



U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 19

Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

AND THE WINNER IS... BAN KI-MOON

by Lydia Swart
2 October 2006

On 9 October 2006, the Security Council (SC) is expected to vote unanimously to recommend to the General Assembly that they appoint Ban Ki-Moon from the Republic of Korea to become the next Secretary General (SG) of the United Nations. In line with past SG selections, the UN General Assembly will likely ratify the SC's recommendation and formally appoint Ban-Ki Moon in the very near future. The recommendation hardly came as a surprise as Ban Ki-Moon was a clear frontrunner in every straw poll the Security Council took.

The 2006 Selection Process

This time, the selection process was somewhat more transparent than before. Member States and the public were able to find out when the Security Council was holding its 'straw' polls and other particulars such as the voting categories used (encourage, discourage, and a new category, no opinion), whether the P5 would have voting cards distinguishing them from the non-permanent members; who the official candidates were at any given time; and the results of the straw polls in a matter of hours, thanks to the media and the blog www.unsg.org. Many of the details of the straw polling process were communicated by the Security Council President to the President of the General Assembly, who subsequently shared this information with all Member States, thus increasing transparency. Regrettably, however, as in the past, no formalized process was put in place before the beginning of the selection process; both the straw polling and final vote were held behind closed doors; and the results only became public due to leaks.

One significant decision taken by the Security Council earlier this year and communicated by the President of the Security Council Ellen Margrethe Løj to the President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson on 2 June 2006, was of major consequence especially to the so-called 'sleeper' or self-nominated candidates and may also impact how the new SG will be perceived. Danish Ambassador Løj wrote: "I wish to inform you that the Security Council intends to start in early July the process of consideration of candidacies which will have been presented to its President by a member State." This decision reflected GA resolution 51/241 of 1997, which alluded to candidates being 'endorsed' by Member States. Consequently, it seems likely that some of the 'sleeper' candidates who officially joined the race in September, which was rather late in the game, did so because of two factors: it was becoming evident that being nominated by a Member State was the only sure way to get on the final list of candidates to be voted on and the strong showing of Ban Ki-Moon and Shashi Tharoor in the first straw poll suggested that permanent members would have no need to resort to a 'dark-horse' candidate the P5 would pick themselves at the last moment as had happened in the past.



U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 19

Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

One of the concerns that arise from the policy of having Member States officially nominate candidates is its potential clash with the notion that a Secretary General should be independent and serve in his personal capacity. One suspects that the costs of visiting capitals are borne by the nominating Member State. The activities on behalf of a candidate by Heads of State and their representatives in capitals throughout the world further nationalizes the selection process and at times is augmented by national press writing about the talents, popularity and standing of "our" candidate.

In addition, the Center knows of at least two candidates on the final roster who had expressed an aversion to an open selection process and the consequences of campaigning. One of them, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, had early on stated in an interview with our Center in April 2006, that an open process could prevent the best candidates from coming forward for fear of their own - or others - embarrassment if they are not elected. While she believed "transparency and some kind of coherence in the process are important," she added that she wouldn't want to see it turn into a "circus... I would hate to see the selection of the secretary general being the sort of process where candidates run around the world looking for financial supporters, where financial supporters affect the selection process and where votes are bought. It opens up a rather horrifying prospect."

In fact, running around the world looking for support apparently was what many of the candidates felt they had to do. What else would account for one candidate quickly visiting China, the other making a last-minute visit to Paris, and quite a few attending the NAM Summit in Cuba in mid-September? Shashi Tharoor openly complained in an interview with the Center in July 2006, after learning that the first straw poll would take place in July: "I have to say that I am obviously not very thrilled about the timing because I have entered the race only three weeks ago and therefore I am the only candidate who has not had an opportunity to visit all the 15 capitals of the members on the Security Council, I am not even close to a third of those. I have not had a chance to make my case to even all the Ambassadors on the Council – so I have to say that I am not delighted by the fact that this initial vote may be given an importance that is not entirely fair, given the fact that some candidates have had far more time to make their case than others." As it turned out, other candidates entered the race even later, missing the first straw vote altogether.

Ban-Ki Moon, who joined the race officially in February, had the opportunity to visit many capitals well before the first straw poll. It probably did not hurt his chances that at the time he made his visits he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of South Korea. His outreach to representatives at the UN was extensive as is clear from an interview with the Center in June 2006, where he said that he had invited ambassadors to dinner "as part of his ongoing efforts to meet individually with all representatives and in order to make the selection process for the secretary-general more transparent."



U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 19

Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

Future Selections

There have been many recommendations over the years to create a formal selection procedure and set other basic criteria for the selection of the SG. This year was no exception. In February 2006, Canada circulated an informal paper calling for agreement on a set of criteria and qualifications and a more transparent and inclusive process, among other proposals. Because of time constraints, many of Canada's proposals were not taken into consideration for this year's election.¹ Another diplomat close to the selection process this year indicated that for the next UN Secretary General to have more legitimacy, the General Assembly should have a role in ascertaining the strengths of candidates nominated by Member States before they are scrutinized by the Security Council, which would give them some degree of endorsement by a majority of Member States.

It is essential for Civil Society to continue to generate ideas and conduct an ongoing campaign for a more transparent and democratic selection process so that a process will be in place well before it is needed. A fair process should also be developed for reappointments. For instance, consideration needs to be given to the merits of allowing a lone no-vote of one permanent member to prevent a Secretary General from continuing his/her work for a second term, as happened in the case of Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Hopefully, discussions on reform of the UNSG selection process will continue in the 61st Assembly within the framework of the follow-up to the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Revitalization of the General Assembly, rather than stay dormant until it is time for the next selection process to begin.

Among the many excellent proposals for reforming the UNSG selection process by Civil Society, are those by UNA-USA², UNSG.selection.org - a campaign endorsed by a large variety of NGOs - and Equality Now. These proposals include elements such as: increased transparency through a widely approved selection process at the beginning of the race with set timelines and timely progress reports; establishment of criteria and qualifications; a selection committee; gender and regional equity; an increased role of the General Assembly and its President; sharing the candidates' platforms with Member States and the public at large; and the possibility of more than one candidate to be referred by the Security Council to the General Assembly.

The Center would like to congratulate Ban Ki-Moon on his selection and wishes him much strength and success with his stated aims as put forward in his interview with us in June 2006 and during recent public talks: to harmoniously reconcile different opinions among Member States and overcome mistrust between the North and the South; to have the UN promise less and deliver more by setting clear priorities; to sustain the momentum of UN reform, including management of the Secretariat and Security Council enlargement; to promote *Responsibility to Protect*; to facilitate interaction with IGOs, the private sector and civil society; and to appoint more women to higher level positions.

¹ Security Council Report: *Special Research Report: Second Report on the Appointment of the UN Secretary-General*, New York, 21 June 2006

² *Selecting the Next UN Secretary General*, Thomas R. Pickering and Sir Brian Urquhart, New York, May 2006
Center for U.N. Reform Education 211 East 43rd Street • Suite 1801 • New York, NY 10017
(212) 682-6958 • FAX (212) 682-6959 • E-mail: inquiries@centerforunreform.org
Internet: <http://www.centerforunreform.org>