

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
12 October 2023

Dear Secretary-General,

In 2022 the Blue Smoke working group was formed by UNA-UK, Plataforma CIPÓ and Strategy for Humanity to shine a light on elections and appointments to senior positions within the United Nations. Working with civil society partners we have established the attached statement of principles which we believe should guide senior appointments at the United Nations and how states engage with appointment processes.

We have the pleasure of sharing this statement with you, alongside the following list of civil society organizations that have endorsed them. Collectively we urge you to put them into practice, and in doing so, put inclusivity, transparency and fairness at the heart of UN appointment processes. We also urge you to champion these principles throughout the wider UN system.

Yours sincerely,

1. United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK)
2. Plataforma CIPÓ
3. Strategy for Humanity
4. Amnesty International
5. Asociación Chilena Pro Naciones Unidas (ACHNU)
6. Association of World Citizens
7. Budapest Centre for Dialogue and Mass Atrocities Prevention
8. Cameroon for a World BEYOND War
9. Center for Human Rights-Nis (CHRNis)
10. Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation (CDPE)
11. Citizens for Global Solutions (CGS)
12. CIVICUS
13. Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UNWN)
14. Democracy Without Borders
15. Equality Now
16. Free Trade Union Development Center

17. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
18. Global Governance, Justice & Security Program, Stimson Center
19. Global Justice Center
20. Global Memo
21. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)
22. Human Rights Watch
23. InterAgency Institute
24. International Drug Policy Consortium (IDCP)
25. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
26. Let There Be Light International
27. National Campaign For Sustainable Development-Nepal
28. National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia (NACCSOL)
29. Nonviolent Peaceforce
30. Observa China 观中国
31. Peace Direct
32. Penal Reform International
33. Permanent Peace Movement
34. Protection Approaches
35. UNA-NCA
36. Union des Amis socio Culturels d'Action en Developpement (UNASCAD)
37. United Nations Association Harpenden
38. United Nations Association London and South-East Region
39. United Nations Association Luton
40. United Nations Association South Sudan
41. Wereld Federalisten Beweging Nederland (WFBN)
42. World Federalist Movement/Institute for Global Policy (WFM/IGP)

Blue Smoke Statement of Principles

"We, the peoples" have a right to know who is exercising the power vested in the United Nations, and how they got there.

Our goal is for the appointment of senior UN leaders to be inclusive, merit-based and transparent. This is essential not only for the credibility – and therefore effectiveness – of the mandate-holder and the UN, but to help find the world's most qualified leaders without discrimination on the basis of their nationality or background. Given the challenges humanity is facing, the world cannot afford anything less.

Article 100 (2) of the UN charter seeks to establish a truly independent international service which member states must not attempt to influence. Article 101 (3) states that staff should be recruited "on as wide a geographical basis as possible."

There is a need for honesty about what this means in practice. UN staff are, and should remain, independent international civil servants, but senior staff are also public figures. No one is well served by the pretense that senior appointments are internal matters when it has been revealed time and again that these posts are traded by and between states for political capital.

Civil Society can help the UN here: by shining a light on the reasons why recruitment decisions are made and the nature of the competing interests of states and other stakeholders who have sought to sway appointments, we can hold those responsible to account while strengthening the UN's independence.

And we can help the United Nations pursue an intersectional approach to equity whereby the geographic basis of the UN Secretariat is increased and doors are opened for those who currently find them closed, but no position is considered to be anybody's exclusive property.

Now, more than ever, the public needs confidence in the UN. Pulling back the curtain on UN senior appointments in pursuit of an open, inclusive, merit-based approach will aid this mission.

Principles for fair, inclusive, transparent appointments for UN senior leaders

1. **FAIR AND HUMAN RIGHTS-CENTRED:** All UN appointments should be merit-based and follow established best practice, with a job description, person specification, and a competitive, proportionate and rigorous selection process to ensure that the best possible candidate is chosen. Adherence to the highest standards of commitment to human rights is non-negotiable, and should comprise part of a comprehensive vetting process.
2. **INCLUSIVE:** All UN appointments should be open for applications from the most qualified candidates without discrimination on the basis of nationality, background, race, sexuality, age, gender, or religion. All UN appointments should be publicly advertised in good time with the advert circulated to all member states, to civil society, and in conventional and social media.
3. **DIVERSE:** A fair distribution based on region, gender and background should be achieved at all levels of UN appointments. The UN and member states should proactively invest in removing barriers to ensure that nationals from less well-represented and marginalized groups worldwide are able to compete on equal terms with those from developed nations or from more privileged backgrounds.

4. **GENDER SENSITIVE:** Acknowledging the huge disparities that persist across the UN system, the UN and member states must play a proactive role in countering gender discrimination and promoting equality. This should include equal or greater than equal representation of qualified women at all stages of the recruitment process as well as within the hiring team. Due regard should be given to exclusionary practices built into employment conditions, working methods and selection criteria.
5. **TRANSPARENT:** The public has a right to know key details of all senior appointments at the UN: what the terms of reference for the role are, when they were appointed, when their contract starts, how long their contract lasts for, if and when their contract is renewed, how the post is funded, and when and how to apply when the post falls vacant. This information should be consolidated in one readily accessible online location, and communications should be issued whenever an appointment is made or a contract renewed.
6. **NO MONOPOLIES:** No UN role should be de facto ring-fenced for the nationals of any UN member state, the institutional practice of placing emphasis on the nationality of appointees should be curtailed, and whenever the General Assembly's regulation that no individual of the same nationality as their predecessor should ever be appointed to a senior post is ignored the Secretary-General should be called to explain why.
7. **NO LOBBYING:** States should desist from seeking to influence UN decisions on senior appointments, in keeping with Article 100(2) of the UN Charter. Unless an appointment requires nominations from member states, states should refrain from backing candidacies for senior UN roles, publicly or otherwise.
8. **RETHINKING STATE BACKING:** States can play a positive role in ensuring that job vacancies are widely circulated and talent nurtured. Where an appointment requires nominations from member states, states should support the best candidate for the job, not just their own nationals. States should be encouraged to work together in jointly nominating qualified candidates.
9. **STAKEHOLDER INCLUSIVE:** The UN serves the people, not member states. Whenever the UN consults with states it should also consult with the people directly, including geographically and intergenerationally diverse civil society representatives and those stakeholders who stand to be affected by the mandate of the role in question.
10. **MAINSTREAMED:** The independence of UN Specialized Agencies and related international organizations must not be used as an excuse to avoid accountability and transparency. These principles are relevant to all parts of the UN system, and best practice should be mainstreamed with respect to senior appointments.