

1 for 7 Billion: mark the UN's 70th anniversary with an open and transparent process to select the next Secretary-General

The 70th anniversary of the United Nations on 24 October is a unique opportunity for all states to enhance the UN's authority by acting in the spirit of its Charter to create an open, transparent and inclusive process to select the best woman or man as the next UN Secretary-General. The world's seven billion people expect no less.

“The next Secretary-General will have to tackle multiple world crises and take forward the new development and climate change agendas. Her or his actions affect the lives of all 7 billion people across the globe. We need an open and thorough process that will deliver the best possible person for this crucial and challenging role.”

“1 for 7 Billion urges all states to act without further delay to ensure that the sound provisions for a better process, set out in the historic General Assembly resolution adopted by consensus on 11 September¹, are implemented.”

Prompt and effective implementation of this resolution would put an end to the secretive and outdated way in which the UN has to date selected its chief: behind closed doors, with no criteria or hearings, and with five countries in the Security Council holding almost exclusive sway over the outcome.

The resolution provides for hearings for all states with candidates, the circulation of their names and CVs on an ongoing basis, a list of basic selection criteria and a call especially for women candidates.

It requests the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council to start the process by writing a joint letter setting out the entire process and calling for candidates to come forward in a “timely manner”. That letter has not yet been sent, although the President of the General Assembly has said that he wants to act swiftly, that he has already started discussions with the Security Council President and that the next Secretary-General should be elected not later than three months before assuming office (i.e. latest by end September 2016).

Widespread support for the landmark resolution was expressed by the vast majority of 49 speakers - representing many more countries - at the Security Council's 20 October Open Debate on Working Methods, where the selection of the next Secretary-General was at the heart of the debate. Many speakers called for the process to begin before the end of this year and without delay.

Among Security Council members, the USA favoured transparency and inclusiveness in the selection process and the wider membership getting an understanding of the views of nominees. The UK asked what could be done to maximize the number of credible female candidates. China was silent on the selection issue. The Russian Federation was isolated in its opposition to launching the selection process now.

In contrast, elected Council members Angola, Chile, Jordan, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Spain called for early action saying that it was ‘not acceptable that the Council has been slow’ in making the necessary engagements between the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council [on the joint letter], given the importance all states attached to this, a call echoed by Venezuela.

Their call for prompt action on the joint letter was echoed by many other states participating in the debate: Australia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Estonia, South Africa, and the 25 members of ACT (Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group).

Security Council members Chad, Lithuania, Nigeria, and Venezuela welcomed and highlighted important elements of the resolution. Venezuela and Chad spoke in support of an important proposal not included in the resolution: that the General Assembly should be able to choose from more than one candidate put forward by the Security Council. Argentina, Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, Turkey, and South Africa equally called for the presentation of multiple candidates for the General Assembly to choose from.

Another important proposal not included in the resolution is that the Secretary-General should be appointed for a single, non-renewable term. Chad, Estonia for the ACT group, Guatemala, Nepal, and South Africa spoke in favour of the proposal or consideration thereof.

Many states addressing the selection process highlighted the need for the nomination of highly qualified women candidates, noting that the eight Secretary-Generals since 1946 have all been men. Governments that spoke to this issue included Argentina, Costa Rica, Colombia, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden for the Nordic countries, and the United Kingdom.

The importance of civil society in the selection process was underlined by Brazil, which mentioned the 1 for 7 Billion campaign, Estonia, Mexico, the Netherlands (for the Benelux), and Turkey.

The *1 for 7 Billion campaign* opposes the practice of veto carrying members of the Security Council extracting promises from candidates on senior UN positions in exchange for support. Russia criticized the practice of three Under-Secretary-General positions in the UN Secretariat effectively being the preserve of three countries and called for rotation and making these appointment processes more transparent.

India concluded that the current practice of coloured ‘straw polls’ of candidates in the closed Security Council session amounted to the use of veto without taking responsibility. It proposed that discussions on selection in the Council should take place in official meetings that are preferably open.

For more information please contact:

Alexandra Maresca
Program Associate, WFM-Institute for Global Policy
Tel: (1) 646 465 8520
Email: maresca@wfm-igp.org

ⁱ A RES 69/321 on Revitalization of the General Assembly