hour;
- Two representatives per Council member were allowed to attend;
- All members attended although at times were not represented at permanent representative level.

#### Modalities of the Straw Polls and Meetings with Candidates

The conduct of the straw polls has been among the most hidden aspects of the Secretary-General selection process. Until 2016, there was very limited public information about the straw polls. There was also little institutional memory among Council members, even among permanent members. In 2016, only Vitaly Churkin, the then Russian permanent representative, had been on the Council during the 2006 process. To guide them, members had some access to documents used during the 2006 selection, as well as a Secretariat paper based on the "Wisnumurti Guidelines"<sup>121</sup> drafted by the then Indonesian Ambassador Nugroho Wisnumurti who had been President of the Council in November 1996 when straw polls were conducted for the selection process that culminated in Kofi Annan being recommended. In 2006, members agreed that ahead of the straw polls, France, the Council President for July, would produce a paper on the process. This paper was circulated ahead of the first straw poll in July 2006. It included an annex with an informal factsheet drafted by the Secretariat and was based largely on the Wisnumurti Guidelines.

In 2016, as members were considering the modalities around the straw polls and Council meetings with candidates, there were a number of non-papers produced addressing practical and procedural aspects of the straw polls and meetings with candidates. The UK produced an updated outline of the "Wisnumurti Guidelines" in April.<sup>122</sup> In early May, Egypt, Council President for that month, and Spain prepared a paper that included information on modalities for meetings with candidates, timing for the first straw polls, communication with candidates and the wider membership, and whether to create a shortlist of candidates.<sup>123</sup> In late May, Russia circulated a paper on how the straw polls should be conducted. In early June, during its Council presidency, France circulated a paper on the procedure for the 2016 selection process, which included an annex on the practice related to straw polls based on past practice.<sup>124</sup> In its capacity as Council President, France consulted with members and developed modalities for the straw polls. Based on these modalities, the July (Japan), August (Malaysia), and September (New Zealand) presidencies each produced non-papers at the start of their respective presidencies to guide Council members on the conduct of the straw polls for that month.<sup>125</sup> Cumulatively, these papers allowed members to discuss how the process would unfold in the Security Council and agree on the modalities.

116 They were held on 12, 13 and 14 April 2016.

117 These rounds were on 7 June, 14 July and 3 October 2016.

118 The candidates were split into two groups of five and took part in two separate debates that were held consecutively.

119 SCR, "The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows" (2017) 6.

120 "It is the search for someone out of seven billion who can really ensure that the whole UN is fit for purpose", statement by Ambassador Matthew Rycroft (UK) (30 June 2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/it-is-the-search-for-someone-out-of-seven-billion-who-can-really-ensure-that-the-whole-un-is-fit-for-purpose>

121 "The 'Wisnumurti Guidelines' for selecting a candidate for Secretary-General".

122 "Outline for updated 'Wisnumurti Guidelines'", UK paper, April 2016.

123 "Informal Guidelines for SG Selection, Process in the Security Council", Spain and Egypt paper (10 May 2016).

124 "Selection of the Secretary-General, Procedure in the Security Council", French paper (1 June 2016).

125 A/71/774-S/2017/93; "Selection of the next Secretary-General: Modalities for straw polls", New Zealand non-paper (7 September 2016).

## IV. The 2025 Revitalisation Resolution

The work of the AHWG and recent General Assembly revitalisation resolutions have generally been organised around four clusters:

- (i) Role and authority of the General Assembly;
- (ii) Working methods;
- (iii) Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads; and
- (iv) Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

Following the biennialisation of the revitalisation resolution in 2021, the AHWG began structuring its discussions across two years, considering the first two clusters during even-numbered sessions of the General Assembly and the remaining two clusters during odd-numbered sessions.<sup>126</sup> During odd-numbered sessions, member states have also negotiated the resolution in its entirety and taken action on the text in the General Assembly. In line with this schedule, in 2025, the AHWG discussed cluster III and IV and negotiated the text of what would become resolution 79/327—the last revitalisation resolution adopted prior to the inception of the selection process for the next Secretary-General. Incidentally, resolution 79/327 amended this schedule and established a new pattern, starting from the 81st session of the General Assembly.<sup>127</sup> It decided, on a trial basis, that clusters I, II and IV will be considered at the 81st session, and every three years thereafter, while cluster III will be considered at the 82nd session, and every three years thereafter. The revitalisation resolution has also been triennialised. It will next be considered at the 83rd session and every three years thereafter, unless earlier consideration “is deemed necessary by the General Assembly”.<sup>128</sup>

General Assembly resolution 69/321 and the subsequent selection and appointment process led to significant changes in General Assembly and Security Council practices on appointing the UN Secretary-General. For many member states approaching the negotiation in 2025, the challenge was to preserve the elements established in 2015/2016 and further enhance the process. They paid particular attention to issues on which consensus was not achieved in 2015 but that continued to be a high priority on many members’ agendas following the appointment of António Guterres, such as transparency, predictability, and gender and geographic representation.<sup>129</sup>

On 6 May 2025—following a period of consultations with member states, political groups of the General Assembly, and civil society representatives—the AHWG co-chairs for the 79th session of the General Assembly, Romania and South Africa, circulated an elements paper for discussion at an informal meeting of the AHWG on 14 May. A first draft of the resolution was then circulated on 26 May. Negotiations took place over several months and the draft evolved over five revised versions before a final version was tabled. The AHWG adopted the resolution on 2 September 2025 and forwarded it to the General Assembly, which adopted it by consensus as resolution 79/327 on 5 September.

The elements paper featured a collection of points prepared by the co-chairs on the basis of proposals received during their initial consultations. Initiating the negotiations with an elements paper has been viewed as constructive by several members as it allowed ambitious elements to serve as the starting point for negotiations. While some members viewed some of these elements as unrealistic, starting the negotiations with an expansive proposal broadened the negotiating space and enabled trade-offs to emerge as the text evolved.

During the earlier stages of the negotiations process, rather than proceeding with line-by-line negotiations, the co-chairs evaluated the input received from member states on previous drafts and issued a revised text. It appears that this approach, which was apparently new to the negotiation of the revitalisation resolution, was taken by the co-chairs to facilitate a more ambitious result and avoid the negotiation running aground in line-by-line discussions early on. It seems, however, that some members were unclear as to why certain proposals they had submitted did not appear in the draft. Others apparently noted that the absence of visibility on other delegations’ language proposals limited their capacity to develop possible compromises and trade-offs—which remained the prerogative of the co-chairs even when members proposed possible workarounds that they had negotiated separately. At the same time, while not always agreeing with the co-chairs’ approach, several members appreciated the firm stance of Romania and South Africa on some key substantive issues during the negotiations, particularly in their engagement with permanent members, noting that it contributed to a stronger resolution. This apparently included such issues as the role of the General Assembly on international peace and security matters, and several aspects of the draft resolution concerning the process of selection and appointment of the UN Secretary-General.

Resolution 79/327 is generally recognised as an important step in formalising practices on the selection and appointment of the UN Secretary-General. In paragraph 42 and its fourteen sub-paragraphs, the General Assembly sets out a roadmap for the process, in an effort to enhance procedural predictability compared to previous cycles. Several of these elements built on fairly consolidated practice, such as that the process should be initiated in the last quarter of the year preceding the end of the incumbent’s term, and that it should end with the swearing into office of the Secretary-General-designate during the last quarter of the year prior to assuming office. Other elements solidify relatively new practices, such as that the process “should be formally initiated” through a joint letter of the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council.<sup>130</sup> Yet other elements, grounded in concerns that emerged during the last selection cycle, add modest new requirements for this selection process, such as that candidates should disclose their sources of funding.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, a significant omission compared to previous revitalisation resolutions is that resolution 79/327 does not include any mention of civil society.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>126</sup> UNGA resolution 75/325 (10 September 2021) A/RES/75/325 [5]. In this resolution, the General Assembly decided to consider the next revitalisation resolution at the 77th session and biennially thereafter.

<sup>127</sup> UNGA resolution 79/327 (5 September 2025) A/RES/79/327 [16]–[18].

<sup>128</sup> A/RES/79/327 [18].

<sup>129</sup> See, for instance, statements delivered at the 20 February 2025 AHWG thematic debate on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads. “Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly” (2 September 2025) A/79/995.

<sup>130</sup> A/RES/79/327 [42(a)].

<sup>131</sup> To note, a reference inviting candidates to voluntarily disclose funding sources already appeared in UNGA resolution 77/335 (1 September 2023) A/RES/77/335 [64].

<sup>132</sup> A/RES/79/327 cf. A/RES/77/335 [63] and A/RES/75/325 [58].

## IV. The 2025 Revitalisation Resolution

During the negotiations, a key dynamic was the general resistance of the permanent members to language that could expand or further formalise the General Assembly's role, including with regard to the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General. While this dynamic reflects long-standing sensitivities over the allocation of authority on this process, it also unfolded against the broader backdrop of the faltering credibility of the Security Council following its failure to prevent and respond to major crises including in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, which has led in recent years to a more assertive General Assembly. Resolution 79/327 itself addresses this issue by, for the first time, calling upon member states to “refrain from measures impeding action to prevent or end the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes”, a clear reference to the use of the veto in those situations.<sup>133</sup>

Regarding the issues pertaining to the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General, with the partial exception of France, which apparently aligned with the EU on most matters, the permanent members were united on most contentious issues. In general, the permanent members resisted references that they viewed as overly prescriptive, such as having a clear deadline for the presentation of candidates. They were also opposed to language that they perceived as allowing the General Assembly to encroach on the Council's prerogatives: for example, having the General Assembly request that the Council recommend more than one candidate to consider. Language that could be used to narrow the search, such as what is often informally referred to as the Secretary-General's “job description”, was also challenging. While the permanent members apparently argued that leaving the process open was the wisest approach to avoid counterproductive strictures and ultimately guarantee the selection of the best candidate, other members generally viewed this as an attempt to exert control over the appointment. In the pointed words of one such member, “you don't need a job description if you are going to pick who gets the job”.<sup>134</sup>

The ACT Group advocated for a more assertive and structured role for the General Assembly in the selection process, putting forward language promoting greater procedural predictability and transparency, and supporting measures including the holding of advisory or indicative votes in the General Assembly to assess the level of support for the candidates.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, NAM encouraged discussion of the Security Council considering recommending multiple candidates, clear timelines, and different options regarding the duration of appointment and renewability of the term of Office of the Secretary-General.<sup>136</sup>

Many groups, including ACT, NAM, the EU, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were in favour of language on

the nomination of women candidates, together with some members such as Mexico being among the strongest supporters of this issue. The US apparently strongly opposed gender language with reference to the appointment of the next Secretary-General—which Russia, too, did not support.<sup>137</sup> It seems that the US also initially opposed including a reference in the revitalisation resolution to the joint letter by the Presidents of the Council and the General Assembly.

While France aligned with the other permanent members in opposing some issues, such as General Assembly straw polls or having a single non-renewable term for the next Secretary-General, some members have nonetheless credited France with helping to broker workable compromise positions with the other permanent members. Some members also observed that, in the later stages of the negotiation, China and Russia—while not moving away from P5 redlines—put forward proposals aimed at maintaining consensus on some contentious issues.

### Joint Letter

Resolution 79/327 decided that the process “formally” starts with the issuing of a joint letter to member states by the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council.<sup>138</sup> Before the 25 November 2025 joint letter, the process had been launched by a joint letter only twice, in 2015 and in 2021, when Guterres had indicated that he was available to serve a second term ahead of the end of his first term.<sup>139</sup> The resolution says that the joint letter should invite candidates' nominations from member states and outline the principles of the selection process and “notional events”—a reference which has been generally understood as indicating broad timelines and stages of the selection process.<sup>140</sup> With respect to the timing of the issuance of the joint letter, while the more prescriptive deadline of the first week of November 2025 appeared in the first version of the draft resolution, this was revised early in the negotiations in favour of a more flexible formulation: “the last quarter of the year” preceding the end of the incumbent's term.<sup>141</sup>

### Candidates' Nomination and Withdrawal Modalities

Resolution 79/327 confers the power to nominate candidates exclusively to member states.<sup>142</sup> The resolution is clear that members can put forward only one nominee at a time, but they can opt to do so individually or as part of a group of states. Members have the option to withdraw their candidate “at any time during the process”, but they are required to do so formally through a notification to the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council.<sup>143</sup> Only after having withdrawn their candidate can a member state put forward another candidate. The importance of clarifying this issue was

<sup>133</sup> A/RES/79/327 [7]. It appears that earlier drafts of the resolution contained a direct reference to the use of the veto in this paragraph, which was however strongly opposed by most permanent members.

<sup>134</sup> UN diplomat, interview (8 October 2025).

<sup>135</sup> See, Letter from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Estonia to the United Nations to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (19 March 2025) A/79/825-S/2025/175. This letter contains the ACT Group position paper on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General.

<sup>136</sup> See the statement by Algeria on behalf of NAM at the 20 February 2025 AHWG thematic debate on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads. The webcast of the meeting is available on UN Web TV: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1c/k1cdc05zyz>

<sup>137</sup> See the statement by Russia at the 20 February 2025 AHWG thematic debate on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads.

<sup>138</sup> A/RES/79/327 [42(a)].

<sup>139</sup> A/70/623-S/2015/988. Letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations (5 February 2021) A/75/780-S/2021/179.

<sup>140</sup> A/RES/79/327 [42(b)].

<sup>141</sup> A/RES/79/327 [42(a)].

<sup>142</sup> The language used in resolution 79/327 is stricter compared to that used in previous revitalisation resolutions (e.g. 75/325 and 77/335) which stated that “nominations of candidates must be submitted by at least one Member State”. This older phrasing could be read as leaving open the possibility of, for instance, a coalition of state(s) and civil society nominating a candidate.

<sup>143</sup> A/RES/79/327 [42(f)].

## IV. The 2025 Revitalisation Resolution

highlighted by the confusion caused when Bulgaria gave its support to a second candidate in late September 2016, having nominated a different candidate in February 2016.

Building on 2015/2016 practice, the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly are tasked with informing member states “as candidatures are being submitted” and jointly maintaining and updating a public list of nominees on a dedicated UN website with the candidates’ CVs, nominating state(s), vision statements, and financial disclosures.<sup>144</sup> With the 2025/2026 process underway, the two presidents have undertaken these tasks.<sup>145</sup>

### Candidates’ Submission Elements and Timing

Resolution 79/327 sets out that candidates should provide a vision statement and financial disclosure at the time of nomination. While vision statements were first introduced in the 2015/2016 selection process, this cycle will be the first in which candidates are expected to disclose their “sources of funding at the time of the nomination”.<sup>146</sup> This element, which was already part of discussions on transparency in the selection process of the Secretary-General in 2016, emerged out of concerns that candidates with more resources may have an unfair advantage.

Language on this issue was apparently not particularly contentious. It seems, however, that some members pushed back against more comprehensive phrasings, such as a reference to disclose “subsequent funding”, which appeared in an early iteration of the draft resolution. As such, resolution 79/327 sets a lower bar than the revitalisation resolution that preceded it. In 2023, resolution 77/335 on the revitalisation of the General Assembly invited candidates during future processes to “voluntarily disclose any funding sources they have relating to their candidature”.<sup>147</sup>

In 2016, there was a sense that candidates from within the UN could have access to information, resources and leverage to advance their nomination that was not available to the other candidates. Resolution 79/327 requests candidates holding positions in the UN system to consider suspending their work during the campaign in order to avoid “any conflict of interest that may arise from their functions and adjacent advantages”.<sup>148</sup> While this phrasing was ultimately included in the final version of the text, it appears that at least one member, Argentina, was uncomfortable with earlier formulations that used more stringent language, questioning the fairness of requiring UN system candidates to stop working during their campaign and arguing that this could negatively affect the functioning of the relevant UN bodies.

Of the candidates that have emerged at the time of writing, Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis (Costa Rica) has taken temporary leave from her position as Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Rafael Mariano Grossi (Argentina)

remains in his position as Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Regarding the issue of the timing for the submission of candidates’ nominations, resolution 79/327 only states that nominations “are expected” after the issuance of the joint letter by the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly.<sup>149</sup> While more stringent language inviting nominations to be presented “in a timely manner” appeared in early drafts, it did not carry over to later stages of the negotiations, seemingly due to opposition from permanent members.

As discussed below, this issue reemerged in the negotiations of the joint letter, with the permanent members opposing an E10 proposal for a 1 April flexible deadline to submit nominations, which was not eventually included in the letter. Following the issuing of the joint letter in November 2025, and with only one candidate formally nominated at that time, the issue of the timing for submitting the nominations may have been a factor in the decision of the President of the General Assembly to issue a letter on 14 January 2026 in which she called for nominations to be submitted “no later than 1 April 2026” to facilitate candidates’ participation in General Assembly interactive dialogues.<sup>150</sup>

### Candidates’ Profile

Language describing the profile of the next Secretary-General proved contentious. In terms of the “job description”, resolution 79/327 affirms that candidates must uphold the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity, and demonstrate a firm commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter. Resolution 69/321 was more expansive as it also invited candidates with “proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills”.<sup>151</sup> While proposals based on this language were apparently made during the negotiations of resolution 79/327, they were eventually excluded, as were proposals to include as selection criteria independence, strong political leadership, knowledge of the UN system, and commitment to multilateralism and international law.

At the same time, references to leadership, managerial abilities, experience in international relations, and diplomatic, communication, and multilateral skills were included in the 25 November 2025 joint letter—likely because they already appeared in the 2015 joint letter which was used by the permanent members as the model for the first draft of the 2025 joint letter. But attempts by the E10 to expand this list with references to multilateralism and international law were opposed by the permanent members and were not included in the joint letter, as discussed in Section V.

Despite calls from member states<sup>152</sup> and civil society<sup>153</sup> in support of a woman Secretary-General, advancing language supportive of

144 A/RES/79/327 [42(e) (j)].

145 Dedicated website: <https://www.un.org/en/sg-selection-and-appointment>

146 A/RES/79/327 [42(h)].

147 A/RES/77/335 [64].

148 A/RES/79/327 [42(i)].

149 A/RES/79/327 [42(a)].

150 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to All Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations on the Communication of Dates for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General (14 January 2026). <https://www.un.org/pga/80/2026/01/14/letter-from-the-president-of-the-general-assembly-on-the-communication-of-dates-for-webcast-interactive-dialogues-with-candidates-for-the-position-of-secretary-general/>

151 A/RES/69/321 [39].

152 See, for instance, the joint statement by Slovenia, Spain, and Mexico on behalf of 78 member states at the 4 November 2024 General Debate on the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly at <https://buildingtrust.si/statement/a-joint-statement-on-the-representation-of-women-at-un-leadership-positions/>

153 See, for instance, the 1 for 8 Billion discussion paper for the meeting of the AHWG on 20 February 2025, which recommended that the General Assembly called on states to only consider nominating women candidates. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5399cc0ae4b0705199b37aa3/t/67af3f98c1e1821190a61e54/1739538329333/1+for+8+Billion+Discussion+Paper+and+Recommendations+for+the+79th+Session+of+the+General+Assembly+-+Feb+2025.pdf>

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this issue in the revitalisation resolution proved difficult. Agreed language from, for instance, the *Pact for the Future* and previous revitalisation resolutions<sup>154</sup> had been constructed to balance signalling support for the appointment of a woman Secretary-General with the priority placed on securing consensus, which required avoiding prescriptive references perceived as encroaching on sovereign prerogatives—resulting in formulations that do not directly call for the appointment of a woman Secretary-General. Building on such agreed references, the co-chairs’ elements paper featured language “deploring” the fact that no woman has ever held the post of Secretary-General and recognising “growing global expectations for better representation of women”, including at the helm of the UN. It also “strongly” encouraged member states to nominate women as candidates for the position of Secretary-General. However, it seems that, due to resistance from a small minority of members, including Argentina and the US, this language was gradually softened and the line recognising growing expectations for women’s representation was removed. The final version notes “with regret” that no woman has ever held the Secretary-General’s post and encourages members to “strongly consider” nominating women.<sup>155</sup>

Geography-related references such as “regional rotation”, “regional representation”, and “geographical balance” were also challenging, with members apparently having different views on whether and how to appropriately refer to this issue in relation to the selection of the next Secretary-General. While all these references broadly address the fact that various areas of the world have not been equally represented at the helm of the UN—with, for instance, four out of nine Secretaries-General coming from Western Europe—members attach different meanings and nuances to these terms, some of which appear to be more crystallised than others.<sup>156</sup> For instance, members generally understand regional rotation as referring to the fact that the position should rotate among the five UN regional groups and go to an under-represented region or, at least, that “each region should have its chance”.<sup>157</sup> The exact contours of the rotation (its order, and what happens if a region is “skipped”) are still being debated, however.

More generally, member states hold differing views on the applicability of the concept of regional rotation to the selection of the Secretary-General. Some apparently accept the existence of an expectation for a non-rigid, broad form of alternation, while others do not believe regional rotation should factor into the process at all. Several members are apparently more comfortable with referring to “geographical balance” which they interpret as being more open as a concept because it moves away from referring to the five regional groups and from the automatism implied in the idea of rotation. For instance, some members have suggested that the notion of geographical balance more accurately reflects existing practice than the concept of regional rotation. Others seem less comfortable with terms such as geographical balance applied to the selection of Secretaries-General, as they interpret this notion as being more readily applicable to staff positions in the UN.

It appears that members of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)—including Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, and Peru—who have been advocating for the next Secretary-General to come from their region, were particularly active in ensuring that a geography-related reference featured in resolution 79/327 in connection with the appointment. It seems, however, that within that group there was support for differing formulations.

An additional layer of complexity was that references to this issue were not addressed in a standalone paragraph on the Secretary-General’s selection. Instead, they were considered with other issues, such as the duration of the Secretary-General’s term and the broader framework for appointing executive heads of the UN. An early draft, for instance, referred to establishing a seven-year non-renewable term to ensure “increased effectiveness of the mandate and allow an increased regional representation”.

The eventual compromise incorporates both geographic balance and an indirect reference to regional rotation. It recalls paragraph 59 of resolution 77/335—which referred to “gender balance and regional rotation” in the appointment of “the best candidate for the post of Secretary-General”<sup>158</sup>—while also reaffirming previous resolutions on “efforts towards achieving equal and fair distribution in terms of the gender and geographical balance” in the appointment of UN executive heads “including the Secretary-General, while meeting the highest possible standards”.<sup>159</sup>

The question of “merit” as a criterion for selecting the next Secretary-General also attracted considerable attention. While a range of delegations have noted the importance of merit, there is no shared understanding of how merit should be defined or assessed in the context of selecting the next Secretary-General—a point made evident by the differences which surfaced around attempts to articulate a more detailed job description. Some delegations, including certain permanent members, argued that merit should prevail over all other considerations and have used this argument to push for the deletion of language calling for nominating women candidates, for instance. This position has been viewed critically by those members who attach significant importance to factors such as gender equality, fair geographical representation, and broader efforts to enhance the inclusiveness and transparency of the process. For these members, elevating “merit” as the predominant criterion risks reinforcing a largely discretionary approach to the selection and, in practice, preserving the considerable latitude historically enjoyed by the permanent members in shaping the outcome.

### The General Assembly and the Candidates

As discussed earlier in this report, the General Assembly’s informal dialogue sessions, also referred to as “hearings”, were regarded as one of the most important innovations in the 2015/2016 process. Resolution 79/327 says that the President of the General Assembly will convene “webcast interactive dialogues with all candidates” in accordance with paragraph 42 of resolution 69/321, which specified, among other things, that participation should be “without any

154 UNGA resolution 79/1 (22 September 2024) A/RES/79/1 Action 42 (c); A/RES/77/335 [77]; A RES/75/325 [68].

155 A/RES/79/327 [42(c)].

156 For a discussion of regional rotation see Sievers, “Appointing the next Secretary-General: The relevance of regional rotation”. Sievers notes, among other things, that language in General Assembly resolution 51/241 “testified to the fact that by then, the concept of regional rotation had become an established criterion for appointing Secretaries-General”.

157 UN diplomat, interview (3 November 2025).

158 A/RES/77/335 [59].

159 A/RES/79/327 [41].

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prejudice to any candidate who does not participate”.<sup>160</sup> This formulation reflects a tension—also evident during the negotiations on the joint letter—between those emphasising the importance of all candidates participating in the hearings to ensure a level playing field,<sup>161</sup> and those who argued that participation should not be a requirement. Members in the latter group have advocated for preserving flexibility in the process or warned against pressuring candidates into what they may perceive as excessive public scrutiny.<sup>162</sup>

Resolution 79/327 does not provide guidance on the modalities of the General Assembly interactive dialogues. Some members apparently proposed setting a timeframe for the interactive dialogues and enhancing the interactive element of the hearings, including through extended response time, structured follow-up questions, and active moderation by the President of the General Assembly. But it seems that these proposals, although most likely advanced to respond to discussions that emerged in the 2015/2016 process on improving the hearings’ modalities, were not retained in later drafts.

During the negotiations, some members supported including references to actors and processes that had been important in 2016, particularly civil society and the convening of a “town hall” meeting with all candidates. As discussed earlier in this report, in 2016, a Global Town Hall meeting was organised by the President of the General Assembly, with ten of the then twelve candidates participating. Building on this, the AHWG co-chairs’ elements paper included language proposing that the PGA convene livestreamed interactive sessions with each candidate during the first trimester of the selection year, followed by a separate town hall involving all candidates. The elements paper stated that civil society representatives “will be invited to participate”.

It appears, however, that, as a result of requests from members such as China and Russia, the reference to the town hall meeting was removed during the negotiations. Language on civil society participation also became contentious and was eventually removed. It seems that some members opposed the inclusion of this language, other members wanted to restrict the reference to civil society organisations to only those with ECOSOC consultative status, while other delegations supported including unqualified language on civil society participation. Some members in this last group apparently considered the qualified language on civil society which was included in some of the revised drafts as overly restrictive and instead preferred the absence of any reference to civil society to one that could have been counterproductive to inclusive engagement. This sentiment was apparently reinforced by an expectation that the President of the General Assembly could, and likely would, support civil society participation even in the absence of a direct reference in the revitalisation resolution, reducing, in these members’ view, the need for prescriptive language.

While the joint letter, too, does not refer to civil society, in her 14 January letter, the PGA encouraged the continuation of civil society engagement in the interactive dialogues, “[i]n line with General Assembly resolutions on the revitalization of the work of the General

Assembly”.<sup>163</sup> In contrast to resolution 79/327, in fact, resolution 77/335 had expressed appreciation for civil society participation and encouraged its continuation.<sup>164</sup> On 24 March, the Office of the PGA opened a call for expressions of interest from civil society to participate in the dialogues.

The holding of straw polls by the General Assembly was among the most embattled issues during the negotiations. The permanent members were united in their opposition to this proposition, which they viewed as counterproductive. Apparently, one concern was that if the candidate recommended by the Council received a low number of votes in General Assembly straw polls, it could place the incoming Secretary-General in a difficult position at the outset of their tenure. Many other members, however, saw the General Assembly’s views on the candidates as a key tool to influence the Council’s choice. The ACT Group was apparently among the strongest advocates of including a reference to this issue, supported by the NAM, Mexico and El Salvador.

The elements paper contained a proposal for the PGA to conduct a General Assembly straw poll by secret ballot concurrently with the Security Council’s straw polls, the results of which would be disclosed only to the President of the Security Council. Several alternative proposals were attempted during the negotiations to keep in the text a reference to General Assembly feedback to the Council on the candidates, such as having the PGA facilitate a “preliminary assessment of the candidates”, or “informal views on the candidates” by the member states, or having the assessment take place after the General Assembly hearings instead of concurrently with the Council. However, none of these alternatives were apparently acceptable to the permanent members, leading to the dilution of this reference almost beyond recognition. In the final version, the text states that the President of the General Assembly “will engage closely, in a transparent and inclusive manner, with Member States”.<sup>165</sup>

### Security Council Straw Polls

While resolution 79/327 does not address the Security Council’s side of the process, after the General Assembly’s interactive dialogues, the Council is expected to hold closed-door meetings with the candidates. As discussed above, these are likely to be followed by Security Council straw polls. Language calling upon the Security Council to “enhance the transparency of its internal deliberations”, including by “making public the results” of any such deliberations—a likely reference to the straw polls’ results—remained through the first revised draft of the revitalisation resolution. But it was later fully removed, as it was apparently unacceptable to most permanent members. One of the arguments that has been cited for this position is that the purpose of resorting to straw polls was to facilitate the Council reaching a consensual decision through informal votes. Key to this, these members have apparently argued, is that the positions of Council members—which may evolve over time—are not exposed, as this would lead to a hardening of those positions and, in turn, to deadlock. As in previous years, another argument has seemingly

160 A/RES/79/327 [42(g)]; A/RES/69/321 [42].

161 See A/79/825-S/2025/175 (ACT Group position paper).

162 Some of these positions apparently shifted over time. See Damilola Banjo, “Slovenia Calls for Easing the Selection Process of the Next UN Chief” (*PassBlue* 2 December 2025) <https://passblue.com/2025/12/02/slovenia-calls-for-easing-the-selection-process-of-the-next-un-chief/>

163 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to All Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations on the Communication of Dates for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General (14 January 2026).

164 A/RES/77/335 [63].

165 A/RES/79/327 [42(g)].

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concerned protecting the dignity of candidates receiving low levels of support. Other members have argued, however, that opposition to the revitalisation resolution addressing Security Council straw polls stemmed also from the perception that this would have encroached on an issue reserved for Security Council deliberation. This interpretation is not shared by these members, who have countered that, in line with Article 10 of the UN Charter, it is within the powers of the General Assembly to make recommendations to the Security Council, including on this issue.<sup>166</sup>

### Recommending and Appointing the Next Secretary-General

Regarding the recommendation and appointment steps of the process, resolution 79/327 does not go beyond Article 97 of the Charter, restating that the Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. While some attempts were made to further develop and formalise certain proposals—such as having references to the Council recommending more than one candidate to the General Assembly, or to the General Assembly holding an interactive session with “any candidates” recommended by the Council prior to the General Assembly’s

formal appointment decision—these were not included in the resolution. Similarly, attempts to move away from the practice of a five-year renewable term for the UN Secretary-General by including language on a seven-year non-renewable term, as well as a compromise proposal for a term of four years, renewable once, were also not acceptable and removed from the draft early during the negotiation process.

### Unforeseen Interruption of Term

Resolution 79/327 for the first time specified that in the event of “an unforeseen interruption in the term of office of the Secretary-General”, the General Assembly and the Security Council should initiate an expedited selection and appointment process in accordance with Article 97 of the Charter and the procedures set out in resolution 79/327 and “previous resolutions”.<sup>167</sup> In other words, the General Assembly decided that, should the Secretary-General be unable to serve the full term of office due to unforeseen circumstances, there should not be a departure from the procedures used to appoint Secretaries-General, including those just formalised through resolution 79/327.

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## V. The 2025 Joint Letter

On 25 November 2025, the November President of the Security Council (PSC), Michael Imran Kanu of Sierra Leone, and the PGA of the 80th session, Annalena Baerbock, signed a letter which formally set in motion the selection and appointment process for the next UN Secretary-General.<sup>168</sup> The joint letter invites member states to present candidates by sending a letter to the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council, indicates that the Council will begin its selection “by the end of July 2026”, and that it “plans” to make its recommendation to the General Assembly “in a timely manner”.<sup>169</sup>

Although the letter is issued jointly by the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the PGA negotiates and signs the letter “upon her own authority”, while the Council agrees to the letter by consensus.<sup>170</sup> As Loraine Sievers explains, this is because the PGA is elected by UN member states, while the presidency of the Security Council rotates alphabetically among Council members.<sup>171</sup> As such, when the PSC signs a letter on behalf of the Security Council, the letter must be agreed by Council members by consensus.<sup>172</sup>

On the Council’s side, the letter was largely negotiated between the five permanent members of the Council (P5), coordinated by Russia, and the then ten elected members (E10), coordinated by

Denmark.<sup>173</sup> The negotiations highlighted diverging views among Council members regarding process, inclusivity, and the respective roles of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General selection process was one of the topics discussed at a 30 September 2025 meeting between Russia and the PGA ahead of the start of Russia’s October presidency.<sup>174</sup> During the meeting, the PGA apparently indicated that she would provide an initial draft of the joint letter in line with the approach used in 2015.

On 3 October, the Office of the PGA sent a draft letter with the “principles and elements of the selection and appointment process” contained in resolution 79/327 to the Russian delegation.<sup>175</sup> It largely reflected language from resolution 79/327, including provisions on nomination and withdrawal of candidates and the qualities of nominees. That draft also apparently contained some references that had not been included in the final version of the resolution, such as timeframes for certain steps in the process. It seems that Russia did not circulate this draft to the wider Council membership.

On 20 October 2025, Russia scheduled a meeting on the selection of the next Secretary-General under “any other business” (AOB), which took place on 22 October 2025, and invited the Security

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166 Article 10 of the UN Charter says: “The General Assembly may discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter, and, except as provided in Article 12, may make recommendations to the Members of the United Nations or to the Security Council or to both on any such questions or matters”.

167 A/RES/79/327 [42(m)].

168 Letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations (25 November 2025) A/80/544-S/2025/765.

169 A/80/544-S/2025/765.

170 Loraine Sievers, “Much-awaited joint GA-Security Council letter launches SG 2026 nomination process” (5 December 2025) <https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5r-update-website-of-Lorraine-Sievers-and-Sam-Daws,-The-Procedure-of-the-UN-Security-Council> (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014).

171 Ibid; S/96/Rev.7 Rule 18.

172 Sievers, “Much-awaited joint GA-Security Council letter launches SG 2026 nomination process”; S/96/Rev.7 Rule 19.

173 The E10 were: Algeria, Denmark, Greece, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Somalia.

174 The President of the Security Council and the President of the General Assembly meet at the start of the month to discuss their respective programmes of work.

175 Statement of the President of the General Assembly on the selection and appointment process for the next Secretary-General (25 November 2025) <https://www.un.org/pga/80/2025/11/25/statement-of-the-president-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly-ms-annalena-baerbock-on-the-selection-and-appointment-process-for-the-next-secretary-general/>

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Council Affairs Division (SCAD) to brief. During the meeting, Russia apparently announced that the P5 had agreed on a draft of the joint letter and expressed the hope that such a draft could be agreed by the whole Council. At that stage, the draft—closely modelled on the 2015 joint letter which initiated the process that led to Guterres’ appointment and with only limited updates based on resolution 79/327—had not been shared with the E10.

In response to Russia’s announcement, Denmark and many other E10 members raised concerns that the draft had been agreed among the P5 without informing and consulting the elected members. These members noted that this practice promoted a two-tiered system in which the P5 took decisions that the elected members were then expected to endorse. They stressed that the joint letter should be negotiated among all Council members and called for a transparent and inclusive approach.

Signs that the P5 would present a unified front at the Council on the selection process had already emerged in discussions within the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG). It appears that the co-chairs of the IWG, Denmark and Pakistan, had put the Secretary-General selection and appointment process on the agenda for an August 2025 meeting of the IWG and were planning to invite SCAD to brief on this issue. It seems, however, that the P5 jointly objected to having this issue on the agenda.

At the time of the 22 October 2025 AOB meeting, the E10 and the five incoming Council members (I5)<sup>176</sup> had been discussing a position paper drafted by Denmark, aligning their positions on the Secretary-General selection process. The idea of the E10 coordinating their positions had first been broached at the E10-I5 Annual Dialogue, which was held in Slovenia on 1-2 September 2025.<sup>177</sup> The position paper, which was agreed among the E10 and I5 on 28 October 2025, apparently includes commitments that apply to various phases of the selection process. Regarding the negotiation of the joint letter, the E10 and I5 agreed that it should include principles—such as fair geographic representation; regional rotation; encouragement of the nomination of women; importance of a merit-based selection; and a commitment to a timely, transparent, and inclusive process—and a deadline for the submission of nominations.

Despite at times pronounced differences among some of the E10 regarding the relative importance of particular elements and the level of pressure to apply to have them reflected in the letter, unity was maintained throughout the negotiations of the joint letter. It appears that, among other considerations, some of the E10 members preferred not to accentuate any divisions between the P5 and the E10 and viewed the joint letter primarily as a procedural step to launch the process, rather than as a vehicle to further regulate it.

Following the 22 October 2025 AOB meeting, Russia circulated the P5-agreed draft to the rest of the Council, inviting comments by 24 October, a deadline later extended to 31 October at the request of the E10. After an informal meeting of all Council members at the Permanent Mission of Russia to the UN on 28 October and receipt of comments from the E10, Russia circulated a first revised draft on 31 October and convened a further in-person negotiation meeting

on 5 November. Russia continued to lead the drafting process in November, after the Council presidency had moved to Sierra Leone. Following the 5 November meeting, the E10 submitted comments on 6 November, which were apparently largely unacceptable to the P5.

In the days that followed, Denmark undertook a series of consultations, liaising between the E10 and the P5, as well as within the E10, in an effort to arrive at a text acceptable to all. After internal discussions on the elements they considered essential, the E10 sent a streamlined version of their earlier proposal to the P5 on 12 November 2025, after which bilateral consultations between E10 and P5 members continued.

It appears that, at various points during the negotiations, the US questioned the necessity of issuing a joint letter and indicated that, in the absence of agreement, no letter would be issued.

On 20 November, Council members met again under AOB at the request of Sierra Leone, in its capacity as Council President, to receive updates from Russia and Denmark on the respective P5 and E10 positions. Following further informal exchanges, Russia placed a second revised draft under a no-objection procedure (NOP) until 21 November, which it passed. Upon expiration of the NOP, the draft was transmitted to the PGA.

A key area of contention among Council members was how much detail to include in the letter about the qualities of the next Secretary-General. It seems that the E10 suggested adding references to independence, political leadership, and commitment to multilateralism and international law. Drawing directly from language agreed in General Assembly resolution 79/327, these members also proposed referring to the importance of the Secretary-General’s role in the context of the implementation of the three pillars of the UN: peace and security, human rights, and development. It seems that the permanent members—which have been generally resistant to any reference that could be used to narrow the possible pool of candidates—opposed these proposals, none of which was included in the final draft of the joint letter.

The P5 also objected to other elements—such as setting a 1 April deadline for candidate nominations while allowing for exceptional circumstances—arguing that these would have restricted flexibility in the process. Similarly, the P5 did not accept an E10 proposal to add a reference to “predictability” as a principle to guide the selection and appointment process. At the same time, an E10-proposed reference to the selection process being carried out “in a structured and timely manner” was added to the joint letter.<sup>178</sup>

An E10 proposal to include language based on resolution 79/327 on the need to “continue efforts towards achieving equal and fair distribution in terms of gender and geographical balance” in appointing UN executive heads, “including the Secretary-General” was rejected by the P5.<sup>179</sup> Other E10 suggestions related to geographic considerations (i.e., “regional rotation” and “fair geographical representation”) proved difficult to accept for the P5. Nevertheless, these efforts ultimately resulted in stronger language on this issue compared with the 2015 joint letter. While the 2015 letter noted “regional diversity in the selection of previous Secretaries-General”,<sup>180</sup> the 2025 letter notes “the importance of regional

<sup>176</sup> Bahrain, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Latvia, and Liberia.

<sup>177</sup> This was the eighth installment of this initiative. The first was held in 2018 in Pretoria, South Africa.

<sup>178</sup> A/80/544-S/2025/765.

<sup>179</sup> See A/RES/79/327 [41].

<sup>180</sup> A/70/623-S/2015/988.

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diversity in the selection of Secretaries-General”—a formulation that recognises the value of regional diversity in its right, rather than only in reference to past selections.<sup>181</sup>

The first version of the joint letter, as agreed among the P5, partially aligned the letter with resolution 79/327 by “[n]oting with regret that no woman has ever held the position of Secretary-General”.<sup>182</sup> Language proposed during the negotiations by the E10, encouraging member states to “strongly” consider nominating women candidates—which further aligns with resolution 79/327—was later added, overcoming strong US opposition on this issue.

Regarding the documents that candidates are expected to submit upon nomination, the E10 managed to harmonise language in the joint letter with resolution 79/327 by proposing a reference saying that candidates “should” provide a vision statement and disclose their sources of funding at the time of nomination, as opposed to only being “invited” to do so, as formulated in the first P5 draft.<sup>183</sup> Proposals that would have gone beyond the language agreed in resolution 79/327 by asking candidates to disclose “subsequent funding” or to provide such disclosures “regularly” were not included, however. Language suggesting that candidates from the UN system should suspend their work was also aligned to resolution 79/327 by adding that this is “with a view to avoiding any conflict of interest that may arise from their functions and adjacent advantages”.<sup>184</sup>

An element in the text which uses slightly stronger language than resolution 79/327 stipulates that the President of General Assembly and the President of the Security Council “will”—as opposed to “should”—jointly maintain and regularly update a public list of candidates on a dedicated UN webpage. The E10 also succeeded in adding a paragraph describing the modalities for the withdrawal of candidates, drawing closely on what resolution 79/327 established on this matter.

Regarding the General Assembly and the Security Council’s interactions with the candidates, the letter says that the presidents of both bodies will offer nominees opportunities for informal dialogues or meetings, “including webcast interactive dialogues in the General Assembly”.<sup>185</sup> The E10 sought—unsuccessfully—to remove language carried over from the 2015 letter noting that “any such interaction will be without prejudice to those who do not participate”.<sup>186</sup> While these members felt that this wording effectively signalled that non-participation was acceptable, it was apparently important for the P5 to retain the flexibility that this phrasing affords to candidates.

The E10 wanted to include a reference to the General Assembly in the context of the early presentation of candidates to facilitate the “deliberations” of both the Security Council and the General Assembly, but this was unacceptable to the P5. It seems that, in the view of the P5, only the Security Council has deliberative power on the matter of the selection of the UN Secretary-General. In addition, these members might have seen this reference as a backdoor for

the General Assembly to assess the candidates through, for instance, the use of straw polls. In an apparent compromise, the joint letter notes that presenting candidates early “will help the organization of informal interactive dialogues in the General Assembly and the deliberations of the Security Council”, thus adding a new reference to the General Assembly while decoupling it from the reference to deliberations.<sup>187</sup>

### 2025 Joint Letter Timeline



The PGA responded to the draft joint letter received from the Council in a letter dated 21 November 2025 to Sierra Leone as President of the Security Council. The PGA noted that several elements of resolution 79/327 related to the principles of the selection process and the role of the General Assembly—most of which had been included in her 3 October 2025 draft—no longer appeared in the text transmitted by the Council. She proposed that these elements be reinserted, while also indicating that, if agreement on them could not be reached, she would be “bound by” and would “conduct the process” in accordance with resolution 79/327 and engage “closely, in a transparent and inclusive manner” with states “on and throughout the process”.<sup>188</sup>

181 A/80/544-S/2025/765.

182 A/80/544-S/2025/765; A/RES/79/327 [42(c)].

183 A/80/544-S/2025/765.

184 A/80/544-S/2025/765; A/RES/79/327 [42(i)].

185 A/80/544-S/2025/765.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

188 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to the President of the Security Council (21 November 2025). The PGA similarly stated that she will be bound by, and conduct the process in accordance with, resolution 79/327 in a 25 November 2025 statement issued shortly after the issuance of the joint letter. <https://www.un.org/pga/80/2025/11/25/statement-of-the-president-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly-ms-annalena-baerbock-on-the-selection-and-appointment-process-for-the-next-secretary-general/>

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It seems that Baerbock proposed including language saying that the Secretary-General “shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council, in accordance with Article 97 of the Charter”. She also apparently suggested deleting language saying that candidates should not be precluded from “making themselves known throughout the process” in the context of a provision encouraging the early presentation of candidates to facilitate the organisation of interactive dialogues in the General Assembly and the deliberations of the Security Council. This deletion had also been proposed by the E10 as these members perceived this wording as being inconsistent with the call for early presentations of candidates. The E10 suggestion was rejected by the P5, however.

Similarly, the PGA apparently suggested adding a reference, also unsuccessfully proposed by the E10, stating that the PGA “will engage closely, in a transparent and inclusive manner, with Member States”. As noted above, this wording is what ultimately remained

in the revitalisation resolution after several revisions that pared back earlier proposals concerning General Assembly straw polls. The PGA also proposed strengthening language on the promptness of the Council’s recommendation to the General Assembly by proposing that the Council “will”, as opposed to “plans to”, make its recommendation “in a timely manner”.

On 24 November 2025, Sierra Leone circulated the PGA’s proposed edits to Council members, inviting comments by noon on 25 November. While apparently some E10 members could have accepted the proposed edits, the position that prevailed was not to reopen negotiations on the draft that had passed the NOP on 21 November, with the P5 being particularly firm on this stance. Hence, the changes proposed by the PGA were not included. Baerbock and Kanu signed the joint letter in the version that had passed the NOP shortly after the deadline for comments passed.

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## VI. Council and Broader Dynamics

The geopolitical context in which the current selection and appointment process is taking place differs markedly from that of 2015/2016. At that time, although there were strained relations among some permanent members, cooperation was possible on several issues. While some permanent members might not have been completely comfortable with the changes to the selection and appointment process, particularly the expanded role of the General Assembly, there was a general acceptance of the initiatives aimed at enhancing transparency and participation, which had been spearheaded by the broader membership.<sup>189</sup>

Council dynamics are more fraught today. The Council’s failure to expedite an end to major crises, some involving Council members and their allies, as well as broader shifts in the international landscape, have contributed to a more polarised and transactional environment—a trend further intensified since the advent of the second Trump administration. Members have appeared increasingly sensitive to geopolitical and external pressures, with these considerations playing a more visible role in shaping positions than established legal and normative frameworks.

Against this complicated backdrop, there is convergence on the need for the next Secretary-General to be able to navigate an international environment characterised by dramatic shifts, both around the globe and within the UN. At the same time, the process thus far has already shown notable divergences, including regarding how explicitly to define the qualities sought in the next Secretary-General and how structured the selection process should be. While members will continue to articulate positions based on their priorities and institutional preferences, the broader geopolitical context will remain an important factor in how the Council will approach the upcoming steps of the process, including members’ decisions on key procedural aspects and support for specific candidates.

During the negotiations on the joint letter in 2025, the then E10 sought to include references to multilateralism, international law, gender and geographic balance, as well as deadlines for the process. The P5 were broadly united in resisting references to deadlines for nominations and more detailed descriptions of expected qualities. Some among these members explained their positions stressing the importance of not going beyond the consensus reached on these issues in the General Assembly revitalisation resolution and the need to avoid adding constraints that lack clear exit strategies should they fail to deliver results. At the same time, some permanent members, in informal exchanges, downplayed suggestions of a P5-E10 divide and emphasised that they have more often been politically and diplomatically closer to some of the E10 members than to some of the other permanent members. None of the P5, however, appears to have informed the E10 in October 2025 that they had already reached quiet agreement on an early draft of the joint letter.

While remaining united during the joint letter negotiations, the E10 were not completely aligned. For instance, some E10 members gave more importance to promptly reaching consensus on the joint letter and avoiding deepening a rift between P5 and E10 than insisting on some of the language that other elected members wanted to see included.

In a statement at the General Assembly in November 2025, China emphasised that the UN Charter and General Assembly and Security Council documents contain clear provisions on the Secretary-General selection process, which are accompanied by “a set of proven practices that should be upheld”.<sup>190</sup> China cautioned against efforts to break with these practices, “create divisions, or stoke institutional competition”, adding that such efforts would hinder the selection process, contravene the collective interests, and “reflect an irresponsible attitude toward history”.<sup>191</sup>

189 In 2016, several Council members would have been in favour of publicly releasing the results of the straw polls. SCR, “The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows” 9.

190 UNGA 80th session, 38th plenary meeting (13 November 2025) A/80/PV.38, statement by China. (The meeting record had yet to be published at the time of writing.) The statement is available at: [https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/hyyfy/202511/t20251114\\_11753129.htm](https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/hyyfy/202511/t20251114_11753129.htm)

191 Ibid.

## VI. Council and Broader Dynamics

Against this backdrop, the 15 December 2025 Security Council open debate on “Leadership for Peace” offered an opportunity for member states to further indicate how they envisioned the selection process moving forward. Taking place after the release of the joint letter and when only one candidate had officially been presented, the open debate was convened by then Council member Slovenia under the “Maintenance of international peace and security” agenda item as the signature event of its December 2025 presidency. The concept note invited participants to address the role, qualities and powers of the next Secretary-General, as well as the relationship between the Security Council and the Secretary-General.<sup>192</sup>

A recurring theme at the open debate was the importance of proactive conflict prevention, early warning, mediation, and the use of good offices, with large support for an assertive use of Article 99.<sup>193</sup> Denmark, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, and Somalia, among others, framed Article 99 as a key leadership tool. Nevertheless, many participants stressed that even the most capable Secretary-General cannot succeed without consistent political backing from member states and, in particular, from the Security Council. Guyana, for instance, stressed that the role “requires the ability to act proactively and decisively in mitigating crises” but noted that a “more important consideration” is the extent to which states are prepared to support the Secretary-General to lead effectively.<sup>194</sup>

Despite broader differences, Russia and the US have recently converged on several issues, such as stressing a return to what they view as core Charter functions and calling for the abandoning of issues which they describe as divisive and ideological—such as gender and climate.<sup>195</sup> At the “Leadership for Peace” open debate, Russia referred to the position of UN Secretary-General as “the future head of the Secretariat”, a phrase it had already used during the annual working methods open debate in November 2025,<sup>196</sup> and which several observers perceived as a strong indication of Russia’s preference for a candidate with a minimalist approach to the role—a secretary more than a general.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, the US said that it expects the next Secretary-General “to respect state sovereignty” and framed the position as primarily one of “chief administrative officer” of the organisation responsible for ensuring efficiency and cutting what the US has framed as wasteful spending. The US also said that, having historically been the largest contributor to the UN budget, it “will prioritize a strong return on [its] investment”.<sup>198</sup>

In parallel, many participants in the open debate—including Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, the ROK, Somalia, and the members of the ACT Group—underscored the importance of independence, alongside other qualities, for the next Secretary-General, arguably reflecting concerns that a candidate supported by both the US and

Russia might face autonomy challenges. China, alone among the P5, did not engage directly with the question of the next Secretary-General during the “Leadership for Peace” open debate.

Many Council members have encouraged the nomination of women to the position of Secretary-General, with Latvia and Greece presenting particularly clear messages on this issue. Latvia, for instance, highlighted the credibility gap created by the absence of a woman Secretary-General in the UN’s history and the opportunity that the selection process offers to “correct that imbalance”.<sup>199</sup> Among the permanent members, France and the UK have publicly encouraged nominating women. In November 2025, China had also stated that it would be “pleased to see female candidates presented by member states”.<sup>200</sup>

Although this was not particularly on display during the “Leadership for Peace” open debate, researchers have noted that member states have often prefaced references to women candidates with the word “qualified”, reflecting lingering prejudices about whether women are sufficiently experienced for the post.<sup>201</sup>

Though framed differently by participants in the open debate, calls for geographic representation, especially from Latin America and the Caribbean members were also frequent. Guyana and Panama referred to this region, while Somalia stressed the need to “address the historical injustice of underrepresentation” and that a “truly universal organisation must ensure that the perspectives of the Global South, particularly Africa, are integrated into the highest levels of decision-making”.<sup>202</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, during the 2025 annual open debate on working methods, the US argued that the process “should be purely merit-based, with as wide a pool of candidates as possible”, before inviting “candidates from all regional groupings”.<sup>203</sup>

While Greece called for enhanced cooperation with civil society to strengthen the UN’s preventive capacity, Denmark was the only Council member that clearly called on candidates to “engage meaningfully with civil society”.<sup>204</sup>

There were also divergent views on the role of the General Assembly. Several speakers in the open debate—including Somalia and the ACT Group, which includes current Council members Denmark and Latvia—argued that the General Assembly should be an active participant rather than a passive recipient of the Council’s recommendation. South Africa delivered one of the most unequivocal interventions on this issue, arguing that Article 97 of the UN Charter makes clear that the appointment of the Secretary-General is made by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council, and that the “ultimate authority” therefore “resides with the General Assembly”, which should not be treated as merely rubber

192 Letter from the Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (1 December 2025) S/2025/788.

193 To note, the concept note solicited input on the use by the Secretary-General of Article 99. *Ibid.*

194 UNSC 10067th meeting (15 December 2025) S/PV.10067.

195 See, for instance, Russia’s statement at the 2025 annual open debate on working methods. UNSC 10043th meeting (14 November 2025) S/PV.10043; and Ambassador Mike Waltz (US), thread on the agreed conclusions of the 70th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (X 13 March 2026) <https://x.com/usambun/status/2032517930072617219?s=46&t=PmLQkHhDyeRgZ7vSutJxeA>

196 S/PV.10067; S/PV.10043.

197 Simon Chesterman (ed), “Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics”.

198 S/PV.10067.

199 S/PV.10067 (Resumption 1).

200 UNGA 80th session, 38th plenary meeting (13 November 2025) A/80/PV.38, statement by China.

201 Tamao Chika and Jennifer Hernandez, “When Will Women Be Considered Good Enough? The Race to Lead the UN” (*PassBlue* 10 February 2026) <https://passblue.com/2026/02/10/when-will-women-be-considered-good-enough-the-race-to-lead-the-un/>

202 S/PV.10067.

203 S/PV.10043.

204 S/PV.10067.

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stamping the Council's recommendation.<sup>205</sup> As such, South Africa suggested that the Council consider recommending more than one candidate for the General Assembly's consideration.

Pre-existing geopolitical pressures have worsened since the turn of the year, with the US military operation in Venezuela, and the US-Israeli strikes in Iran, and the regional escalation that followed, putting additional strain on Council dynamics and further undermining the Council's credibility as the organ entrusted with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

The composition of the elected members has also shifted, with the departure of several members—such as Algeria, Guyana and Slovenia—that had played an active role in shaping key Council discussions, altering the internal dynamics among the E10.

The next steps of the selection and appointment process are likely to unfold with some transparency and openness together with continued Security Council, particularly P5, control over decisive stages. States that have advocated for predictability and inclusivity—particularly among the elected members—are likely to continue pressing for structured engagement but might also calibrate their approach to avoid direct confrontation with the P5. This could impact key decisions Council members need to make soon including, for instance, around the modalities of the straw polls.

The unity of the elected members might be tested in the upcoming stages of the process. While acting collectively the E10 can exercise what has been described as a “sixth veto power”,<sup>206</sup> cohesion may prove difficult to sustain if the distance among these members widens on, for instance, the appropriate degree of transparency and

standardisation of the process; differences may emerge over the procedures for conducting the straw polls and meetings with candidates. Even more so should elected members coalesce around different candidates, interests, or come under pressure from some permanent members, including on matters not directly related to the Secretary-General's selection.

Council dynamics could also be affected by shifting configurations, and convergences across P5-E10 groupings on specific aspects of the process, or around particular candidates. Recently, on some issues, China, Russia and the US have been more aligned than in the past. With the rapidly changing geopolitical environment, it is difficult to know at this stage if there will be convergence among the P5 on a candidate or whether evolving political dynamics at key decision points in the process will make that difficult.

On the General Assembly side, there is likely to be support for all candidates to participate in the interactive dialogues, which the PGA scheduled for the week of 20 April.<sup>207</sup> The dialogues are expected to shape perceptions among the wider membership and civil society on candidates' political judgment, leadership style, and vision for the future of the UN. Civil society campaigns, already active in monitoring nominations, tracking member states' positions, and shaping broader expectations around transparency and participation, are likely to intensify as the process advances. At the same time, the Security Council is expected to retain a decisive role with, for instance, straw polls likely to remain a key consensus-building and filtering mechanism, conducted behind closed doors.

## VII. Challenges Ahead and Options

This section examines the key issues, challenges, and options that are emerging in the current selection and appointment process. It focuses on questions related to candidates' profiles and qualifications, gender and geographical considerations, transparency and integrity in the process, as well as the modalities for engagement by the Security Council, the General Assembly, and civil society. Drawing on lessons from past selection cycles and recent developments, this section maps areas of convergence and contention among member states and discusses options that could shape the conduct, credibility, and legitimacy of the process as it unfolds.

### Candidates

#### *Candidates' Profile*

Resolution 79/327 affirmed that candidates must uphold the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity, and demonstrate a firm commitment to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The 25 November 2025 joint letter references leadership, managerial abilities, experience in international relations, as well

as diplomatic, communication, and multilateral skills. An ongoing issue is that, besides these qualities, there remains persistent ambiguity over the specific skills that candidates for Secretary-General are expected to demonstrate. As discussed, this is the result of different views among Council members regarding the profile and leadership skills required for the post of Secretary-General, as well as a general preference among permanent members to maintain flexibility in defining this role.

To facilitate a focused discussion on the skills required for the position, Council members could convene a closed Arria-formula meeting with The Elders to examine the leadership qualities required of the UN Secretary-General in the current geopolitical environment. A closed format would allow for a frank exchange on the qualities most needed at this juncture. Such a discussion could help sharpen Council members' understanding of the profile needed for the role and provide an opportunity to reflect on lessons from past processes.

Analysts such as Sievers have highlighted the importance of engaging UN personnel in discussions on the qualities of the next

205 Ibid.

206 António Guterres cited in Arthur Boutellis, “Lessons from E10 Engagement on the Security Council” (International Peace Institute 2022) [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2211\\_Lessons-from-E10-Engagement.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2211_Lessons-from-E10-Engagement.pdf)

207 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to All Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations on the Communication of Dates for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General (14 January 2026).

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Secretary-General, given their direct stake in the leadership and direction of the organisation.<sup>208</sup> In this regard, an option would be to commission an anonymous, staff-wide survey to gather views on the leadership qualities and priorities that UN staff would expect from the next Secretary-General. Such an exercise could be particularly valuable in light of the significant organisational and financial changes currently underway in the UN system. While UN personnel should be consulted on the appropriate modalities for providing input, any survey should be designed, administered, and analysed by an independent third-party provider, in line with recognised best practices for large-scale organisational surveys. It would be important to ensure robust safeguards on data protection, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, including ensuring that no personally identifiable information is collected and that respondents can provide candid input without fear of reprisal.

The survey could include open questions allowing staff to reflect on the qualities, skills, and behaviours they see as essential for the next Secretary-General, with the third party tasked with synthesising and analysing this input. The questionnaire could also include questions on leadership and management style, such as how accountability and effective management across the UN system could be strengthened and how decision-making could be made more transparent and efficient. A further set of questions could invite staff to identify the strategic priorities that they would expect the next Secretary-General to pursue under each of the UN's three pillars: peace and security, development, and human rights. The survey could provide valuable system-wide insights into staff perspectives and help anchor discussions on leadership needs in organisational realities. In the survey, UN staff could also provide input on how the survey could feed into the selection process. A closed-door, UN staff town hall where all candidates are asked questions based on the insights from the survey could be one such possibility.

### Gender Considerations

The absence of a woman Secretary-General over the UN's 80-year history continues to raise fundamental questions of equality, fairness, and representation. This record is symptomatic of the endurance of patriarchal structures in international politics and diplomacy, a pattern also reflected in representation at senior diplomatic and domestic political posts. While recent years have marked advances towards parity in leadership positions in multilateral organisations, women account for only 23 percent of permanent representatives to the UN in New York, meaning that nearly four out of five permanent representatives are men.<sup>209</sup> At the Security Council, only four delegations are currently headed by women permanent representatives (Colombia, Denmark, Greece, and Latvia). Domestically, only 26

out of 193 countries were headed by a woman head of state or government as at 29 January, and only 14 countries' national cabinets were composed of at least 50 percent women.<sup>210</sup>

At a deeper level, and as several civil society initiatives have recognised, the issue extends beyond representation. Campaigns such as those led by 1 for 8 Billion and GNWP have stressed the need for feminist leadership that actively advances "gender equality and justice at the highest level of global governance", framing the question of the next Secretary-General as one of substantive transformation.<sup>211</sup>

At the same time, while many member states have affirmed the importance of gender equality in principle, including with regard to the selection and appointment of the next Secretary-General, there is a perception that, amid growing backlash against women's rights and feminist objectives, overt support from member states has become less pronounced over the past year. Given the current Council dynamics and the structure of the selection process, which requires candidates to be acceptable to the P5 and a majority of elected members, the prospects for the selection of a feminist woman candidate appear to have dimmed.

Recent analysis has also drawn attention to the "glass cliff" dynamic in the context of selecting a woman as the next Secretary-General.<sup>212</sup> This refers to the trend whereby women's appointments to senior leadership roles are more likely to take place at moments of institutional stress and crisis, potentially curtailing both their room for manoeuvre and the likelihood of success.<sup>213</sup>

These limitations are symptomatic of broader structural inequities in global political systems, where gender discrimination persists and feminist leadership remains marginalised. Members interested in countering these trends may view the constraints of the current process as reinforcing the case for addressing gender equality and justice more broadly through structural change.

Regarding the current selection and appointment process, however, if stated principles fail again to shape outcomes, this risks eroding the legitimacy of the process and the Secretary-General it produces, as well as confidence in the UN's ability to live up to its own normative commitments.<sup>214</sup> Some have pressed for concrete signals from the wider membership, such as having the General Assembly consider rejecting any male candidate recommended by the Council.<sup>215</sup> While this suggestion is unlikely to garner sufficient support in the current geopolitical climate—with some also cautioning that it could inadvertently incentivise certain permanent members to coalesce around a woman candidate whose positions may not align with proponents' expectations on gender equality—it nevertheless reflects growing concern that repeatedly proclaimed commitments to gender equality risk losing credibility if they are once again discarded at the decisive moment.

208 CIC NYU, "Navigating the Next Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process" (YouTube 2 December 2025) 1:08:50 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ5xk-lqZY&t=1s>

209 GWL Voices, "Women in Multilateralism 2026" (2026) <https://res.cloudinary.com/gwlvoices/raw/upload/v1769191013/Women%20in%20Multilateralism%202026%20-%20members.pdf>

210 Council on Foreign Relations, Women's Power Index <https://www.cfr.org/trackers/womens-power-index#tablelink>

211 GNWP, "Selecting the Next UN Secretary General: A feminist woman" <https://gnwp.org/next-un-sg-feminist-woman/#tracker> 1 for 8 Billion, "A fair and inclusive process to appoint the next UN Secretary-General" <https://una.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/1-for-8-Billion-Policy-Platform-2024.pdf>

212 Anjali Dayal, "Who Can Lead a Disarrayed World? Electing the Next UN Secretary-General" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung June 2025) 11 <https://ny.fes.de/article/who-can-lead-a-disarrayed-world-electing-the-next-un-secretary-general-1.html> and Jennifer Parlamis, "Will the Next UN Leader Shatter the Glass Ceiling but Fall Off the Glass Cliff?" (*PassBlue* 26 March 2026) <https://passblue.com/2026/03/26/will-the-next-un-leader-shatter-the-glass-ceiling-but-fall-off-the-glass-cliff/>

213 Susanne Bruckmüller and Nyla R. Branscombe, "The glass cliff: When and why women are selected as leaders in crisis contexts" (2010) 49 *British Journal of Social Psychology* 433.

214 GWL Voices, "Women in Multilateralism 2026" 12.

215 See, for instance, Anwarul Chowdhury, "How to Ensure Election of the First Woman Secretary-General: A Daunting Challenge Before the United Nations" (*Global Issues* 14 April 2025). <https://www.globalissues.org/news/2025/04/14/39598> and Adama Balde, Ben Donaldson, Mavic Cabrera-Balleza and Claudette Segura, "As the U.N. Seeks Its Next Secretary-General, a Growing Number of Countries Favor a Woman for the Post" (*Just Security* 12 December 2025) <https://www.justsecurity.org/126730/next-un-secretary-general-woman/>

## VII. Challenges Ahead and Options

### *Geography-related Considerations*

In the current cycle, expectations that the next Secretary-General would come from GRULAC have been widely stated in public and private, including by some Council members. To date, the majority of candidates who have emerged are nationals of a member of GRULAC, suggesting a broad degree of recognition among member states that it is the region's turn to provide the next Secretary-General.<sup>216</sup>

A further indication of the broad understanding that the next Secretary-General should come from GRULAC was the reaction of some representatives of African states to the nomination of a candidate from their region, Macky Sall. These members suggested that the nomination was not respectful of the view that it is supposed to be GRULAC's turn. For instance, in a 27 March letter to the AU Commission, Nigeria stated that “[i]t is a known fact that it is the turn of South America and the Caribbean region” and that Nigeria saw “no rationale in violating the time-honoured principle of continental rotation”, adding that by discarding this practice the AU was “putting its position and interest in jeopardy now and in the future”.<sup>217</sup>

At the same time, regional expectations remain contingent on the selection process and on the Security Council dynamics within it. Recalling the 2015/2016 process, during which António Guterres, a candidate from WEOG, was selected even if it was generally held that it was the EEG's turn, some observers have cautioned that, should the process again result in a candidate from outside the widely expected region, it may become increasingly difficult to sustain the existence of regional rotation as a principle in future Secretaries-General selection processes.<sup>218</sup> More broadly, Council members may want to be attentive to the reputational cost that may accrue if expectations about regional diversity are perceived to be repeatedly set aside, particularly given that regional diversity in past Secretaries-General has contributed to perceptions of fairness.

### *Financial Disclosure*

Resolution 79/327 said that “[e]ach candidate should disclose her or his sources of funding at the time of the nomination”.<sup>219</sup> As noted by Sievers, the phrasing used in 79/327 “leaves open the possibility that significant unreported financial contributions could be received by candidates after their nomination is effected”.<sup>220</sup> At the same time, in 2023, resolution 77/335 on the revitalisation of the General Assembly invited candidates during future processes to “voluntarily disclose any funding sources they have relating to their candidature”.<sup>221</sup> Although resolution 79/327 is a more recent marker of where inter-governmental consensus lies, the invitation for broader financial disclosure advanced by the earlier resolution remains effective, all the more so with resolution 79/327 reaffirming that the principles set out in previous resolutions—including 77/335 which is directly mentioned in the text—should also guide the selection and appointment process.<sup>222</sup>

216 Michelle Bachelet (Chile); Virginia Gamba (Argentina); Rafael Grossi (Argentina/Italy); Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis (Costa Rica); and Macky Sall (Senegal).

217 Letter from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Permanent Mission to the AU and UNECA to the AU Commission (27 March 2026) No. 196/03/2026.

218 For instance, Ambassador Rein Tammsaar (Estonia) at CIC NYU, “Navigating the Next Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process” (YouTube 2 December 2025), CIC NYU 17:21 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ5xk-lqZY&t=1s>

219 A/RES/79/327 [42(h)].

220 Loraine Sievers, “GA’s 2025 “Revitalization” resolution advances process for appointing next Secretary-General” (22 September 2025) [https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5q-update-website-of-Loraine-Sievers-and-Sam-Daws-“The-Procedure-of-the-UN-Security-Council”-\(4th-edn,-Oxford-University-Press-2014\).](https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5q-update-website-of-Loraine-Sievers-and-Sam-Daws-“The-Procedure-of-the-UN-Security-Council”-(4th-edn,-Oxford-University-Press-2014).)

221 A/RES/77/335 [64].

222 A/RES/79/327 [39].

223 E.g.: Ben Donaldson, “UN Secretary-General Race: Financial Disclosures, an Explainer” (PassBlue 22 March 2026).

224 A/RES/79/327 [42(f)].

225 *ibid.*

Candidates have thus far provided scant information regarding how their campaign is going to be funded, usually limited to a sentence in their submission materials indicating generically that the funding will be private, public or a combination of the two. None of the candidates nominated at the time of writing has disclosed the amount received for their campaign in the documents submitted at the time of nomination. This has set a low bar for compliance with the General Assembly's request, leading civil society groups to call for stronger financial transparency.<sup>223</sup> More detailed disclosures would allow member states to assess any potential conflict of interest and/or unfair advantage, protect the independence of the office of the Secretary-General, and uphold the credibility of the selection process.

While in future selection and appointment processes, the General Assembly and the Security Council could mandate additional details to be included in the disclosure, an option for candidates running in the current cycle would be to voluntarily disclose more details regarding their financial contributions, such as each source of financial support (including in-kind), specific amounts received, and relative dates. More broadly, 1 for 8 Billion is working on a set of Principles for Integrity in UN Secretary-General Campaigns, which is expected to include a set of commitments related to campaign integrity, including on financial disclosures, and upholding Article 100 of the UN Charter, which candidates will be able to sign on to on a voluntary basis.

Another option could be for candidates to agree through negotiations among themselves on a common format to update their financial disclosure and provide additional comprehensive financial information. Ideally, this should take place soon after their nomination and at intervals during the campaign. Such an agreement would not only demonstrate the candidates' interest in transparency but would also be a test of the candidates' negotiating skills and could be an initial step towards more detailed disclosures.

### *Withdrawal of Candidates*

Resolution 79/327 clarified the modalities for the withdrawal of candidates. It established that “[a] nominating Member State may withdraw a candidate at any time during the process” notifying the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council at which point “the candidate should be considered automatically withdrawn”.<sup>224</sup> The resolution adds that “if a candidate withdraws, the nominating Member State may subsequently nominate another candidate”.<sup>225</sup>

While permitting groups of member states to nominate candidates, resolution 79/327 does not directly address the withdrawal of candidates nominated by a coalition of member states. While, during the negotiations, proposals were considered to clarify this issue—such as having the “nominating state” or the “state of nationality”

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to communicate, and in practice determine, the withdrawal—these proposals did not garner support and were not included in the resolution. It seems that this was because coalitions of member states that nominate candidates together have generally been understood to do so as a group—that is, “jointly”, as stated in resolution 79/327<sup>226</sup>—not as one nominating state supported by others. In the same vein, the resolution established that candidates must be nominated by states, but it does not require that the nominating state be, or include, the candidate’s state of nationality—as further confirmed by some of the candidatures thus far emerged, who were not put forward by the candidate’s nationality state.<sup>227</sup>

Any remaining uncertainty regarding the withdrawal of candidates jointly nominated by a group of member states was clarified in practice following Chile’s withdrawal of its nomination of Michelle Bachelet on 24 March.<sup>228</sup> While Chile withdrew from the nominating coalition, which also comprises Brazil and Mexico, Bachelet’s candidature remained in effect. In a 25 March letter to the membership, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council stated that, as of that date, Bachelet is considered a candidate for the position of Secretary-General, nominated by Brazil and Mexico.<sup>229</sup>

An option for future selection and appointment cycles would be to clarify that candidatures nominated jointly by groups of states remain viable unless the group as a whole, or all of its members, withdraw the nomination. It remains the prerogative of the single nominating state to withdraw itself from the coalition.

### *Late Entrants and Candidates’ Participation in the General Assembly Hearings*

While the current geopolitical context is markedly different from that of 2015/2016, one of the lessons learnt from that process was that joining the process late could put a candidate at a disadvantage.<sup>230</sup> By the time the final candidate, Kristalina Georgieva, came forward, most Council members had already formed their opinion on the candidates. At that time, some Council members considered that her late entry—and poor performance in the only straw poll she participated in—helped accelerate the Council’s decision in favour of the frontrunner, António Guterres.<sup>231</sup>

The issue of establishing a timeline and deadline for nominations proved contentious during the negotiations on General Assembly resolution 79/327 and the 25 November 2025 joint letter. As discussed in the previous sections, while resolution 79/327 and the joint letter established that candidate nominations are expected after the issuance of the joint letter, there was no consensus on including a specific end date for the submission of nominations—an E10 proposal for a 1 April flexible deadline to submit nominations was not added to the joint letter due to opposition from the P5. Nevertheless, in a 14 January letter, the PGA asked for candidates to be presented

before the General Assembly interactive dialogues and “no later than 1 April 2026 in order to be able to participate in the interactive dialogues in the week of 20 April 2026”.<sup>232</sup>

The inclusion of a deadline in the PGA’s letter appears to have elicited a range of reactions among observers, with several member states and civil society representatives welcoming the PGA’s proactive efforts to promote a predictable process, and some others expressing wariness that this extended beyond what was agreed in intergovernmental discussions.

At the same time, the joint letter recognised that candidates’ early presentation would help the organisation of the General Assembly interactive dialogues, while also noting that candidates should not be precluded from making themselves known throughout the process. The 14 January PGA’s letter explains that the purpose of the deadline is to ensure that candidates can participate in the General Assembly interactive dialogues, which the PGA is mandated to organise under resolution 79/327 and which, consistent with 2016 practice, precede the Security Council hearings. Moreover, the deadline refers specifically to the interactive dialogues that will take place on the week of 20 April. If the precedent of 2016 is followed, any late entrant will be offered the opportunity to participate in an interactive dialogue with the General Assembly organised at a later date.

That a hard cut-off date for the nomination phase of the process could be unhelpful in a scenario where there is no consensus on a candidate is arguably understood by most, if not all, Council members. This is particularly so in light of Council and wider geopolitical divisions. Indeed, the E10 proposal on this issue during the negotiation of the joint letter was mindful of this reality as it invited member states to present nominations no later than 1 April “unless exceptional circumstances so necessitate”. Similarly, one of the suggestions made in the letter from the former permanent representative of Japan Ambassador Koro Bessho, who served on the Security Council during the process that selected Guterres, was that all nominations “should be submitted, in principle, before the first round of voting takes place”.<sup>233</sup> He added that candidates would be eligible to receive votes in the Security Council only after having gone through the relevant Council and Assembly processes, such as the informal interactive dialogues and the meetings with the Security Council’s permanent representatives. An option for members with an interest in preserving the transparency of the process is to insist that any late entrant participates fully in all stages of the process, including the General Assembly dialogues. Council members could choose not to meet with candidates that have not had a webcast interactive dialogue session in the General Assembly.

The joint letter indicates that candidates not taking part in interactions with the Security Council and the General Assembly should not be disadvantaged.<sup>234</sup> However, in light of the 2015/2016 advances on transparency and the more active role assumed in recent years

226 A/RES/79/327 [42(d)].

227 Virginia Gamba was nominated, and later withdrawn, by the Maldives. Macky Sall was nominated by Burundi.

228 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations (25 March 2026) transmitting Chile’s decision. <https://www.un.org/pga/80/2026/03/25/letter-from-the-president-of-the-general-assembly-to-the-president-of-security-council-on-selection-and-appointment-of-sg-chile-candidate/>

229 Ibid.

230 SCR, “The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows” (2017) 13.

231 Ibid.

232 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to All Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations on the Communication of Dates for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General (14 January 2026).

233 A/71/774-S/2017/93 [29(c)].

234 “The President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council will offer candidates opportunities for informal dialogues or meetings with members of their respective bodies, including webcast interactive dialogues in the General Assembly, while noting that any such interaction will be without prejudice to those who do not participate”. A/80/544-S/2025/765.

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by the General Assembly, any candidate who bypasses the dialogues will hardly be viewed as having undergone a process acceptable to the wider membership. In a context where the General Assembly could still decide to proceed to a vote—rather than appoint by acclamation—on the Council-recommended candidate, this is a consideration that potential late entrants may want to take into account.

### *Meeting the Candidates*

The interactive dialogues at the General Assembly are expected to start the week of 20 April. In a 4 March letter, the PGA set out the modalities for the dialogues, which provide that each dialogue with a candidate will last three hours, will be chaired by the PGA, and will be broadcast live on UN Web TV.<sup>235</sup> Each dialogue will begin with an opening statement by the candidate lasting up to ten minutes, followed by questions from member states and civil society. The letter states that questions should be structured around two thematic areas:

- leadership abilities, experience, and skills for “a strong fit-for-the-future” UN; and
- the three pillars of the UN—peace and security, development, and human rights.

The dialogues are informal General Assembly meetings, with interpretation in all official languages, and member states will take the floor on a first-come, first-served basis, with interventions from groups of member states prioritised.

Members’ statements are limited to two minutes for national interventions and three minutes for groups, with strict enforcement through automatic microphone cut-off. Candidates are encouraged to respond in two minutes immediately after each question from member states. Candidates will have an opportunity for a press stakeout after each dialogue.

Modalities for civil society participation were published by the Office of the PGA on 24 March through a call for expressions of interest to ask questions, open until 5 April. Civil society organisations were invited to participate either in person or virtually and were required, at the time of registration, to submit a written outline of their proposed question. The call stated that the selection of questions was to be conducted with “due regard to balanced thematic and stakeholder representation” and based on a lottery. Speaking time for selected civil society organisations was limited to 60 seconds, with strict enforcement through the use of automatic microphone cut-offs. The call further specified that questions should fall within the following categories for all candidates:

- Proven leadership abilities, experience and skills of the candidates;
- UN Reform/UN80;
- Peace and security;
- Development; and
- Human rights.

Key differences with the 2016 hearings include the longer overall time dedicated to each interactive dialogue (from two to three hours), the shorter time for individual questions with microphone cut-offs, and the fact that candidates are being asked to respond

immediately after each question posed instead of being able to respond collectively. Several of these elements appear to respond to feedback from the 2016 hearings. Another difference is that in this process the selection of civil society questions is managed solely by the Office of the PGA, whereas in 2016 the Office of the PGA worked with the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) and a civil society committee.

Member states could aim to maximise the effectiveness of the dialogues by posing focused, substantive questions rather than making general statements on national positions, in line with the modalities’ intent to promote a genuinely interactive exchange.

The repetitive nature of the questions asked was one of the main criticisms that emerged in relation to the General Assembly hearings during the 2015/2016 process. Members could coordinate informally within political and regional groups as well as across regional groups to avoid duplication of questions, allowing the dialogue to cover a broader range of issues within the time available. Having a diversity of questions may also help to limit the advantage that later-scheduled candidates may gain from anticipating the types of questions asked in earlier sessions. Member states and civil society representatives are likely to closely monitor how the modalities for their respective participation function in practice, including whether they enable more effective interaction and a deeper level of engagement compared to the 2015/2016 process.

Commentators are also suggesting the idea of additional locations for the interactive dialogues with the candidates. For instance, Adam Day noted that, while the dialogues in the General Assembly are important, they “reflect the worldview of New York diplomacy, one centered heavily on geopolitics and the work of the UN Security Council”, with many questions in the 2016 hearings focusing on conflict mediation, peacekeeping and relations with big powers.<sup>236</sup> He has called for hearings to take place in Geneva—the UN’s “operational and normative center”—as a first step to consultations in Nairobi, Bangkok, and Panama City, which he argues could broaden nominees’ exposure to crucial regional issues and deepen the scope of their engagement.<sup>237</sup>

Another issue is for the PGA and civil society actors to decide on the modalities of additional public engagement with the candidates, such as through town hall or similar events. During the 2015/2016 process, the PGA organised a Global Town Hall, which was broadcast live on Al Jazeera TV. (As discussed above, attempts to negotiate references to holding a town hall in the 2025 revitalisation resolution were unsuccessful.) Member states and candidates had mixed reactions to the Global Town Hall event, with some maintaining that it was an effective way to test the candidates’ capacity to respond to difficult questions in front of a global audience, while others found it a format more suitable for national elections.<sup>238</sup> In hindsight, some have observed that this format tends to favour candidates who perform well in high-pressure, high-visibility settings—an attribute that does not necessarily or completely correlate with effectiveness as Secretary-General—and may even discourage some potential candidates from participating. Some view such events, which resemble

235 Letter from the President of the General Assembly to all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations (4 March 2026) on the modalities for the webcast interactive dialogues. [https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/110/2026/03/PGA-Letter\\_Modalties-for-Webcast-Interactive-Dialogues-with-Candidates-for-the-Position-of-Secretary-General.pdf](https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/110/2026/03/PGA-Letter_Modalties-for-Webcast-Interactive-Dialogues-with-Candidates-for-the-Position-of-Secretary-General.pdf)

236 Adam Day, “UN Secretary-General Candidates Should Come to Geneva” (30 March 2026) <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2026/03/un-secretary-general-candidates-should-come-to-geneva/>

237 Ibid.

238 SCR, “The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows” 5, 6.

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US-style electoral debates, as overly confrontational and fast-paced limiting their usefulness in assessing the strategic judgment, diplomatic skill, and managerial capacity required for the role. At the same time, a high-profile event bringing the candidates together for questioning and broadcast by a major international network has the potential to raise public awareness of the selection and appointment process, enhance transparency, and focus global media attention on the qualities and priorities of the candidates under consideration.

There are also a range of possible alternative or additional formats for assessing the candidates. These include one-to-one interviews with candidates conducted by civil society organisations and think tanks, which may allow for more substantive and thoughtful exchanges.<sup>239</sup> Another option is a rapid-fire series of question-and-answer sessions with each candidate moderated by the President of the General Assembly or another designated host on the same day, aimed at eliciting comparable responses across candidates while avoiding the dynamics of a large public debate.

Civil society-organised debates with candidates are also emerging as an option. In this regard, GWL Voices has announced that it will organise a public debate with the candidates.<sup>240</sup> It is scheduled to take place in June at the Maison de la Paix in Geneva, as a standalone event focused on leadership and the future of the UN. All candidates will be invited to attend, and it seems that the event will be broadcast live by an international TV network.

### *Council Engagement with Secretary-General Candidates*

As discussed above, starting in early June 2016, Council members held meetings that lasted for one hour with each of the candidates in the mission of that month's presidency. It seems that these meetings largely focused on peace and security issues and the relationship of the Secretary-General with the Security Council. While the opportunity to meet with candidates was viewed as a positive development, feedback on the value of the meetings was mixed.<sup>241</sup> Some members observed that, as the meetings took place after the interactive dialogue sessions in the General Assembly, they provided limited additional insights into candidates' positions. Others, however, indicated that the closed format allowed for more substantive and robust exchanges in certain cases.<sup>242</sup> The 2025 joint letter from the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly provides that they "will offer candidates opportunities for informal dialogues or meetings with members of their respective bodies, including webcast interactive dialogues in the General Assembly, while noting that any such interaction will be without prejudice to those who do not participate".<sup>243</sup> In this context, Council members are likely to meet candidates who request such meetings in the period following the Assembly's interactive dialogue sessions at the end of April and before the start of the straw polls, expected to begin towards the end of July.<sup>244</sup>

As discussed above, Council members engaged in extensive discussions and several non-papers were produced on modalities for these meetings in the first half of 2016. Having never met with the candidates as a group, members needed to develop and agree on the modalities for such meetings. In 2015, the UK proposed holding an open Arria-formula meeting to meet the candidates,<sup>245</sup> but most members, as well as the Office of the PGA, apparently felt that such an approach would be too similar to the General Assembly dialogues. The discussions eventually led to an understanding that a confidential, informal format would be more conducive to frank exchanges.

Council members will soon need to agree on the modalities for meeting candidates. In light of the experience in 2016, several issues related to the substantive aspects of these meetings may arise, including:

- how to structure discussions with candidates in a way that is both focused and interactive, while retaining some flexibility in the areas covered;
- how to broaden the scope of questions to avoid duplication with issues already addressed in the General Assembly; and
- how to ensure consistent coverage of key issues across candidates while preserving flexibility for Council members to raise specific priorities.

With regard to the format, members could again choose to hold meetings at the mission of the Council presidency as they did in 2016. Meetings were held with three candidates in June, nine candidates in July and one candidate in October during the presidencies of France, Japan and Russia, respectively. However, some members appear interested in exploring options that could allow for greater consistency and transparency, including the closed Arria-formula format, informal interactive dialogue, or other informal meeting formats. Most of these formats, although not formal meetings of the Council, would be captured in the meeting statistics compiled by the Secretariat providing a historical record of when they took place. In addition, given that they would be held in the UN building, these formats would more easily allow for press stakeouts to deliver press elements following the meeting. Using the same room at the UN Headquarters could also provide a consistent setting for all the meetings with candidates.

When António Guterres indicated that he was willing to run for a second term in 2021, his reappointment followed the overall practices of the 2015/2016 selection process, even though Guterres was the only candidate. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, meetings in the permanent missions were not feasible and instead the meeting with the incumbent candidate took place in the ECOSOC chamber, which was being used in place of the Security Council chamber due to COVID-19-related space requirements. It seems that China, who was Council President in May, proposed that the informal interactive dialogue format be used to meet with Guterres. However, other

239 For instance, WomanSG is planning to interview all women candidates, and the International Peace Institute (IPI) may also be planning a series of interviews.

240 "GWL Voices Announces Debate with Candidates for UN Secretary-General" (9 March 2026) <https://www.gwlvoices.org/actions/gwl-voices-announces-debate-with-candidates-for-un-secretary-general>

241 SCR interviews conducted with Security Council ambassadors during and after the 2016 selection process. SCR, "The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows".

242 Ibid.

243 A/80/544-S/2025/765.

244 The joint letter stated that the informal dialogues or meetings "can be held before the Council begins its selection by the end of July 2026 and may continue throughout the process of selection". A/80/544-S/2025/765.

245 "It is the search for someone out of seven billion who can really ensure that the whole UN is fit for purpose", statement by Ambassador Matthew Rycroft (UK) (30 June 2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/it-is-the-search-for-someone-out-of-seven-billion-who-can-really-ensure-that-the-whole-un-is-fit-for-purpose> Also mentioned in Loraine Sievers, "ACT proposes a more transparent, inclusive process for appointing the Secretary-General" (5 July 2015) <https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5b-update-website-of-Lorraine-Sievers-and-Sam-Daws,-The-Procedure-of-the-UN-Security-Council> (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014).

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members had concerns about formalising the meeting's format and apparently insisted that it should be referred to as an "informal dialogue" to distinguish it from the established informal interactive dialogue format used by the General Assembly. Following the meeting, the Council President issued press elements which conveyed that Council members had held "an informal dialogue" with Guterres during which he presented his vision statement on the challenges and opportunities faced by the UN.<sup>246</sup> This was a new development as no information was released following the meetings with candidates in 2016.

With the 2021 example in mind, some members may suggest a similar format for the current process, including the issuing of press elements. This could provide a degree of transparency and ensure a minimal public record of the meeting with candidates. Other members, however, might be concerned that adopting a more formal format than meeting in missions and providing information on the meetings may not be conducive to a more frank discussion with the candidate.

### Security Council Straw Polls

#### *Confidentiality vs Transparency*

One of the main criticisms of the 2016 process was the limited transparency surrounding the straw polls.<sup>247</sup> In June 2016, shortly before the start of the straw polls, Council members agreed that the results would not be made public. The majority of Council members and member states interviewed in the aftermath of the 2015/2016 process felt that the lack of transparency in the release of the results of the straw polls was an element of the process that needed to be reassessed in the future.<sup>248</sup>

In 2016, following each poll, the Council President informed the PGA that a straw poll had taken place and relayed the same information to the press, also indicating that he had spoken to the PGA. Candidates were informed of their individual results, as well as the highest and lowest scores obtained. However, the full results were leaked shortly after each round and subsequently reported in the media, at times inaccurately. This led some members to suggest that having the Council release the results would help reduce speculation and misreporting. Others, however, emphasised the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

In his 1 February 2017 letter, Ambassador Bessho, who served as Council President in July 2016 when the first straw polls were conducted, wrote a letter reflecting on the achievements and lessons learnt from the process.<sup>249</sup> Regarding the disclosure of the results of the straw polls, he noted that although there had been consensus among Council members in June not to release the results to the public, the leaking of the first straw poll results led some members to push for the Council to disclose the results. This was discussed in a closed consultations meeting under "any other business", but Council members were unable to agree on releasing the results. Bessho outlined several arguments advanced by those favouring non-disclosure:

- given that a decision had been taken not to release the results, this position should be maintained throughout the process unless there was consensus to do otherwise;
- straw polls are an internal process preceding a formal Council decision, and should therefore not be disclosed to the public; and
- announcing the results to the public could "hurt the dignity" of some candidates.<sup>250</sup>

In the current selection process, the question of whether and how to release straw poll results is expected to arise again. Members may need to consider not only whether to disclose the results but also the level of detail to be provided, the modalities of communication, and how to ensure this is respectful of candidates. The respective roles of the Council President and the PGA, as well as the timing and sequencing of any decision, may also be relevant, particularly in light of the 2016 experience of results being immediately leaked and rapidly published.

Several options could be considered:

- Maintaining the 2016 approach: The Council could treat straw poll results as confidential, limiting disclosure to candidates and providing only general information externally. However, it would not resolve the issue of leaks or the perception of insufficient transparency;
- Full disclosure of results: Members could agree to release the full results of each straw poll. In this scenario, following each poll, the Council President would brief candidates and transmit the results to the PGA, who could circulate them to the wider membership. The Council President could also convey the results to the press through a stakeout or press release. This approach could enhance transparency and reduce reliance on unofficial reporting, but it may raise concerns among some members regarding the exposure of candidates' performance at different stages of the process;
- Partial or aggregated disclosure: Members could opt to release limited information, such as aggregated results without attribution to individual candidates. For example, members could choose to provide information on the number of candidates that received "encourage", "discourage" and "no opinion" votes, or the total number of votes in each of these categories. This could provide some insight into the dynamics of the selection process while preserving a degree of confidentiality. It may also mitigate concerns about reputational effects on candidates, although it would provide less detailed information to member states and the public.

The 2016 experience highlighted an underlying tension between the traditionally confidential nature of the straw polls and growing expectations among member states for a more transparent selection process. Any future approach is likely to require balancing these considerations, including whether increased transparency can be introduced without undermining the purpose of the process or the position of candidates.

An alternative approach that was examined in analytical commentary after the 2015/2016 process would be to move away from straw polls to a format that might more easily allow for disclosure

<sup>246</sup> Press elements are usually read out at the Security Council press stakeout and not issued in writing. Rather unusually, during the COVID-19 period, press elements were sometimes provided in written form as well as at the stakeout due to the restrictions on attending various activities at the UN. "UN Security Council Press Elements after informal dialogue on 18 May 2021 with Mr. António Guterres" (18 May 2021) <https://un.mfa.ee/un-security-council-press-elements-after-informal-dialogue-on-18-may-2021-with-mr-antonio-guterres/>

<sup>247</sup> SCR, "The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows" 12. See also A/71/774-S/2017/93 [16]; S/2016/784.

<sup>248</sup> SCR, "The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows" 12.

<sup>249</sup> A/71/774-S/2017/93. See also Loraine Sievers, "Japanese letter addresses parameters of Secretary-General appointment process" (4 April 2017) <https://www.scprocedure.org/chapter-7-section-5m-update-website-of-Loraine-Sievers-and-Sam-Daws,-The-Procedure-of-the-UN-Security-Council> (4th edn, Oxford University Press 2014).

<sup>250</sup> A/71/774-S/2017/93 [19].

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of the results. In his 2017 letter, Ambassador Bessho argued that if the Council continues to rely on straw polls, the positions around the issue of confidentiality are unlikely to change “due to the internal character of straw polls”.<sup>251</sup> In this context, he noted that before 1981 the Council conducted official votes in private meetings and this format could be used instead of straw polls.<sup>252</sup> He further suggested that the results of the votes be included in the communiqué of the Council to be issued following the meeting and that the president would announce the results. As discussed earlier in this report, the private meeting format and secret ballots were used until 1981, when a deadlock between the two leading candidates led to the introduction of the straw polls system. In terms of transparency, the private meeting format allows for information to be provided through official communiqués. While the information has generally been minimal, in earlier selection processes, communiqués occasionally included some information on voting outcomes, as was the case for the first two Secretaries-General.<sup>253</sup>

There is an increased risk of successive inconclusive ballots if the Council chooses to abandon the straw polls system and instead discusses its recommendation in a private meeting. The introduction of straw polls in 1981 was intended precisely to mitigate this risk. Informal, undifferentiated straw polls allow members to test levels of support and adjust positions without the political cost associated with a formal vote. Members have historically shifted their votes between straw poll rounds—particularly in the early, non-colour-coded polls—facilitating convergence around a viable candidate.

By contrast, in a formal private meeting, positions are likely to be more rigid. The absence of an informal testing mechanism ahead of the formal vote could therefore prolong the process or complicate efforts to reach an agreement. This could potentially lead to a deadlock and the emergence of a compromise late candidate, which may raise concerns about bypassing the early steps of the process.

A new development relevant to the selection process if the private meeting format is used, is the “veto initiative”. On 26 April 2022, the General Assembly adopted resolution 76/262, which decided that the President of the General Assembly “shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Security Council, to hold a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast, provided the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation”.<sup>254</sup> The resolution also invited the Security Council to submit a report on the use of the veto in question at least 72 hours ahead of the Assembly meeting. Accordingly, every time a veto has been cast since the adoption of this resolution, the General Assembly has convened a meeting or met in an existing ESS to discuss the situation that was vetoed.

While the veto initiative has been applied in other contexts, its implications for the Secretary-General selection process have yet to be tested. A veto cast in a secret ballot held in a private meeting would, in principle, trigger a General Assembly meeting, most likely under the agenda item “Use of the veto”, within ten days of the veto.

Such a meeting could provide the wider membership with an opportunity to express their views on the process, thereby expanding the General Assembly’s role.

At the same time, in this scenario, the veto would be cast in a secret ballot, which could complicate matters. Although all permanent members casting a veto have thus far elected to speak at the General Assembly meetings held under the veto initiative, resolution 76/262 does not require the member casting the veto to participate in the subsequent debate, and the permanent member casting the veto would in all likelihood wish to remain anonymous. If a member does choose to explain their vote, this could introduce a level of transparency to one of the more opaque aspects of the selection process.

### *Timing and Frequency of Straw Polls*

Several issues could arise in relation to the conduct of the straw polls, the timing of their commencement, the interval between rounds, and the point at which to transition from undifferentiated ballots to colour-coded.

The 2025 joint letter indicates that the Council will begin its selection “by the end of July”.<sup>255</sup> This timing allows Council members to hear from candidates in the General Assembly interactive dialogues, which are expected to begin the week of 20 April and to hold closed meetings with candidates prior to the first informal poll.

While there appears to be broad convergence on the starting period, the timing and use of colour-coded ballots may prove more contentious. In previous selection processes, some members questioned the use of colour-coded ballots, arguing that they effectively introduce the veto into an informal process. Although it seems unlikely that there would be sufficient support to eliminate colour-coded ballots altogether, members will need to determine when to introduce them. This may become a contentious issue, with some elected members expected to favour postponing their use until as late in the process as possible.

In considering the appropriate interval between straw polls, members may seek to balance the desire to maintain momentum with the need to allow candidates sufficient time between rounds to assess their level of support and conduct further outreach. Although it may be difficult to predict the number of rounds before a viable candidate emerges, members could consider agreeing, on a provisional basis, to regular intervals between polls in order to provide greater predictability for candidates. This may be more appropriate in the early rounds of the straw polls rather than in the later stages when a strong candidate may have emerged.

Another issue is the timing of the transition to using coloured ballots to differentiate between elected and permanent members. The move to colour-coded ballots is generally considered most useful once one or more leading candidates have emerged and it becomes necessary to assess their acceptability to permanent members before moving to a formal vote. The timing of this move has varied greatly in recent selection processes:

- In 1996, during the selection process that led to the recommendation of Kofi Annan, members moved from the only undifferentiated round to colour-coded on the same day (10 December). Six

251 A/71/774 – S/2017/93 [21].

252 Ibid.

253 E.g.: UNSC 613th meeting (13 March 1953) S/PV.613. This communiqué included information of the results on votes on Carlos P. Rómulo, Stanislaw Skrzyszewski and Lester B. Pearson, who either did not receive the required affirmative votes or received a negative vote from a permanent member.

254 A/RES/76/262 [1].

255 A/80/544-S/2025/765.

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colour-coded rounds followed, with Annan receiving a red ballot in every round. Finally, on the eighth round, Annan received 15 “encourage” votes<sup>256</sup>;

- In 2006, there were three undifferentiated rounds followed by just one coloured ballot, which showed that Ban Ki-moon was not opposed by any permanent members; and
- In 2016, the first and only colour-coded ballot took place in the sixth round, at which point António Guterres emerged without receiving a “discourage” vote from a permanent member.

On the one hand, delaying the introduction of colour-coded ballots until a clear frontrunner has emerged may favour the formation of consensus and help preserve flexibility for permanent members by avoiding early signalling of opposition through a “discourage” vote that could become politically difficult to reverse at a later stage. It would also delay the point where the P5 effectively has a veto. On the other hand, early use of colour-coded ballots, especially in a context where there are many candidates, could provide greater clarity regarding the viability of candidatures at an earlier stage and potentially persuade low-scoring candidates to withdraw.

### General Assembly Straw Polls

As discussed in previous sections of this report, the question of whether the General Assembly should conduct straw polls as part of the selection and appointment process remains highly contested. The permanent members of the Security Council have been united in opposing any role for the General Assembly in polling member states’ preferences, viewing this as encroaching on the Council’s prerogatives—a perspective not shared by proponents of General Assembly straw polls.

How the General Assembly might convey its views on candidates has been a recurring issue over several selection cycles and predates the transparency advances of the 2015/2016 process. Proposals aimed at enabling the wider membership to express views on candidates—short of a formal vote—have periodically resurfaced, reflecting broader concerns about inclusivity, transparency, and legitimacy in the process. For instance, in 1997, in a resolution endorsing the conclusions of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, the General Assembly said that, without prejudice to the Council’s prerogatives, the PGA may consult with member states “to identify potential candidates endorsed by a Member State and, upon informing all Member States of the results, may forward those results to the Security Council”.<sup>257</sup> In 2012, a draft resolution initiated by Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Singapore, and Switzerland, as the Small 5 (or S5), but never voted on, would have made several recommendations to the Council, including “taking into account the results of consultations that may be held by the President of the General Assembly” with regard to the appointment of the Secretary-General.<sup>258</sup>

There currently appears to be scant appetite among member states for the organisation of General Assembly straw polls. Among other reasons, some members might be wary that this would entail the type of coordination and political deals of an election to a UN body.

Several possible options have nonetheless been floated, including:

- A General Assembly straw poll following the first rounds of General Assembly interactive dialogues and before the Council begins its meetings with the candidates, which would allow the wider membership to express views after having directly engaged with the candidates who have emerged up to that point. One drawback of this option is that it could exclude candidates presented later in the process;
- A straw poll after the conclusion of the Council’s meetings with the pool of candidates that have emerged by the start of the Council’s own straw polls. This timing could allow the Assembly’s views to be conveyed closer to the critical phase of Council deliberations, while allowing for the Council’s meetings with the candidates to be concluded;
- A General Assembly straw poll concurrently with the Council’s own straw polls. While this timing could bring the Assembly’s input into closer temporal proximity to the Council’s deliberation, it may increase process complexity and would likely sharpen perceptions of institutional competition.

An additional issue would be the modalities of the General Assembly straw polls and how the results are conveyed to the Security Council.

Resolution 79/327 affirmed that, in the context of the process for the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly “will engage closely, in a transparent and inclusive manner, with Member States”.<sup>259</sup> Building on this, the PGA may draw on existing consultative practices to engage with the wider membership and develop an understanding of views on the candidates, without resorting to formal polling or voting mechanisms.<sup>260</sup>

Beyond straw polls, the ACT Group has suggested that an additional dialogue session could be convened when the Security Council has put forward its recommendation and before the Assembly makes the appointment.<sup>261</sup> In stark contrast with the view held by permanent members, these members have emphasised that the General Assembly’s power of appointment should not be understood as a mere formality whereby the Assembly automatically approves the Council’s recommendation, and that the General Assembly should independently be persuaded that it is appointing the right person for the job. While not formally altering the Council’s role in making the recommendation, and remaining within the powers of the General Assembly, some permanent members may view this option as controversial and as a means of questioning the Council’s recommendation.

Another option that is being explored by civil society campaigns such as 1 for 8 Billion is to conduct informal polls of UN permanent representatives willing to participate, with the aim of gauging preferences among the wider membership.

While not addressing broader calls for a more prominent role for the General Assembly, Council members, including the P5, may want to consider that a way for the Security Council to limit renewed calls for General Assembly straw polls lies not in procedural resistance, but in outcomes. If the candidate recommended by the

<sup>256</sup> Gharekhan, “The Horseshoe Table” 300, 301.

<sup>257</sup> A/RES/51/241 Annex [60].

<sup>258</sup> UNGA draft resolution (15 May 2012) [17] A/66/L.42/Rev.2 discussed in Sievers and Daws, “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” 407.

<sup>259</sup> A/RES/79/327 [42(g)].

<sup>260</sup> Ambassador Mathu Joyini at CIC NYU, “Navigating the Next Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process” (YouTube 2 December 2025), 32:18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ5xk-1qZY&t=1s>

<sup>261</sup> Statement by the ACT Group at the 5 March 2026 thematic debate of the Working Group on the Strengthening and Revitalizing of the Work of the General Assembly. <https://www.mission-newyork.fdfa.admin.ch/en/publication?id=IsPRRDjyenEw>

## VII. Challenges Ahead and Options

Council is widely regarded across the membership as competent and responsive to prevailing expectations, pressure for the Assembly to assert its voice is likely to recede. Conversely, if such confidence is lacking, interest within the General Assembly in exploring additional avenues to express its views could increase.

### Term of Office and Number of Candidates Recommended

While the UN Charter does not specify the term of office, General Assembly resolution 11(I) of 1946 established that the first Secretary-General would serve a term of five years, renewable for a further five years.

The idea of a single term may once again be advanced by some member states as well as civil society. The most commonly proposed option has been a seven-year non-renewable term. Member states, including the ACT Group, civil society campaigns, like 1 for 8 Billion, and the Elders, including former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, have argued for a single term, maintaining that it could enhance the Secretary-General's independence by reducing incentives associated with seeking a second term and allowing a greater focus on the job. Any attempt to change the term of office, however, is likely to encounter significant resistance. As discussed in Section IV, attempts to include language on shorter terms in resolution 79/327 were not acceptable to some members.

If members choose to pursue this issue, there are several options. Resolution 11(I) specifically states that “[t]here being no stipulation on the subject in the Charter, the General Assembly and the Security Council are free to modify the term of office of future Secretaries-General in the light of experience”.<sup>262</sup> It does not, however, specify the modalities for doing so.

One option would be for the Security Council to include a specific, non-renewable term in its resolution recommending a candidate to the General Assembly. This approach appears to be technically feasible and would not require any Charter amendment. However, although the recommendation resolution has been acknowledged as a substantive issue to which the veto applies, if a permanent member disagrees with changing the length of term, this could raise the question of whether a change in such provisions is a procedural matter for which the veto would not apply.<sup>263</sup> In addition, it could generate tensions with the General Assembly, particularly in the absence of a broader agreement on the length of the term among the wider membership.

The General Assembly could also take the lead on this matter by adopting early during the process a resolution recommending a different term. Such a resolution could recommend a revised term and invite the Security Council to reflect this in its recommendation resolution. Given that the current process is underway, proponents of changing the term of office may seek to advance an initiative of this kind before the Council starts its straw polls in late July, as currently anticipated. Such an initiative, however, is expected to be met with strong opposition by the P5, who would most likely call for a vote in the General Assembly. It is unclear if there is the appetite to pursue a resolution with such high political cost.

An alternative option would be to encourage the candidates to voluntarily commit to serve a single term if they are selected.

Candidates could do this during the General Assembly interactive dialogues or in the meeting with Council members. While this approach would have the advantage of not requiring a formal decision from either body, among its drawbacks is that such a voluntary commitment could be reversed, and candidates who make such a commitment could be perceived negatively by those members who oppose a single term.

The question of whether the Council should recommend more than one candidate may also arise during the selection process. Advocates of this approach argue that recommending a single candidate limits the General Assembly's role in the appointment. It appears unlikely, however, that the Council would agree to this.

### The Appointment by the General Assembly

Rule 141 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly stipulates that, when the Council has submitted its recommendation on the appointment of the Secretary-General, “the General Assembly shall consider the recommendation and vote upon it by secret ballot in private meeting”.<sup>264</sup> In practice, the General Assembly has consistently accepted the Council's recommendation.

A departure from this practice would be exceptional and would most likely be the result of significant concerns among the wider membership regarding the suitability of the recommended candidate. In such a scenario, some member states could advocate for the General Assembly to reject the candidate and request other candidates.

Another option, if there are some reservations but not sufficient opposition to block the recommendation, would be for the General Assembly to proceed to a vote on the Council-recommended candidate rather than adopt the resolution by acclamation. This would allow members to express support or show their reservations through their vote. While procedurally permissible, this approach would be politically sensitive. Even if the resolution was adopted by a two-thirds majority, a significant number of votes against the recommended candidate or abstentions would be perceived as weakening the incoming Secretary-General's political standing.

With regard to the appointment resolution, members of the General Assembly could consider adopting a more substantive text that includes language on the expectations of the membership of the next Secretary-General, as well as on key steps of the selection and appointment process. This possibility was raised during the previous selection process, but time constraints and the absence of consensus led members to retain the traditional concise format. Should there be renewed interest in a more detailed resolution, interested member states would need to begin consultations early in the process, develop a draft, and request the PGA to appoint co-facilitators to guide the negotiations.

262 A/RES/11(I) [4(a)].

263 For a detailed discussion, see Sievers, “ACT proposes a more transparent, inclusive process for appointing the Secretary-General”.

264 A/520/Rev.21 Rule 141.

## VII. Challenges Ahead and Options

### Concluding Observations

The current selection and appointment process reflects both procedural advances and persistent structural tensions that continue to shape broader patterns in Council–Assembly relations, where debates over authority, legitimacy, accountability, and representation increasingly intersect.

Several of the challenges discussed in this section can, directly or indirectly, be connected to the issues around the reform of the Security Council, including the role and powers assigned to the permanent members. Permanent members emphasise the veto as a Charter-based prerogative and a core element of the existing institutional balance, while the wider membership has become more assertive in light of recent Council failures and has sought a wider role for the General Assembly.

The General Assembly and civil society will watch closely how the Council approaches the selection process. This section has noted that, while general appetite for additional proactive Assembly action appears currently low, measures such as a vote in the General Assembly on the Council-recommended candidate have not been ruled out and, under certain circumstances, impetus for these measures could grow again. More broadly, the report has shown that issues such as the profile of the candidate, the term of the Secretary-General's office, gender equality, and regional representation have periodically returned to the fore, highlighting their importance to many member states and civil society actors.

The importance of the selection process is amplified by the broader international context, in which the UN faces increasing strains alongside significant changes to the multilateral system. It is all the more important that the process results in a candidate with the requisite leadership, experience, and legitimacy—not only for the effectiveness of the next Secretary-General, but also for sustaining confidence in the UN at a time of global uncertainty.

While the legitimacy of the Security Council and, more generally, the political relevance of the UN, will continue to be judged primarily on their ability to prevent, deescalate, and resolve conflicts, the choice of the next Secretary-General remains highly consequential. The Secretary-General cannot impose specific conduct on the Council or the wider membership. But, through diplomatic judgement—in, for instance, effectively calibrating public and private diplomacy—as well as political courage and integrity, the Secretary-General can contribute to shaping outcomes across the three pillars of the UN. Being able to appoint—unencumbered by electoral promises—a senior leadership team that is also in possession of these skills will prove important too.

How the selection and appointment process is conducted, and how its outcome will be perceived, will matter not only for the standing of the next Secretary-General, but also for wider confidence in the UN's relevance and ability to navigate an increasingly fraught international environment.

### Possible Scenarios in the Event of Prolonged Council Deadlock

Should the Security Council fail to reach agreement on a recommendation before the expiry of Secretary-General António Guterres' term on 31 December 2026, this would raise complex political and procedural questions. As noted by Sievers and Daws, Chapter XV of the UN Charter requires the presence of a Secretary-General, underscoring the need for continuity in the office.<sup>265</sup> While there is no established guidance detailing how such a situation should be handled, historical practice provides some indication of possible options.

One reference point is the period following the death of Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961, when U Thant was appointed Acting Secretary-General pending agreement on a definite appointment.<sup>266</sup> This precedent suggests that, in exceptional circumstances, a temporary arrangement involving the appointment of someone who is not the current Secretary-General to an interim role—potentially with the title of Acting Secretary-General—could be envisaged.

Another option is a temporary extension of the incumbent's term, should Secretary-General Guterres be available. While the precedent is not fully analogous, U Thant accepted a temporary extension of his first term until the conclusion of the 21st session of the General Assembly, after having indicated that he did not wish to serve a second term—a position he later changed.<sup>267</sup> A key distinction is that, in Guterres' case, any extension would apply to a second term and would therefore need to be clearly framed as temporary, so as not to be perceived as constituting a *de facto* third term. If the U Thant precedent is followed, the Security Council would, after securing Guterres' agreement, make a recommendation to the General Assembly that

the incumbent's term be extended for a clearly specified period of time. The General Assembly would then adopt a resolution extending the term according to the agreed time period.

A further precedent dates to 1950, when the Security Council was unable to agree on a recommendation and the General Assembly extended Secretary-General Trygve Lie's term for three years without a Council recommendation. This case was highly controversial, however, with the Soviet Union protesting the move as "illegal" and "contrary to the Charter" for bypassing the Security Council.<sup>268</sup> Australia also abstained, questioning the appropriateness of the General Assembly's action.<sup>269</sup> A further element worth noting is that, in Lie's case, the 1946 Security Council recommendation did not contain any indication regarding his original term of office.<sup>270</sup>

Before voting on the resolution that eventually extended Lie's term, the General Assembly considered two other draft resolutions. The first, put forward by the Soviet Union, would have stated that the Secretary-General "may be appointed by the General Assembly only upon recommendation of the Security Council" and would have deferred consideration of the issue.<sup>271</sup> The second, proposed by Iraq, was to appoint a committee of seven member states to "study the matter" and report to the Assembly on possible solutions.<sup>272</sup> Neither of the two proposals garnered sufficient votes to be adopted.

Before resorting to these options, however, Council members might consider publicly acknowledging the absence of consensus and call for additional candidates to come forward and go through the hearings process, reengage in intensified informal consultations, and hold additional non-colour coded straw polls.

265 Sievers and Daws, "The Procedure of the UN Security Council" 409.

266 A/RES/1640(XVI).

267 Letter dated from the Secretary-General to all Permanent Representatives of the United Nations (1 September 1966) A/6400; Sievers and Daws, "The Procedure of the UN Security Council" 410.

268 UNGA 5th session, 296th plenary meeting (31 October 1950) A/PV.296; UNGA 5th session, 298th plenary meeting (1 November 1950) A/PV.298.

269 A/PV.298.

270 UNSC 4th meeting (29 January 1946) S/PV.4; Sievers and Daws, "The Procedure of the UN Security Council" 409.

271 UNGA draft resolution (31 October 1950) A/1471.

272 A/PV.298.

# UN Documents

## Security Council Resolutions

[S/RES/2580](#) (8 June 2021) recommended the reappointment of António Guterres.

[S/RES/2311](#) (6 October 2016) recommended the appointment of António Guterres.

[S/RES/1987](#) (17 June 2011) recommended the reappointment of Ban Ki-moon.

[S/RES/1715](#) (9 October 2006) recommended the appointment of Ban Ki-moon.

[S/RES/1358](#) (27 June 2001) recommended the reappointment of Kofi Annan.

[S/RES/1090](#) (13 December 1996) recommended the appointment of Kofi Annan.

[S/RES/720](#) (21 November 1991) recommended the appointment of Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

[S/RES/589](#) (10 October 1986) recommended the reappointment of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.

[S/RES/494](#) (11 December 1981) recommended the appointment of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.

[S/RES/400](#) (7 December 1976) recommended the reappointment of Kurt Waldheim.

[S/RES/306](#) (21 December 1971) recommended the appointment of Kurt Waldheim.

[S/RES/229](#) (2 December 1966) recommended the reappointment of U Thant.

[S/RES/227](#) (28 October 1966) recommended the temporary extension of U Thant's first term.

[S/RES/168](#) (3 November 1961) recommended the appointment of U Thant as Acting Secretary-General.

## Security Council Meeting Records and Communiqués

[S/PV.10067](#) and [S/PV.10067 \(Resumption I\)](#) (15 December 2025) was a Security Council open debate on "Leadership for Peace", under the "Maintenance of international peace and security" agenda item.

[S/PV.10043](#) and [S/PV.10043 \(Resumption I\)](#) (14 November 2025) was the open debate on working methods.

[S/PV.3714](#) (19 November 1996) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council voted on the reappointment of Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

[S/PV.2312](#) (11 December 1981) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.

[S/PV.1329](#) (2 December 1966) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended the reappointment of U Thant.

[S/PV.1311](#) (28 October 1966) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended the temporary extension of U Thant's first term.

[S/PV.1026](#) (30 November 1962) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended U Thant as Secretary-General.

[S/PV.972](#) (3 November 1961) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended U Thant as Acting Secretary-General.

[S/PV.792](#) (26 September 1957) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended the reappointment of Dag Hammarskjöld.

[S/PV.617](#) (31 March 1953) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General.

[S/PV.4](#) (29 January 1946) was the communiqué of the meeting during which the Security Council recommended Trygve Lie as Secretary-General.

## General Assembly Resolutions

[A/RES/79/327](#) (5 September 2025) was on the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly containing updated language on the Secretary-General selection process.

[A/RES/79/232](#) (19 December 2024) requested an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the obligations of Israel in relation to the presence and activities of the UN, other international organisations, and third states.

[A/RES/79/1](#) (22 September 2024) was *The Pact for the Future*.

[A/RES/ES-10/24](#) (18 September 2024) mandated a series of measures following the rendering by the International Court of Justice of an Advisory Opinion on the "Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

[A/RES/ES-10/23](#) (10 May 2024) determined that the State of Palestine was qualified for UN membership and requested the Security Council to reconsider the matter favourably. It also granted additional rights and privileges to the State of Palestine regarding its participation in the work of the General Assembly and other UN conferences.

[A/RES/77/335](#) (1 September 2023) was on the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly.

[A/RES/ES-11/5](#) (14 November 2022) was a resolution titled "Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine".

[A/RES/77/247](#) (30 December 2022) was a resolution on "Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem" which requested the International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion.

[A/RES/76/262](#) (26 April 2022) stipulated that the President of the General Assembly shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within ten working days of a veto being cast by a permanent member of the Security Council.

[A/RES/ES-11/3](#) (7 April 2022) suspended Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council.

[A/RES/75/325](#) (10 September 2021) was on the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly.

[A/RES/75/286](#) (18 June 2021) reappointed António Guterres.

[A/RES/71/4](#) (13 October 2016) appointed António Guterres.

[A/RES/69/321](#) (11 September 2015) was on the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly containing new language on the Secretary-General selection process.

[A/RES/65/282](#) (21 June 2011) reappointed Ban Ki-moon.

[A/RES/61/3](#) (13 October 2006) appointed Ban Ki-moon.

[A/RES/55/277](#) (29 June 2001) reappointed Kofi Annan.

[A/RES/51/241](#) (31 July 1997) endorsed the conclusions of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System.

[A/RES/51/200](#) (17 December 1996) appointed Kofi Annan.

[A/RES/46/21](#) (3 December 1991) appointed Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

[A/RES/41/1](#) (10 October 1986) reappointed Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.

[A/RES/36/137](#) (15 December 1981) appointed Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.

[A/RES/31/60](#) (8 December 1976) reappointed Kurt Waldheim.

[A/RES/2903\(XXVI\)](#) (22 December 1971) appointed Kurt Waldheim.

[A/RES/2161\(XXI\)](#) (2 December 1966) renewed the appointment of U Thant until 31 December 1971.

[A/RES/2147\(XXI\)](#) (1 November 1966) briefly extended the appointment of U Thant.

[A/RES/1771\(XVII\)](#) (30 November 1962) appointed U Thant as Secretary-General for a term ending on 3 November 1966.

[A/RES/1640\(XVI\)](#) (3 November 1961) appointed U Thant as Acting Secretary-General for the remainder of Dag Hammarskjöld's term.

[A/RES/1229\(XII\)](#) (14 December 1957) renewed the appointment of Dag Hammarskjöld.

[A/RES/709\(VII\)](#) (7 April 1953) appointed Dag Hammarskjöld.

[A/RES/492\(V\)](#) (1 November 1950) extended the appointment of Trygve Lie for three years, without a Security Council recommendation.

[A/64](#) (1 February 1946) contains the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly during the 1st part of its 1st session, from 10 January to 14 February 1946, including the resolution that appointed Trygve Lie.

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# UN Documents

[A/RES/11\(I\)](#) (24 January 1946) established the terms and process for appointment of the UN Secretary-General.

## Letters

Letter dated 2 April 2026 from the President of the General Assembly on Timetable for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General.

Letter dated 27 March 2026 from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Permanent Mission to the AU and UNECA to the AU Commission (no. 196/03/2026)

Letter dated 4 March 2026 from the President of the General Assembly on Modalities for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General.

Letter dated 14 January 2026 from the President of the General Assembly on the Communication of Dates for Webcast Interactive Dialogues with Candidates for the Position of Secretary-General.

[S/2025/788](#) (1 December 2025) was the concept note for a Security Council open debate on “Leadership for peace” organised by Slovenia under the “Maintenance of international peace and security” agenda item. It focused on the role and the qualities of the next Secretary-General.

[A/80/544-S/2025/765](#) (25 November 2025) was the joint letter from the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly formally inviting nominees for the position of Secretary-General and describing the process.

[A/79/825-S/2025/175](#) (19 March 2025) was a letter from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (ACT Group position paper).

[A/75/780-S/2021/179](#) (5 February 2021) was the joint letter setting in motion the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General. The letter described the overall process and noted that António Guterres had conveyed his availability to serve a second term.

[A/71/774-S/2017/93](#) (1 February 2017) was a letter from the Permanent Representative of Japan, Koro Bessho, reflecting in his personal capacity on his experience of the 2015/2016 selection process, particularly as President of the Security Council for the month of July 2016.

[S/2016/784](#) (13 September 2016) was a letter from the President of the 70th session of the General Assembly to the President of the Security Council on the changes in the selection process and future improvements.

Letter dated 15 July 2016 was from the President of the General Assembly forwarding the 18 May 2016 and 29 June 2016 letters from, respectively, ACT and NAM proposing a facilitation process for the appointment resolution.

[A/70/623-S/2015/988](#) (15 December 2015) was the joint letter formally inviting nominees for the position of Secretary-General, establishing a clearly defined nomination process.

[S/2006/252](#) (20 April 2006) was a letter from Malaysia, Chair of the NAM Coordinating Bureau, to the Security Council, communicating NAM's formal position that the next Secretary-General should be from Asia.

[A/6400](#) (1 September 1966) was a letter from Secretary-General U Thant indicating that he did not wish to serve a second term, a position he later changed.

*The letters from the President of the 80th General Assembly on the selection and appointment process can be found at: <https://www.un.org/pga/80/documents/letters/>*

## Other

[A/520/Rev.21](#) (2025) are the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, with amendments and additions adopted by the General Assembly up to and including its 79th session.

[A/51/24](#) (18 July 1997) was the Report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System.

[S/1996/952](#) (18 November 1996) was the draft resolution recommending that Boutros Boutros-Ghali be reappointed as Secretary-General. The draft resolution was not adopted due to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Security Council.

[A/50/24](#) (23 July 1996) was the Report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System.

[S/96/Rev.7](#) (1982) Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council.

[PC/20](#) (23 December 1945) is the report of the UN Preparatory Commission.

[UNS\(0921\)/W4](#) (November 1996) The “Wisnumurti Guidelines” for selecting a candidate for Secretary-General.

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Security Council Report is a non-profit organisation supported by the Governments of Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Carnegie Foundation, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Germany, Ireland, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Kuwait, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Open Society Foundations, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, and Individual Contributions.

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