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## **H.E. António Guterres**

Secretary-General of the United Nations  
United Nations Secretariat Building  
405 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10017  
United States of America

*Sent via email*  
10 August 22

Dear Secretary-General,

Four years ago, when your office was tasked with exercising the authority delegated to it by the General Assembly in selecting a new High Commissioner for Human Rights, we enjoyed a constructive partnership with your team in improving the transparency of the selection process and ensuring the strongest possible field of applicants from which the best possible candidate could emerge.

We write today to offer the same support, and to request the same cooperation and an update on proceedings.

### **Conducting an effective process**

We would like to express our gratitude to you for the openness you have shown in certain respects and your ongoing commitment to elements of best practice for senior appointments. Notably:

- That the appointment process be based on formal selection criteria
- That there be a published job description
- That there be an inclusive process welcoming nominations from all member states
- That the advertisement be placed on the Secretary-General's senior appointments vacancies website

We do however note that various recommendations that we and other civil society voices made four years ago remain unimplemented and that in one key regard the process followed this time around is less open.

In 2018, a letter from your then Chef de Cabinet reassured us that “The Secretary-General will make a specific request to Member States, non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions and regional organizations for the nomination of women candidates and to the public to encourage women candidates to apply to the vacancy.” On this occasion, no such assurances have been made to civil society and no such actions appear to have been carried out thus far.

Other outstanding issues include:

- A call for nominations encouraging candidates with disabilities, LGBT+ candidates and those from different backgrounds
- A recommendation from the Joint Investigation Unit (JIU) report in 2011 that the Executive Office of the Secretary-General publish a clear timetable with five core dates on it, only one of which is currently explicitly disclosed: the expected date by which all applications need to be received. The following are not disclosed:
  - the expected date by which the new incumbent is expected to report for duty (granted this can be inferred)
  - the expected date by which candidates selected for interviews will be contacted; interviewed candidates will be informed of the results of the recruitment process
  - whether consultations are expected to be conducted
  - the expected date the final selection is to be announced
- A recommendation that the vacancy be advertised widely on social media in all UN languages. We also believe, although we hope to be contradicted, that the advertisement was not placed in print and online media in all UN regions

In many cases this is likely the consequence of the truncated timeline, about which we must express concern. In 2018 we recommended that the appointment process be held in a timely manner, allowing for sufficient time for a thorough process and expressed our dismay when this did not take place, leaving a mere 10 weeks to conduct the process.

Given that the UN's standard notice period for permanent staff is three months and that the deadline for applications was fewer than three months from the anticipated start date of 1 September, we concluded this was too short a period for a robust process. This tight turnaround meant insufficient time for: widespread promotion of the vacancy; a wide range of candidates to apply; rigorous vetting of candidates; civil society input; and leaving the successful candidate with little time to prepare for this challenging role.

On this occasion the timeframe was even shorter, leaving a mere two months to conduct the process.

### **Request for further information**

We write to request an update on the process, the steps taken to ensure it is robust with respect to the potential for conflicts of interest, the expected timeline from this point forwards, and information with respect to the following questions:

- Will generic information about candidates be released in accordance with the 2011 JIU recommendation that the nationalities and gender of candidates interviewed and those recommended following the interviews be made public? We also believe that information on other indicators (e.g. disability) should be disclosed, as well as the number of individuals in the overall pool of applications and those interviewed.
- Will women make up at least half of the candidates invited for interview in line with your commitment to gender parity? At bare minimum will there be at least one woman interviewed in line with the recommendation of the 2011 JIU report?
- Will the appointment follow the established process on the vetting of candidates and will vetting information be published?
- Will the terms of reference of the interview panel be published? The 2011 JIU report recommends that a public disclosure include “an explanation of how the interview panel was constituted, how many members served on the interview panel, what were their grades, and whether other agencies/entities and/or external experts were invited to sit on the interview panel and why”.

- Will civil society be included on the interview panel, as they were in 2018? How will the civil society representative on the interview panel be selected and will their name be disclosed?
- As part of the application process will the Secretary-General and his team consult with non-state external stakeholders within the human rights community?

### **The qualities required in a High Commissioner for Human Rights**

We reiterate the point we made in a joint letter with 60 other civil society groups on 21 June 2022 that the post “requires a human rights champion who is courageous and principled. Your nominee should have a proven record of effective public advocacy, as well as demonstrated experience working with defenders and victims of violations. The post requires a strong commitment to addressing discrimination, inequality, oppression and injustice in all its forms, as well as combatting impunity and pursuing redress and accountability for all human rights violations and abuses, including those committed by the most powerful governments”.

We asked our over 20,000 members and supporters to crowdsource the skills, qualities, and individuals, who they think should be prioritised in the search for the next high commissioner for human rights. Their responses overwhelming called for a qualified high-profile individual with experience advocating for human rights and engaging with civil society; someone willing to stand up to oppressors and who represents constituencies beyond the usual suspects in the powerful West.

### **With our thanks**

We would like to reiterate once again our thanks for the openness your office has shown in collaborating with us in strengthening recruitment processes over the years, and to wish you all the best for the successful conclusion of this vital appointment.

Kind regards,



Marissa Conway  
CEO, United Nations Association - UK