



ISSUE ADVISORY - Next U.N. Secretary-General Should Be a Woman – But Men Are in the Lead

By Luna Floyd, NOW Government Relations Intern
August 3, 2016

Kofi Annan, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Kurt Waldheim, U Thant, Dag Hammarskjöld, Trygve Lie, Ban Ki-moon. What do all these names have in common? All of them have been United Nations secretary-general in the 70-year history of the organization, and all of them are men. The top diplomatic position in the world has been exclusively male since the inception of the United Nations. As Ban Ki-moon's term concludes at the end of 2016, groups across the world are advocating for a female Secretary General. Of the twelve official candidates for the position, six are female. A woman in the world's top diplomatic position could demonstrate the U.N.'s commitment to gender equity and increase its focus on the treatment of women including their security, rights, and opportunity. It is imperative that the U.N. Security Council choose a woman for the job. The world has had eight male secretaries-general - the ninth should be a woman.

Sadly, an informal straw poll of the Security Council conducted on July 21 shows that male candidates are in the lead. This does not mean that a woman cannot be selected, but it looks less likely. Word of the results leaked out that former Portugal Prime Minister and High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres is in the lead, followed by former Slovenian president Danilo Turk. The highest-ranked female candidate, UNESCO director Irina Bokova, is tied for third place with two other male candidates.

The straw poll is done through confidential ballots marked "encourage," "discourage" and "no opinion." The Security Council is expected to carry out more straw polls, perhaps in conjunction with "informal dialogues" held with each of 12 candidates—as they have done in the past. A final Security Council vote is slated for October and a candidate is then recommended to the 193 members of the General Assembly who cast the deciding vote.

Why A Woman Needs to be the World's Diplomat-In-Chief - Gender equity is one of the primary goals of the United Nations. As their website states, the U.N.'s goal is to "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life." What kind of statement is the U.N. making if their top job does not align with their goals of gender equity? Proponents of a female secretary-general say that a woman would likely bring a new style of diplomacy to the U.N., with an emphasis on peacekeeping. Of the five permanent member countries of the U.N. Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States), only two of those countries have been represented by women in recent history and currently, 14 out of 15 member countries in the Security Council are represented by men. The U.N. needs to lead by example and ensure that full gender equity is represented within the organization.

As Shazia Rafi, a board member of the Campaign to Elect a Woman U.N. Secretary-General put it, "The U.N. is the global institution of peace and security and the bulk of the victims of peace and security are women and children. Women are not a minority. They are almost 51 percent of the world's population... They are not reflected in economics. They are not reflected in the positions of power in the same way. But having this job in the hands of a woman I think would be a very strong message to the rest of the world."

A study conducted by the Harvard Business Review in 2011 analyzed 7,280 leaders from a variety of organizations, and concluded that women scored better than men in 12 out of 16 leadership categories. Women's leadership skills have been proven time and again, and every candidate running for Secretary General has already proven herself to be a strong leader in her own country or in a U.N. agency.

"A woman is naturally, almost instinctively, devoted to ensuring peace; peace, security and stability, because this is what we search in our individual lives," former Moldovan Foreign Minister and Secretary General candidate Natalia Gherman said.

The open letter from The Campaign to Elect a Woman U.N. Secretary General and sent to members of the Security Council on July 20 sums it up best: *"After seventy years and eight male leaders in succession, the choice of a woman would send a signal of transformation and would be an important step in correcting a gender bias of many decades. It will galvanize renewed action to implement existing commitments to women's rights and opportunities. It may bring different approaches to U.N. leadership and new perspectives to the immense challenges of global governance today. It would renew and inspire interest and support of the U.N. from the larger public."*

A follow-up letter from the Campaign sent on August 2 reiterates the importance of selecting a woman, saying that, *"It will bring different approaches to UN leadership and new perspectives to the immense challenges of global governance today. It would renew and insure interest and support of the UN from a larger public."* A second straw poll is to be conducted on August 5.

Female Candidates Incredibly Qualified - In a list of 12 candidates that includes many former heads of state and directors of U.N. programs, several women stand out as the most qualified candidates. All the women who are running have served as heads of state, Parliament members, or U.N. leaders, making each one an expert in the field and fully qualified to hold the position of Secretary General. Jean Krasno, a professor at City College of New York's Colin Powell School and chair of The Campaign to Elect a Woman U.N. Secretary General, told NBC News that "It can no longer be argued that there are no qualified women."

Profiles of all the women running for Secretary General can be found at The Campaign to Elect a Woman U.N. secretary-general website (<http://www.womansg.org/>). Three female frontrunners have emerged since the July straw poll results were made known:

- **Irina Bokova** - Ms. Bokova was nominated by her home country of Bulgaria in February 2016. She currently serves as the director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Familiar with the structure and bureaucracy of the United Nations, she is considered a frontrunner in the secretary-general race.
- **Helen Clark** - Ms. Clark was nominated by her home country of New Zealand in April 2016. She has previously served as the first woman elected Prime Minister of New Zealand and is currently the Administrator of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Her trailblazing career qualifies her for this prestigious position.
- **Susana Malcorra** - Ms. Malcorra was nominated by her home country of Argentina in May 2016, the fifth woman to enter the race. She has served as chief of staff to Ban Ki-moon and currently serves as Argentina's foreign minister. Because of her proximity to the secretary-general job and her decades of experience, she is also a strong candidate.

(The straw poll results can be found at

http://media.wix.com/ugd/296f72_a617f3032c5a4b5bbbe4b39b5037a866.pdf)

Also in the race are former Macedonian Foreign Minister Srgjan Kerim; Montenegro Foreign Minister Igor Luksic; former Slovenian President Danilo Turk; former Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic; Moldova's former Foreign Minister Natalia Gherman; and former U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, who is also a former Portuguese prime minister. The straw poll results show Guterres in the lead, but that could change depending on the opinions of the permanent Security Council countries.

The Changed Nature of Choosing the New Secretary-General - For decades, the process of selecting a new secretary-general has been distinctly undemocratic, with the Security Council simply emerging with the name after back-room deliberations. This cycle, a greater emphasis on transparency has not altered the process of selection, but has made it more available to the public. This change has come about thanks to pressure from women's organizations that protested the secrecy and "old boys' club" nature of the selection process.

The U.N. Security Council chooses the candidates for secretary-general, but the five permanent members of the Security Council each have veto power over individual candidates. According to an informal "rotation" rule, the new Secretary General should be from Eastern Europe – the only region that has not produced a Secretary General. (This is part of what makes Irina Bokova such a strong frontrunner.) This year, a new push for transparency led to each candidate's application materials and personal statements to be posted online. For the first time, an open forum was held with candidates on April 13, allowing questions from nonprofits, businesses, and other non-U.N. organizations. Results of preliminary straw polls have also been released online.

This is an important change for the United Nations. As the New York Times reported, "In the past, candidates for secretary-general lobbied mainly behind closed doors, and a decision emerged, like white smoke, from inside the Security Council. This year, the candidates spoke

one by one inside a wood-paneled room known as the trusteeship council. The hearings were streamed live over the Internet.”

However, for all this transparency, the public still has no real input in selecting the new Secretary General. The permanent members of the U.N. Security Council can still veto candidates – in the past, this has resulted in more of a “secretary” than a “general.” The Council has no obligation to take public opinion into account. The Council still presents a candidate to the General Assembly to accept, and for all the transparency in the world, a group of five countries has the power to choose the world's top diplomat and may not want to pick a candidate who will “rock the boat or challenge their authority.”

Candidates Speak Out for Reforms - According to Julian Borger of *The Guardian*, some of these candidates have been open in proposing big changes for the United Nations. The organization has been criticized for being slow to resolve crises such as the armed conflict in Syria and the Ebola epidemic in Africa, according to Julian Borger, World Affairs Editor of *The Guardian*. The U.N. is seen by some as becoming more unaccountable and inscrutable in its operations.

Vesna Pusic, former Croatian foreign minister and a candidate for secretary-general, has said that she wants to dramatically change the U.N.'s handling of human rights, increasing a focus on the treatment of women. Pusic told *The Guardian*, “If you look at all the key issues that the U.N. or different states are being faced with, like access to education, child marriages, sexual violence, family violence, sexual violence in conflict, access to paid jobs, human trafficking, slavery – of course, they affect men too – but to a large extent women are the targeted group. If you are address women and girls, you are addressing the human rights of a society.”

Natalia Gherman, former foreign minister from Moladava, advocates for the use of article 99 of the U.N. Charter which empowers the secretary-general to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his or her opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security” as a way to increase pressure on the council to take action on long-running armed conflicts in places like Syria and Iraq. Several of the male candidates have also advanced their critical views and proposals for U.N. reform.

Certainly, a more transparent process has provided a platform for candidates – who may or may not have a good chance at being selected – to present their concerns and suggestions for a more effective functioning of the U.N.

Conclusion - As of January 2015, there were only 19 female heads of state or government in the world, according to the group U.N. Women. The United Nations has made a commitment to uphold gender equality worldwide, so why does that commitment not extend to the U.N.'s highest office? There are many qualified women, including UNESCO director Irina Bokova, UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, and Ban Ki-moon's former chief of staff Susana Malcorra.

The National Organization for Women has joined with allies in prior years to advocate for a woman when a new secretary-general was to be selected. We believe that after eight male Secretaries General, it's time for a woman to take on the "most impossible job in the world" as the ninth U.N. Secretary General.

For more information, please follow these links:

Campaign to Elect a Woman Secretary General,
<http://www.womansg.org/>

The "most impossible job in the world" may finally go to a woman this year,
<http://qz.com/665321/the-most-impossible-job-in-the-world-may-finally-go-to-a-woman-this-year/>

Will the next UN secretary general be a woman?
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/jul/09/will-the-next-un-secretary-general-be-a-woman>

The next UN secretary general: the 12 vying to replace Ban Ki-Moon,
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/21/un-security-council-to-take-first-vote-on-ban-ki-moons-replacement>

Are Women Better Leaders than Men?
<https://hbr.org/2012/03/a-study-in-leadership-women-do>

Men Voting for Men: UN Security Council's Straw Poll for Secretary-General,
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dulcie-leimbach/men-voting-for-men-un-sec_b_11134744.html

Open Letter to the United Nations Security Council from the WomanSG Campaign,
<http://www.womansg.org/#!open-letter/g9lmd>