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Agenda item 126

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Letter dated 10 February 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations have the honour to transmit on behalf of 25 States members of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT Group)¹ identical letters transmitting a non-paper on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General for the term beginning in 2022 (see annex).

The non-paper was transmitted on 3 February 2021 to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council. Copies of the non-paper were also sent to the Permanent Representatives of El Salvador and Slovakia to the United Nations in their capacity as Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly.

We hope that the non-paper, which builds on the lessons learned by the ACT Group from the 2015–2016 selection process (see [A/72/514-S/2017/846](#)), 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 General Assembly, under agenda item 126.

(Signed) Rodrigo A. Carozo
Permanent Representative of Costa Rica

(Signed) Martin Bille Hermann
Permanent Representative of Denmark

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.



Annex to the letter dated 10 February 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Identical letters dated 3 February 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and 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 States members of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT Group)¹ a non-paper on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General for the term beginning in 2022 (see enclosure). We hope that the attached note, which builds on the lessons learned by the Group from the 2015–2016 selection process (see [A/72/514-S/2017/846](#)) will serve as a useful reference for current and future selection processes.

A copy of the present letter has been sent to the Permanent Representatives of El Salvador and Slovakia to the United Nations in their capacity as Co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly.

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

(Signed) Rodrigo A. **Carozo**
Permanent Representative of Costa Rica

(Signed) Martin Bille **Hermann**
Permanent Representative of Denmark

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.

Enclosure

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

Summary

- Lessons learned by and recommendations from the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group on the process of the selection and appointment 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

The once-renewable five-year term of António Guterres 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. The present paper outlines the standards and guiding principles already established for the process, as well as proposals for how to best strengthen the process moving forward.

The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT Group)¹ welcomes the letter of the President of the General Assembly to Member States, dated 11 January 2021, outlining plans for the appointment. This includes the process of soliciting candidates for the position of Secretary-General. The ACT Group 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 with that of 2015–2016. As the President of the General Assembly notes, there is a strong interest from Member States in consolidating the 2015–2016 reforms and ensuring that the process remains guided by the principles of transparency and inclusivity. In this regard, the ACT Group recalls the lessons learned and recommendations made by the Group following the previous selection process (see [A/72/514-S/2017/846](#)), which must be seen as the baseline, not the ceiling, for further strengthening future appointment processes. The ACT Group looks forward to cooperating with all parties to this end. At a time of grave global challenges, it is vital that the United Nations lead by example, by continuing to undertake an open, inclusive and merit-based process for this crucial role.

The provisions of Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations² are reflected in resolutions [69/321](#), [70/305](#), [73/341](#) and others, and 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, the ACT Group calls for the adoption of the following proposals, which shall be conveyed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council.

¹ A cross-regional group comprised of 25 Member States.

² Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations reads, in part: “The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.”

Process for soliciting candidates

- The ACT Group reiterates the importance of establishing a more specific timeline for the overall process.
- The ACT Group calls for building on the practice established in the last selection process, with further clarity in the process on the nomination of candidates, as well as their withdrawal.
- While resolution [69/321](#) allows for the presentation of candidates through rounds of informal dialogues at any time during the process, the ACT Group 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, the ACT Group 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. The ACT Group calls on the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to reinforce this call.
- The ACT Group 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 his or her term in office.
- The ACT Group encourages any candidate to interact with civil society organizations throughout the process and calls on the President of the General Assembly to facilitate that interaction.
- The ACT Group 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 (see [A/72/514-S/2017/846](#)), 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
 - 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
- The ACT Group 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

- The ACT Group stresses the need to uphold the practice of candidates producing a vision statement setting out clear priorities, consistent with resolution [73/341](#).³
- The ACT Group encourages the President of the General Assembly to again organize informal dialogues between candidates and Member States. The ACT Group welcomes the willingness of the incumbent candidate to again produce a vision statement and participate in an informal dialogue, and welcomes this as an opportunity for accountability. It is also an opportunity for Member States to both reflect on the work and achievements of the incumbent's first term and to hear clear objectives for a second term in office.
- The ACT Group encourages the President of the General Assembly to optimize the format of the informal dialogues, avoiding the excessive duplication of questions and ensuring ample time for responses.
- The ACT Group notes the contribution made by civil society to 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. The ACT Group underlines the high and legitimate expectations of global civil society to be more closely included in United Nations affairs after the successful and global outreach during the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. The ACT Group reiterates its call to the President of the General Assembly to facilitate these interactions.
- The ACT Group encourages the Office of the President of the General Assembly to continue the practice of using the official website of the Presidency of the seventy-fifth 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, the ACT Group encourages regular updates from the President of the 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, the ACT Group 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 Charter, the ACT Group welcomes discussion on the prospect of multiple candidates being nominated by the Security Council for the General Assembly's consideration.
- The ACT Group notes that the General Assembly resolution appointing the Secretary-General provides an important tool to increase accountability and

³ Paragraph 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".

ownership for the future agenda of the United Nations. The ACT Group supports using this tool in the best possible way.

- In line with the provisions of the Charter and the oath taken by the Secretary-General, the ACT Group 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 that 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 General Assembly resolution [46/232](#).
- The ACT Group calls for a thorough discussion to be held on the term of office of the Secretary-General and on a longer, single, non-renewable term for future Secretary-General appointments.

Lessons learned and further recommendations

- Further recommendations and lessons learned from the 2015–2016 process of selection and appointment of the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations are set out in the identical letters dated 5 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council ([A/72/514-S/2017/846](#)), and the 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 ([A/71/774-S/2017/93](#)).
