



## **It's Time: A Woman as U.N. Secretary-General**

March 8, 2016

**A 50-50 Planet** - What could be more appropriate for celebrating International Women's Day, March 8, than to join in the international effort advocating for selection of a woman as the next United Nation's Secretary-General? The 2016 campaign theme for International Women's Day is perfect: "Planet 50-50: Step It Up for Gender Equality."

Not only do women need to be equally empowered, but women in important leadership roles around the world results in more equitable outcomes. A Ms. Secretary-General would be an important symbol of gender equality to the approximately 3.6 billion girls and women of the world, raising their aspirations of what they might accomplish in more gender equitable societies.

**A More Transparent Process** - In the 70-year history of the United Nations eight men have led that institution and the U.N. remains a male-dominant structure. The term of the current UN General-Secretary Ban Ki-moon expires in December. Several recent campaigns have pushed hard for a change in the process, which has been that the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council meet behind closed doors, make their selection and present it for approval to all the member states. Because women's rights advocates have pressed for a more democratic and transparent process, this time countries will be encouraged to nominate candidates and candidates will be able to make the case for their selection in public.

Traditionally, there has been a rotation between regions of the world. According to a former U.S. diplomat who served at the U.N. interviewed on National Public Radio (NPR), Elizabeth Cousens, notes that Western Europe has had three turns at the wheel, Latin America has had only one turn ... African has had two secretary-generals, and the Asian region has had two. One region that has not yet had representation is Central or Eastern Europe and Russia, Cousens adds, but "the regional rotation is not set in stone."

Cousens, who runs the U.N. Foundation in the U.S., says that a woman at the helm of the U.N. can be a "voice for the voiceless." She says that what is needed is, "Someone who can advocate for the human rights of the abused, for humanitarian values and principles and who can also be an effective diplomat in some of the most difficult geopolitical situations is something that is very much in American interests and something that every American should have a stake in following."

**Many Qualified Candidates** - Already more of the formal nominees thus far are from that region, including three women from Bulgaria, Moldova and Croatia. The field for qualified women is wide and deep. Jane Krasno, a U.N. watcher and teacher at City College of New York

and Columbia University, has a website, <http://www.womansg.org/> , which features a very impressive collection of highly qualified women leaders from all regions.

**Impressive Women from Central/Eastern Europe** - From the region which has not yet been represented, the possible candidates include Dr. Vesna Pusic, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia; Dahlia Grybauskaite, the first female president of Lithuania; Natalia Gherman, Deputy Prime-minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova; Irina Bokova, Director General of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) who is a Bulgarian who has studied in Moscow as well as at the University of Maryland and Harvard University; Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic who has served as president of Croatia since 201, and many other outstanding women leaders from that part of world. (Be sure to go to this website and be wowed by all the very accomplished women that are proposed as a future U.N. Secretary-General.)

Events at the U.N. on International Women's Day were to focus on how to accelerate the 2030 Agenda in building momentum for the effective implementation of new Sustainable Development Goals, plus new commitments under the UN Woman's Step It Up Initiative, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/international-womens-day>

Other groups are launching their own campaigns for a woman U.N. Secretary-General; SheUnited, at <http://sheunited.org/> which will be posting updates and tracking campaigns for U.N. Secretary-General.

**#pledgeforparty** - The official website of International Women's Day, [www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com), suggests the campaign theme hash tag of #pledgeforparty, and urges readers to take the pledge as champions of gender parity. A bevy of corporate leaders who have taken the pledge to achieve gender parity in their own organizations as well as in the wider world, <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/Leaders>

Finally, for a good read on the history and recent observances of International Women's Day, go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Women%27s\\_Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Women%27s_Day) The earliest known observance was held on Feb. 28, 1909 and was organized by the Socialist Party in America to commemorate the 1908 strike by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. As it spread to other parts of the world, the observance took on the causes of women's equal rights and suffrage. Throughout the decades since then, activities and events have varied. In many countries, International Women's Day celebrations are akin to our Valentine's Day – expressing the respect, appreciation and love towards women. Others celebrate women's economic, political and social achievements. The political and human rights theme designated by the U.N. is central to the observance and advances public awareness of the struggles of women worldwide.

As women everywhere are becoming more aware of the need for women's full equality and empowerment that is becoming a primary emphasis of International Women's Day.