

UNSETTLED ELEMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STRENGTHENING

1 for 7 Billion discussion paper – April 2021

1 for 7 Billion is proud of the role it played in helping to transform the 2015/16 Secretary-General selection process. Facilitated by [Resolution 69/321](#), for the first time in 70 years we had an open process with an official call for applications, a basic person specification, the publication of a list of candidates alongside their vision statements and hearings for each candidate in front of the General Assembly. The official process was enhanced by healthy engagement from civil society and media outlets, including through hustings with candidates and questionnaires on public priorities for the UN. These breakthroughs represented progress on half of the [ten reforms that 1 for 7 Billion proposed](#).

Since then, 1 for 7 Billion has been calling for these reforms to be consolidated, which we were pleased to report has largely been achieved following the [launch of the 2021 selection process on 5 February](#). However, there are various elements around the requirement for state backing and the recognition of official candidates that remain unsettled and for which 1 for 7 Billion urges further clarity to bring greater transparency, structure and inclusivity to the process.

This short paper discusses these unsettled issues while also highlighting broader opportunities to build on the achievements of 2015/16.

Is state backing a requirement for nominations?

It is implicit in Resolution 69/321 that member states have the role of nominating candidates for the position of Secretary-General, for example, paragraph 35:

“Requests the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council to start the process of soliciting candidates for the position of Secretary - General through a joint letter addressed to all Member States”,

while paragraph 38:

“invites Member States to consider presenting women as candidates for the position of Secretary-General”.

Both the [2015](#) and [2021](#) joint letters from the presidents of the General Assembly and Security to member states reinforce this role, stating (identically) that “Member States presenting candidates should do so in a letter to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council”.

But member state nomination is not expressly described as the exclusive route for an individual to be considered an official candidate - either in Resolution 69/321 and the subsequent resolutions agreed in the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly, or in the joint letters. 1 for 7 Billion argued in its [2014 policy platform](#) that the process should include “a call for nominations by Member States, parliaments and civil society organisations”.

While this issue has remained unsettled, a number of civil society campaigns and self-nominated applicants for the role are testing the viability of an external route to become an official candidate for the role of Secretary-General. This has led the President of the General Assembly to maintain two lists, one of official candidates, whose credentials are circulated to member states and listed on a [dedicated website](#), and another list of "[applicants who \[have\] come to the attention of the President](#)". In the case of the latter, we understand that the letters and curricula vitae of the "applicants" are being forwarded to the President of the Security Council.

[1 for 7 Billion's 2014 policy platform](#) stated that a "*formal list of selection criteria should be published by the UN*". Thus, we were pleased to note that basic criteria were set out in Resolution 69/321, namely, a requirement for "*proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills,*" which should be applied to all applications (including state-nominated candidates).

[1 for 7 Billion's own suggested selection criteria](#) went much further, including requirements for:

- A comprehensive understanding of, and demonstrated commitment to, the purposes and principles of the UN Charter including peace and security, human rights and development.
- The possession and display of the highest qualities of moral authority, independence, integrity and courage.
- A demonstrated capacity for moral, intellectual and political leadership of an international organisation and capacity to provide leadership to the wider UN system.
- A proven ability to manage a complex international organization.
- Sophisticated diplomatic, mediation and problem-solving skills.
- Speaking and media skills required to be an effective and inspiring global communicator.
- Proven multicultural understanding and sensitivity to equality and diversity.
- A track record showing a willingness to work with civil society and all other relevant stakeholders.

The process around how applicants, whatever the source of their nomination, can become official candidates requires clarification. States should work to issue guidance on this, including more comprehensive selection criteria and the definition of a process for these criteria to be applied to applications. This could be done through the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly, which regularly discusses matters pertaining to the selection process. Given the time constraints in the current process, an option this time could be for the Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council to issue a clarification to the joint letter.

The UN Charter ascribes a role to both the Security Council and General Assembly in the appointment process. It is therefore clear is that to be a successful candidate – and, ultimately an effective Secretary-General – requires significant state support, including in both these bodies.

1 for 7 Billion supports the emergence of the strongest possible open field of candidates. We encourage states to work in partnership with civil society to identify qualified individuals of all genders and regions to come forward and enrich the process with their visions for the future of the United Nations.

Must a candidate be presented by the government of the country of which they are a national?

The requirement, established in 2015/16, for candidatures to be made public has brought structure and transparency to this aspect of the process. It has also, inadvertently perhaps, encouraged a perception that there is a convention around candidates being presented by the country of which they are a citizen.

This is not the case. For the UN's first 70 years the Security Council discussed, and at times, even voted on names without the knowledge of the individual in question, let alone that of their government. It therefore remains possible for a candidate to be nominated by a state of which they are not a citizen, or indeed by more than one state – which could be desirable in terms of demonstrating broad, cross-regional support and reflecting modern realities of multiple citizenships.

Opportunities for further strengthening

In addition to the important clarifications and refinements discussed above, we would like to see states and civil society consider the three major 1 for 7 Billion campaign proposals yet to be addressed: (1) appointment for a longer, non-renewable term of office; (2) presentation of multiple candidates by the Security Council for selection by the General Assembly; and (3) a commitment from all candidates and all states to rule out backroom deals which see promises regarding senior appointments extracted from candidates by states in exchange for their support.

- [Read our paper on a longer, non-renewable term of office](#)
- [Read our 2016 analysis of state support for multiple candidates](#)
- [Read our paper calling for an end to backroom deals](#)

About 1 for 7 Billion

1 for 7 Billion is an international coalition of more than 750 civil society groups campaigning for a fair, open and inclusive process to select the UN Secretary-General.

For further information visit: www.1for7billion.org.