



**Selection and appointment process of the Secretary-General of the United Nations
Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly**

**Identical letters dated 3 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica and
the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the President of
the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council**

We have the honour to transmit on behalf of 25 Member States of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT)¹ a non-paper on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General for the term beginning in 2022 (see annex). We hope that the attached note—which builds on the Group’s lessons learned from the 2015-2016 selection process²—will serve as a useful reference for current and future selection processes.

We should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 126.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Permanent Representatives of El Salvador and Slovakia to the United Nations, co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on the Revitalization of the General Assembly.

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¹ Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay.

² A/72/514-S/2017/846. Available at: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2017/846>

Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General for the term beginning in 2022

Summary

- *ACT lessons learned and recommendations on the selection and appointment process of the ninth Secretary General 2015-2016*
- *A more structured, transparent, open, and inclusive selection process*
- *Open hearings for all candidates with Member States and with civil society participation*

Introduction

António Guterres's once-renewable five-year term as Secretary-General of the United Nations will come to an end on 31 December 2021. Guterres was appointed in 2016, when a historic process implemented by the General Assembly and the Security Council enabled a more inclusive and transparent selection process to take place. This paper outlines the standards and guiding principles already established for the process as well as proposals for how to best strengthen the process moving ahead.

ACT¹ welcomes the letter of the President of the General Assembly to Member States, dated 11 January, outlining plans for the appointment. This includes the process of soliciting candidates for the position of Secretary-General. ACT welcomes the decision by the incumbent Secretary-General to run for a second term and acknowledges that this will have a bearing on the process compared to that of 2015-16. As the PGA notes, there is a strong interest from Member States in consolidating the 2015-16 reforms and ensuring that the process remains guided by the principles of transparency and inclusivity. In this regard, ACT recalls the lessons learned and recommendations made by the group following the previous selection process,² which must be seen as the baseline, not the ceiling, for further strengthening future appointment processes. ACT looks forward to cooperating with all parties to this end. At a time of grave global challenges, it is vital that the United Nations leads by example, by continuing to undertake an open, inclusive, and merit-based process for this crucial role.

The provisions of Article 97 of the UN Charter³ are reflected in resolutions 69/321, 70/305, 73/341 and others, that reaffirm the role afforded to the General Assembly. Guided by these provisions, the process must be further strengthened through increased inclusivity and transparency. To implement these resolutions, ACT calls for the adoption of the following proposals, which shall be conveyed to the President of the General Assembly (PGA) and the President of the Security Council.

Process for soliciting candidates

- ACT reiterates the importance of establishing a more specific timeline for the overall process.
- ACT calls for building on the practice established in the last selection process with further clarity in the process for nominating candidates, as well as for their withdrawal.
- While resolution 69/321 allows for the presentation of candidates through rounds of informal dialogues at any time during the process, ACT calls on all candidates to participate in an informal dialogue with the General Assembly as a necessary step. This should occur subsequent to the joint circulation of the letter formally presenting the candidate and prior to their inclusion in the Security Council's considerations.

Candidates and interaction

- To Member States who consider nominating a candidate, ACT strongly encourages the consideration of female candidates, noting that there has never been a female Secretary-General and highlighting commitments to gender equality and parity in senior management. ACT calls on the joint Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council to reinforce this call.
- ACT encourages the early presentation of qualified candidates, as late nominations may not allow sufficient time for full evaluation and for the Secretary-General-designate to prepare for their term in office.
- ACT encourages any candidate to interact with civil society organizations throughout the process and calls the President of the General Assembly to facilitate that interaction.
- ACT calls on all candidates to participate in all elements of the selection process, as this will strongly increase their legitimacy.

Selection process timeline

- In 2017, the ACT Group produced an indicative timeline for the appointment of future Secretary-Generals,⁴ which is as follows:
 - October of the year preceding appointment: joint letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to all United Nations Member States encouraging the nomination of qualified candidates;
 - 1 April of the appointment year: deadline for the submission of candidatures;

¹ Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group – a cross-regional group comprised of 25 Member States.

² A/72/514-S/2017/846. Available at: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2017/846>.

³ From Article 97 of the UN Charter: "The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council".

⁴ A/72/514-S/2017/846. Available at: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2017/846>.

- 30 June of the appointment year: deadline for the completion of General Assembly hearings with all candidates;
- 1 October: deadline for the Security Council recommendation and the resolution from the General Assembly regarding the appointment of the Secretary-General.
- ACT stresses the need to commit to concluding the process upon entering the final quarter of the calendar year preceding the beginning of the new Secretary-General's term.

Vision statements and dialogues with Member States and other stakeholders

- ACT stresses the need to uphold the practice of candidates producing a vision statement setting out clear priorities, consistent with resolution 73/341.⁵
- ACT encourages the PGA to again organize informal dialogues between candidates and Member States. For the incumbent candidate, ACT welcomes his willingness to again produce a vision statement and participate in an informal dialogue and welcomes this as an opportunity for accountability. For Member States to both reflect on the work and achievements of the incumbents first term and to hear clear objectives for a second term in office.
- ACT encourages the PGA to optimize the format of the informal dialogues, avoiding the excessive duplication of questions and ensuring ample time for responses.
- ACT notes the contribution made by civil society in the 2016 General Assembly informal dialogues and joint town halls and calls for this element to be replicated and, where possible, strengthened by allowing for greater participation, including through virtual modalities. ACT underlines the high and legitimate expectations of global civil society to be more closely included in UN affairs after the successful and global outreach during UN75. ACT reiterates its call to the President of the General Assembly to facilitate these interactions.
- ACT encourages the Office of the President of the General Assembly to continue the practice of using the official website of the Presidency of the 75th session of the General Assembly to provide information about the candidates, including but not limited to the presentation of candidatures, biographies, vision statements, and withdrawal letters where applicable, as well as the process itself.
- Additional enhancements could include consultations with regional groups and town hall meetings with civil society.

Appointment

- In a competitive scenario, ACT encourages regular updates from **the President of Security Council** to the wider membership on developments in the selection process and for full transparency of the results of the straw poll process.
- Welcoming the broad gender parity that was achieved across the list of candidates presented in 2016, but noting again that there has never been a female Secretary-General, ACT urges the Security Council to give serious consideration to any qualified female candidate put forward by Member States.
- In addition, and in accordance with the active role attributed to the General Assembly in Article 97 of the UN Charter, ACT welcomes discussion on the prospect of **multiple candidates being nominated by the Security Council** for the General Assembly's consideration
- ACT notes that the General Assembly resolution appointing the Secretary General provides an important tool to increase accountability and ownership for the future agenda of the UN. ACT supports using this tool in the best possible way.
- In line with the Charter provisions and the **oath** taken by the Secretary-General, ACT believes that the Secretary-General should exercise **full independence** in the selection of any **senior official** and urges candidates and Member States to desist from any actions which could compromise this principle. For example, the practice of reserving certain senior appointments for nationals of a particular Member State should be discontinued, in line with GA resolution 46/232.

ACT calls for a thorough discussion to take place on **the term of office** of the Secretary-General **and a discussion on a longer, single, non-renewable term** for future Secretary-General appointments.

Lessons learned and further recommendations

- Further recommendations and lessons learned on the 2015-16 selection and appointment of the ninth Secretary General of the United Nations are contained in documents A/72/514-S/2017/846⁶, and A/71/774-S/2017/93⁷.

⁵ OP 43 of resolution 73/341 provides for the “possibility for the incumbent Secretary-General to present a vision statement for the next term and brief the Member States on its content”.

⁶ Identical letters dated 5 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council.

⁷ Identical letters dated 1 February 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary General and the President of the Security Council.