

## How parliaments can help secure an effective UN Secretary-General

The UN's next Secretary-General will be appointed during the second half of 2016. Previous appointments have been blighted by a haphazard process wholly unsuited to selecting the best person for the job. This time things will be different. Momentum for change is building among member states, but this must be pushed forward by parliamentarians, civil society and the media to ensure we get a recruitment process worthy of the UN's top post.

Over the coming six months there is an opportunity for parliamentarians around the world to play a key role in securing a robust process to appoint the UN's chief, identifying highly-qualified candidates, and in urging governments to nominate and support only the most qualified individuals for the position.

Under the UN Charter, the General Assembly is responsible for appointing the Secretary-General, and through the General Assembly all UN member states have made a commitment to improving the selection process and making it more transparent. Parliamentarians now have an important role in ensuring governments live up to the international commitments to which they have agreed.

### Background

The UN Secretary-General plays a crucial role that affects the world's seven billion people. She or he tackles global challenges, including by driving forward the UN's work on peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. We all have a stake in ensuring that the most highly-qualified woman or man is selected to become the next Secretary-General of the United Nations.

On 11 September, the UN General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution (Res 69/321) that outlines vital reforms to the process to select the UN's next chief. Crucially, the resolution was adopted by consensus, which means all states have made an international commitment to improving the selection process. If implemented robustly, the resolution could mark an end to the [secretive and outdated selection process](#) in which a handful of powerful states decide on a candidate behind closed doors.

The resolution provides for an expanded role for the wider UN membership, including: a call for candidate nominations, especially for female candidates, from all UN member states in a 'timely manner'; basic selection criteria; publication, on an ongoing basis, of names of candidates and their CVs; and General Assembly meetings with all candidates. This heralds increased opportunities for parliamentarians and civil society organisations to be involved, not only by lobbying governments to ensure these reforms are swiftly implemented, but also by proposing candidates and scrutinising governments in their nomination and vetting of candidates.

[Click here for more information on Resolution 69/321](#) | [Click here for more information on the process](#)

### An improved process – a stronger UN Secretary-General

By supporting a fair, open and inclusive appointment process, the chances of getting an effective UN leader will be maximised. Swift and full implementation of the resolution is a crucial first step; however, there are several key proposals widely supported by member states that are absent from the resolution:

- a single, non-renewable term to strengthen the independence of the office and avoid distraction of re-election campaigning
- an end to backroom deals by the permanent members of the Security Council that reward powerful

### About 1 for 7 Billion

[1 for 7 Billion](#) is a global campaign supported by organisations and individuals committed to getting the best UN Secretary-General. We represent a combined network of 750 civil society organisations worldwide, with a global reach of more than 170 million people. The informal steering committee consists of [Avaaz](#), [FES-NY](#), [UNA-UK](#) and [WFM-IGP](#).

[Click here for 1 for 7 Billion's policy document](#) (available in the six UN languages)

- states with top UN jobs
- the nomination by the Security Council of more than one candidate for the General Assembly to choose from
- a role for parliaments and civil society in the process

## Role for parliamentarians

1 for 7 Billion has identified opportunities for parliamentarians to speak out on this issue to help ensure that a highly-qualified Secretary-General is appointed in 2016.

Urge your government to **establish a fair, transparent and inclusive process** by:

- supporting the swift and robust implementation of General Assembly Resolution 69/321
- supporting open hearings with candidates in the General Assembly in which parliaments, civil society and the media can scrutinise their visions for the role
- stating publicly that it condemns the practice by which permanent members of the Security Council pledge their support to candidates in return for promises, including on other senior appointments
- supporting a single, non-renewable term of office
- setting an example by providing transparency throughout the selection process and keeping parliament informed of developments

Urge your government to **support only highly qualified candidates** by:

- highlighting the qualities they would like to see in the next Secretary-General
- identifying, with parliamentary support, suitable individuals on the basis of criteria listed in Res 69/321<sup>1</sup>
- being transparent about the names of potential candidates it is considering putting forward
- nominating only the most-qualified women and men

## The UK example

Parliamentary activity generated by members of the UK House of Lords could provide a useful example to other legislatures around the world with regard to the role of parliamentarians on the appointment of the next Secretary-General.

Over the past two years, there have been a number of debates generated by parliamentarians urging the UK Government to support a more transparent, inclusive and accountable process. During this period, there is a clear progression in the UK's position towards advocating a robust appointment process.

During these debates UK parliamentarians have:

- emphasised the transformative effect that an improved selection process could have across the UN system
- challenged the UK to support 1 for 7 Billion's reform proposals (listed above)
- asserted that improved dialogue between states and candidates – with input from parliaments and civil society – would give the world the opportunity to scrutinise candidates
- discussed the qualities they want to see in the new Secretary-General, asking the UK what criteria it would apply in putting forward candidacies for the position
- urged the UK to ensure it only supports the nomination and appointment of the most-qualified candidates, based on specific selection criteria
- held public discussions identifying women and men that would constitute highly qualified candidates

In the UK, parliamentary interest on this subject has created an expectation of transparency, accountability and parliamentary consultation from the UK Government. Further parliamentary input from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords is expected on this issue in the coming months.

[Click here for a briefing sent to UK parliamentarians on this issue](#)

[Click here for more info on UK parliamentary activity on this issue](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Selection criteria as outlined in GA Resolution 69/321: The best possible candidate for the position of Secretary-General should be appointed "who embodies the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity and demonstrates a firm commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations." Member States are invited to present candidates "with proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills"

## A practical, transformative reform

At first glance, improving a UN recruitment process may seem like a marginal reform, given the larger challenge of generating the political will needed to make the UN more effective. But it is precisely because of this major constraint that this issue is so important.

Improving the selection process for the Secretary-General does not require amending the UN Charter – the big political stumbling block to other reform efforts, such as Security Council enlargement. Most of the current practices surrounding the appointment (see box) are customary and informal. Securing reform in this area is therefore more achievable. It could also have a transformative multiplier effect across the UN system.

The Secretary-General can manoeuvre within the parameters of UN politics to enhance its impact across the board: coordinating efforts to tackle cross-border challenges; encouraging action on situations that lack big-power interest; championing issues that governments are reluctant to address; galvanising practical UN reforms; and making smart appointments to other key UN positions, thereby strengthening UN effectiveness.

## What Secretaries-General can achieve

Peacekeeping, for example, was developed by the first Secretary-General, Trygve Lie. His successor, Dag Hammarskjöld, expanded the Secretary-General's "good offices" function. In 1955, he secured the release of 11 US airmen imprisoned in China. U Thant played a significant role in de-escalating the Cuban Missile Crisis. More recently, Kofi Annan brokered a groundbreaking deal with pharmaceutical companies to widen access to HIV/AIDS treatment, promoted international justice and the International Criminal Court as well as the 'Responsibility to Protect' norm. Ban Ki-moon has used his moral authority and convening power to promote effective action to combat climate change and has strengthened the position of women in senior appointments.

Crucially, Secretaries-General can play a pivotal role in preventing conflict. The Charter enables them to bring to the Security Council any matter that may threaten peace and security. Their ability to do so would be enormously strengthened by a more legitimate selection process that enhances their power to act effectively.

While a better process cannot guarantee a better appointment, increased scrutiny is likely to raise standards over time, as has been the case with other senior positions. For example, [civil society protests in December 2014](#) against a political nomination by the UK for the position of UN Emergency Relief Coordinator resulted in more qualified candidates being put forward.

## The appointment process In a nutshell

- There is no job description, timetable or public scrutiny
- There is a troubling history of backroom deals
- No woman has ever been seriously considered
- The P5 dominate the process. They present the rest of the UN's membership with a single candidate to rubberstamp.

## In more detail...

- The appointment is governed by a single **article (97) of the UN Charter**, which states: "The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council."
- To be nominated, a candidate must receive at least nine affirmative votes in the Security Council, with no permanent member voting against. It is therefore subject to a veto by any of the P5 and this factor is taken into account even if no formal veto is cast. (It should be noted that given the threshold of nine votes, the non-permanent members also wield influence, as a number of their votes are needed for candidates to progress).
- The Charter provisions were supplemented by a range of **General Assembly resolutions. Resolution 11(1)**, adopted in 1946. The resolution stated that "it would be desirable" for the Security Council to proffer one candidate only for consideration by the Assembly, and that the Assembly would make its decision through a simple majority vote. For recent appointments, the Assembly has opted to adopt by acclamation, rather than by vote.
- It also set the term limit for the first postholder (five years, with the option of a further five), while making clear that as the Charter did not stipulate a term limit, both it and the Security Council could modify the term in the future. A 1997 resolution (51/241), required the General Assembly to consider the term length, including the option of a single term. It was never implemented.
- In addition, informal practices have emerged, such as:
  - Consideration of "regional rotation" among postholders, so that a Secretary-General would be selected successively from different world regions. As a result, many eastern European states are currently claiming the next appointment as theirs, on the basis that there has never been a Secretary-General from that part of the world. (Given current big power tensions in the Security Council, agreement on an Eastern European candidate will be difficult to achieve). The General Assembly acknowledges regard for regional rotation and gender equality, but places "the appointment of the best candidate" first.
  - Postholders are generally from small or middle-ranking powers. P5 nationals are not nominated.
- None of the proposals advocated by the 1 for 7 Billion campaign requires amendment of the UN Charter. They enjoy widespread support from member states, opinion leaders and civil society. Most of them have already been endorsed by the General Assembly. They just haven't been implemented.

Instituting a single, non-renewable term of office, say of seven years is one of our key proposals. It would also provide future postholders with more political space. Freed from the constraints of seeking re-election, the Secretary-General would be more independent and better placed to implement her or his vision and insist states take action to prevent atrocities; galvanise international action on issues such as climate change; and hold states to account on their record on human rights.

## Why it matters to the future of the UN

Finally, a better process is an important end in itself. An institution such as the UN, which advises countries on governance, should set an example. Instead, the Secretary-General's appointment process falls far short of international standards, even when compared to other senior UN recruitment processes ([see comparative chart on senior UN appointment processes](#)).

An inclusive process that involves all states – and civil society – would help to improve UN accountability, restore confidence in the institution and reinvigorate public engagement with it. It would boost the ability of future Secretaries-General to mobilise support for the UN's agenda. And it would serve as a powerful symbol and marker of broader UN reform, representing a move away from the big-power hold on international institutions that is increasingly at odds with the world's changing geopolitical landscape and with what global civil society is prepared to accept.

## Resources

1 for 7 Billion website  
[www.1for7billion.org](http://www.1for7billion.org)

1 for 7 Billion policy document in 6 UN languages  
[www.1for7billion.org/policy-platform/](http://www.1for7billion.org/policy-platform/)

Map of support showing countries' positions on reform proposals  
[www.1for7billion.org/map-of-support](http://www.1for7billion.org/map-of-support)

General Assembly Resolution 69/321, adopted by consensus on 11 September  
[www.1for7billion.org/s/UNGA-resolution-11-sept-extraction.pdf](http://www.1for7billion.org/s/UNGA-resolution-11-sept-extraction.pdf)

List of candidates  
[www.1for7billion.org/candidates/](http://www.1for7billion.org/candidates/)

Comparative chart on senior UN appointment processes  
[www.1for7billion.org/s/Comparison-chart-for-UN-appointment-processes.pdf](http://www.1for7billion.org/s/Comparison-chart-for-UN-appointment-processes.pdf)

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