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The United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) is a center for innovative programs and dialogue to engage Americans in issues of global concern, from peace and security to genocide prevention and international law. Its policy and advocacy programs support the work of the United Nations, the importance of nations working together and the need for United States leadership in the United Nations. A not-for-profit organization, UNA-USA is a member of the World Federation of United Nations Associations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
Overview ........................................................................................................... 2
Issues ............................................................................................................... 5
The Way Forward ............................................................................................. 14
Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 18

APPENDICES

Appendix A: UNA-USA Fact Sheet: An Historical Overview on the Selection of United Nations Secretaries-General

Appendix B: United Nations Charter, Article 97

Appendix C: United Nations General Assembly Resolution 11(1)

Appendix D: United Nations General Assembly Resolution 51/241, Annex Article XIX
INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of talk over the years about reforming, renewing and revitalizing the United Nations. During the past year, in particular, the process of UN reform has been a subject of intense focus and debate. Real progress has been made in some important areas, but considerable challenges still remain.

In many ways, the effort to modernize the institution can be viewed as the hallmark of Kofi Annan’s 10-year term as secretary-general. As Annan prepares to step down at the end of 2006, the matter of who should assume this leadership role at such a pivotal moment in the organization’s history is perhaps the central question facing the member states this year. It is reasonable to expect that the reform process should touch upon the selection of this key figure in the work of the organization and beyond. Seeking the best person for the job should be the key pivot for the new UN.

This report draws upon a series of discussions that were convened by the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) in an effort to bring attention to the significance of selecting a new secretary-general. We are most grateful to all who participated in these exchanges and gave so freely of their wisdom and ideas. In exchange for their candor, we agreed to preserve their anonymity. In offering the recommendations contained in this report, our only agenda was to think through how to find the most qualified man or woman to fill the job. Given the issues at stake, we should demand nothing less.

This project would not have been possible without the efforts of UNA-USA’s leadership and staff—we especially would like to thank Bill Luers, Suzanne DiMaggio, Angie Drakulich and Ari Shaw. We also are grateful to the United Nations Foundation for generously supporting this effort.

*Thomas R. Pickering and Brian Urquhart
May 2006*


**OVERVIEW**

Against the backdrop of the intense process of reform and renewal currently underway at the United Nations, the upcoming leadership transition of the secretary-general could be the most important succession in the organization's history. December 31, 2006 marks the end of Kofi Annan’s tenure as secretary-general, and the man or woman named to be the UN’s next leader will unquestionably play a pivotal role in setting the course of the world body in the years ahead.\(^1\)

The *UN Charter* identifies the secretary-general as the “chief administrative officer,” while also empowering him to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.” The office of the secretary-general has evolved to encompass both administrative and diplomatic portfolios, at once managing a large bureaucracy and forging consensus among often polarized member states.

Despite these far ranging responsibilities, the *UN Charter* provides minimal guidance on the process of selecting the UN’s top post, stating simply that “the Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.”\(^2\) There are no explicit criteria or qualifications for the job, including term limits or country of origin. In practice, this has given the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) veto power over the selection process within the council since the UN’s founding. The General Assembly has had the theoretical power to override the council’s selection by declining to give the recommended candidate the necessary majority vote; nonetheless, to date, the General Assembly has never rejected a candidate referred by the Security Council.

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\(^1\)Kofi Annan of Ghana began his first term in 1997; his second term ends in December 2006. Previous secretaries-general include: Trygvie Lie of Norway (1946-1952); Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden (1953-1961); U Thant of Burma/Myanmar (1961-1971); Kurt Waldheim of Austria (1972-1981); Javier Perez de Cuellar of Peru (1982-1991); and Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt (1992-1996).

\(^2\)See Article 97 of the *United Nations Charter* appended to this report (Appendix B).
In the absence of official guidelines, some precedents have emerged over the years with respect to choosing the secretary-general. The post’s tenure lasts either one or two terms of five years. The selection has followed a geographical rotation of sorts, and it is generally accepted that the secretary-general should not originate from one of the permanent five member states.

**Current Debates**

In recent years, so-called precedents for selecting the secretary-general have been criticized as privileging political considerations over the selection of the most qualified candidates. Permanent members have used their veto toward political ends in three of the past six elections in which an incumbent secretary-general sought a renewed mandate. Most recently, in 1996, the United States used its veto to block the re-election of Boutros Boutros-Ghali—despite its support of his selection in 1991—in order to quell domestic political opposition to the Clinton administration. Then presidential candidate, US Senator Bob Dole, famously declared: “When I’m president, no American soldier will be forced to serve under Boutros Boutros-Ghali.” Many UN observers saw the lone American veto as a domestic electoral ploy by the incumbent president to assuage the concerns of conservative voters.¹

Such overt politicking has prompted larger calls to reform the selection process. Prominent ideas that have emerged include: establishing a more open, deliberative process of nominating candidates through a nominating committee; foregoing the geographical rotation of candidates which privileges region of origin over individual capabilities; and eliminating gender barriers that have historically been tied to the office.

The Reform Angle

A re-examination of the process of selecting the secretary-general can be viewed as a component of the larger ongoing UN reform effort. At this key moment in the organization’s history, a strong, capable leader is needed to ensure the implementation of reforms and to guide the transformation of the UN into a more efficient and effective body. The choice of a new secretary-general will have a lasting impact on the organization and, indeed, the world. An open, responsible selection process must reflect the weight of such a decision.

In this context, the United Nations Association of the United States of America, with the support of the United Nations Foundation, carried out an initiative to examine issues relating to the selection of the next secretary-general. Under the co-chairmanship of Thomas R. Pickering, former US Ambassador the UN and former US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Sir Brian Urquhart, former UN Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, the effort aimed to: (a) clarify the appropriate roles of the secretary-general and identify the qualities we should look for in the next secretary-general; (b) shed light on how to best improve the selection process; and (c) think through what should be the priority agenda for the next secretary-general.

Toward this end, in early 2006, UNA-USA organized a series of meetings and consultations on choosing the next person to fill the UN’s top post. Participants included member state representatives to the UN from every region of the world, former and current UN officials, representatives from nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, scholars and other experts. While this resulting report does not represent a “consensus” document, it was informed to a large extent by discussions and exchanges with this wide-ranging group of participants.

We begin by outlining the major issues that emerged, pointing out areas of agreement and disagreement, and conclude with a number of recommendations for consideration that we believe, if implemented in a timely way, could significantly enhance the upcoming selection process and strengthen the role of the next secretary-general.
ISSUES

Some observers have noted that the lack of clarity as to how past appointments of secretaries-general have unfolded has brought with it an element of flexibility that has been beneficial to the process. However, while this approach may have worked in the past and while some aspects of it may still be viable, the time has come to re-examine some existing assumptions. The following section explores the three major questions that surfaced consistently throughout the discussions convened by UNA-USA:

- How should one envision the secretary-general’s roles and responsibilities, and what qualities are most important in selecting the next secretary-general?
- What changes should be made to the selection process?
- What should be the key agenda items and priority areas for the next secretary-general?

Roles and Qualities

Given the array of tasks for which the secretary-general is responsible, it is seemingly impossible to look for the specific qualifications an individual would need to do the job well. As one participant in our discussions summed it up, the secretary-general is such a multifaceted position that it essentially reflects “10 full-time jobs in one” and, as such, a selection based on specific qualifications may prove to be a thorny exercise. Indeed, it would be difficult to describe the position on paper and even more difficult to find a person who could match such a description.

During our discussions, many contended that a more useful approach would be not to focus on qualifications, but instead to evaluate candidates based on the qualities that they possess. In this regard, there was general agreement that any candidate under serious consideration should have outstanding diplomatic skills and possess strong leadership capabilities.
It is notable that some felt leadership in this instance should reflect a person’s ability to ensure that the organization is managed well, but not necessarily to serve as the organization’s “manager.” Instead, proponents of this view asserted that candidates should exhibit a willingness and capability to delegate responsibilities to a deputy on a daily basis while maintaining overall accountability for the health of the organization. Others disagreed, emphasizing that at this moment in the organization’s history—with the mismanagement of the Oil-for-Food program and sexual abuse perpetrated by peacekeepers still fresh in people’s minds—the UN needs first and foremost a strong administrator at its helm (see below for more on this issue).

The following additional qualities were described as important: a broad understanding of the global issues facing the UN today; a commitment to carry out needed reforms; a strong vision with an outlook toward issues of the future; and the ability to translate ideas into concrete action.

There was general agreement that the next secretary-general must be a “uniting figure” that can develop solutions to challenges in diplomatic, economic and humanitarian fields. Related to this, many cited that an essential quality to look for is the ability to bridge the gap between North and South and to repair the deep divisions that have emerged in recent years. Many noted that the next secretary-general must have the capacity to work with all member states and the ability to “stand up to the P-5 if necessary.” However, some cautioned that this person should not be too strong, especially when it comes to dealing with the permanent members of the Security Council (P-5). Some participants drew attention to the mounting pressure that the next secretary-general will likely face from powerful member states who have not been given a permanent voice in the UN’s core decision making body—the Security Council.

Some suggested that the ideal candidate should be an “insider” who has served in the UN for an extensive period of time. Others disagreed, noting that the so-called scandals faced by the UN in recent years make an “outsider” a much more desirable candidate at this point in time.
The Role of the Deputy Secretary-General. Many participants in our discussions said that the thinking about the role of the UN’s top post has not kept pace with current realities on the ground. In his blunt assessment of the situation, current Secretary-General Kofi Annan tackled this issue in a recently issued report: “I am expected to be the world’s chief diplomat and at the same time to run a large and complex organization, as it were, in my spare time. This will hardly be less true for my successors.”

Throughout our discussions, participants noted that the deputy secretary-general position had not been utilized to its full advantage. Some participants agreed that empowering the deputy with a real line of authority on management and operations would enable the secretary-general to continue to lead the ever-growing political and policy dimensions of the UN’s work. Proponents of this view noted that, given the realities of the job, defining the secretary-general as chief political officer and the deputy as a chief operating officer makes great sense. But some disagreed and maintained that when assessing the qualities of candidates for the post of secretary-general, an emphasis should be placed on management skills, not political skills.

There was some discussion about whether slates in which candidates for both the secretary-general and deputy posts are appointed together would improve the selection process. Some participants found this “team” idea from the outset to be appealing because it could provide a better sense of the approaches and policies that might emerge during the secretary-general’s tenure. But others thought such an approach could unnecessarily complicate matters if, for example, some member states are in favor of the secretary-general candidate but not the deputy candidate. Some cautioned that a “slate” approach could lead to too much electioneering and more formal campaigning. Others were concerned that it could result in tying the secretary-general’s hands and prevent him/her from replacing the deputy if the two were not able to work together effectively.

The Selection Process

The process for selecting the secretary-general has mainly consisted of secret ballots and closed meetings, with information distributed through leaks rather than formal reporting. This has led to calls for greater transparency.\(^5\) Indeed, many participants in our discussions generally agreed that a more open, democratic process would go a long way toward producing the most qualified and credible candidate. Specific proposals pointed to the need for more choices, while acknowledging that support must come from the P-5. Calls for more information about the “platforms” of candidates prior to selection as a way to improve the search was another common theme. Some also suggested that any person interested in being the secretary-general should reach out to all member states in the General Assembly and regional groups, and not just members of the Security Council.

In addition to the process of self-nomination, some advocated in support of the establishment of a search committee with diverse regional representation, possibly comprised of former heads of state that have emerged positively in an international light. Others suggested the creation of a similar type of committee, but one that is much less formal and without specific parameters for membership. This idea, however, was met with some reluctance, primarily by those who pointed out that the UN is not a corporation and should not be managed as such. One participant likened the establishment of a search committee for the next secretary-general to placing an advertisement in *The Economist*.

As the process moves forward, some recommended that the Security Council use “straw” votes as preliminary indicators of consensus. Anonymous straw ballots were introduced into the Security Council in 1991 with different colored coded ballots for permanent and non-permanent members as a mechanism by which to test the viability of

a candidate before proceeding to a formal ballot. In 1996, this method was used again and indicated the origin of the vote—“red” for permanent members and “white” for elected members of the Security Council. Some noted that such an approach may prove useful once again. Others, however, asserted that the straw ballot method makes the process even more secretive.

For future selection processes beyond 2006, some suggested that the UN borrow from the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) practice of having extensive consultations among candidates being considered for the organization’s top post and member states representatives to gauge the level of support for each. Others called attention to additional notable aspects of the procedures for the appointment of the WTO Director-General, such as more transparent criteria for candidates and establishing set timeframes for the selection process (the WTO process begins nine months prior to the expiration of the incumbent’s term and member states have one month from the start of the process to nominate candidates).

The Unwritten Tradition of Regional Rotation. The UN Charter does not contain any specific reference to regional rotation in the process for selecting the secretary-general. However, General Assembly Resolution 51/241 states that “due regard” should be given to regional rotation. During our discussions, some argued that the practice has been more or less adhered to for the past 60 years and, as such, it should continue to be observed. Those who strongly favored regional rotation viewed it as a way to ensure an element of equity in the process. Proponents of this view made the point that the principle of regional rotation is the only way for the developing world to be represented, and that Annan should now hand off the baton to an

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1Only Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali drew a sizable number of votes—rising to 11 out of 15 on the last round. The Security Council then took a formal vote that unanimously recommended him to the General Assembly, which approved his appointment.

2In 1996, Kofi Annan received a “red” ballot in seven rounds, indicating lack of support from a permanent member. Eventually the ballot changed color and Annan was selected, demonstrating how the weight of majority opinion can influence a permanent member.


4See Appendix D.
Asian. Others felt that while regional rotation is important and desirable, we should move on to others if Asia cannot produce the best candidate. A third group of participants took the position that the most qualified person for the job should be sought regardless of regional origin.

The Asians and Africans, who represent the majority of the 191 member states of the UN, seem to agree that it is now Asia’s turn to take the helm at the UN. But the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the Security Council appear to be divided on where the next secretary-general should come from. Following a Security Council discussion on the next secretary-general held in February 2006, Wang Guangya, China’s ambassador to the UN, made his government’s position clear when he stated, “We believe, with more than two billion people, definitely Asia can provide the best qualified candidates.” Not surprisingly, Russia supports this view. But Washington has expressed strong opposition to the principle of regional rotation—a view that is shared by the United Kingdom. Both have placed an emphasis on qualifications over geographical origin. The French are somewhere in the middle, preferring to see an Asian take the top post, but noting that it should not be the determining factor.

The US has called attention to the fact that Eastern Europe has never had a shot at filling the secretary-general seat. Eastern Europe is acknowledged as a regional group in Security Council elections and has recently been allocated six seats as a region on the newly established Human Rights Council. But any candidate from Eastern Europe would most likely be unacceptable to the Russians.

With a lack of consensus among the P-5 on this issue, it remains to be seen if the element of regional rotation will be adhered to in the upcoming process. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, a number of participants observed that, pragmatically speaking, it would be difficult to envision any other outcome at this point.
The Role of the General Assembly. As previously noted, the selection process is grounded in Article 97 of the UN Charter, which calls for the appointment of the secretary-general by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. The General Assembly is on record as opting out of the selection process by requesting that the Security Council recommend no more than one candidate. Resolution 11(1), which was passed in 1946, states that “it would be desirable for the Security Council to proffer only one candidate for the consideration of the General Assembly.”

A second General Assembly resolution, number 51/241, which was passed in 1997, sought to establish a set of principles that might be applied to the selection of the secretary-general, calling upon the assembly to make “full use of the power of appointment enshrined in the Charter” and identifying a role for the General Assembly president in facilitating interaction with the Security Council.

Throughout our discussions, some participants interpreted the sentiment of Resolution 51/241 as saying that the process should begin at both ends of the organization with the president of the General Assembly consulting regional groups to identify candidates at the same time as consultations were carried out in the Security Council.

Not surprisingly, many participants called for the General Assembly to have a larger role in identifying specific candidates that reflect the priorities of the membership and submit them to the Security Council. In fact, some asserted that the process of choosing the secretary-general should originate in the General Assembly. It was also observed that increasing the role of the General Assembly in the process may serve to enhance the legitimacy of the ultimate selection. Supporters of this point-of-view noted that having candidates appear before the General Assembly as well as regional groups could prove to be useful.

Notwithstanding the wide agreement on this issue, many conceded that an expanded General Assembly role would likely become a great source of tension with the Security Council that would not be easy to resolve.

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10See Appendix C.
Agenda and Priorities

It is self-evident that the demands currently being placed upon the UN are markedly different from those of just a decade ago, let alone since the organization’s founding six decades ago. As some participants in our discussions emphasized, the UN has in many ways become a peacekeeping and peacebuilding organization—a development that the founders of the UN could not have foreseen. With 80,000 peacekeepers stationed in trouble spots around the globe, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations is now the largest deployed military in the world, aside from US armed services. Additionally, more than half of the UN’s 30,000 civilian staff are currently serving in the field, engaged in peacekeeping, humanitarian relief efforts, electoral assistance and human rights monitoring.

It was also noted by some discussion participants that the UN is being called upon more and more to respond to humanitarian and complex emergencies. Currently, more than 19 million refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons receive food, shelter and medical assistance from the UN. At the same time, the UN system is leading the largest international effort against diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and polio.

When thinking about choosing the next secretary-general, participants underscored that any candidate being seriously considered for the job must have the capacity to carry out the aforementioned responsibilities and, at the same time, lead and follow through on the ambitious agenda for reform that was put forward at the 2005 World Summit and is already in progress. This reform agenda includes:

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Solidifying the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission to strengthen the secretary-general’s capacity for mediation and to serve as the organizing mechanism to coordinate preventative and post-conflict activities;

Following through on a comprehensive convention against terrorism that universally condemns terrorism in all forms and also significantly strengthens the UN’s counter-terrorism capacity;

Strengthening the newly established Human Rights Council to reinforce the UN’s human rights machinery which had been discredited over the years by its predecessor, the much criticized Human Rights Commission;

Moving forward on member states’ recognition that there is an obligation to protect suffering populations under certain conditions, particularly genocide, if the government in question is unable to do so or is itself inflicting the suffering;

Continuing the implementation of a wide range of management reforms in the Secretariat and beyond, including increasing the UN’s oversight capacity, updating all mandates older than five years and overhauling policies on budget, finance and human resources;

Maintaining the momentum toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—a set of eight clearly-defined, time-bound and measurable development targets that provide a common development strategy for the international community on issues ranging from universal primary education and a reduction in child mortality to environmental sustainability and the promotion of gender equality—by 2015; and

Revitalizing the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to follow up on relevant outcomes of major UN conferences and develop a mechanism for monitoring member states’ progress toward fulfilling the MDGs.
THE WAY FORWARD

The perspectives and ideas presented in this report are being advanced as a contribution to the debate on the search for the next secretary-general at a time when considerable attention is being focused on the process. Indeed, the recommendations that follow would not require any changes to the UN Charter and could be feasibly implemented during the 2006 selection process if the member states marshal the collective will to act in a timely manner.

Roles and Qualities

- In selecting the next secretary-general, the overriding goal should be to appoint the most qualified man or woman for the job. Whether an aspirant for the position has the right qualities required to carry out the job should hold primacy over all other considerations.

- The secretary-general is and should remain a fundamentally diplomatic post. The person selected to be the next secretary-general should first and foremost be a highly capable diplomat with outstanding leadership and negotiating skills. His/her moral authority should be beyond reproach because, ultimately, the secretary-general’s power flows from the respect commanded by the individual holding the office.

- Notwithstanding the previous point, the next secretary-general must obviously do more than simply take on what is regarded as traditional diplomatic tasks. The ideal candidate would be an extremely successful “diplomatic manager” who understands the major issues and the organization and has the international stature, capabilities and personal qualities to inspire the member states and the public to have confidence in his/her abilities to do the job.

- At the end of the day, the secretary-general should be held accountable for the overall management of the organization, but he/she should be able to entrust day-to-day management responsibilities to the deputy and other senior staff.

- In light of the problems faced by the UN in recent years, the next secretary-general should not be an “insider,” but rather someone with a fresh perspective and without any baggage collected during
service within the UN. It is important that the next secretary-general has not learned what cannot be done.

The Selection Process

• In the UN’s 60-year history, the organization’s top post has never been held by a woman. In light of this, gender equality should be viewed as an important criterion in the selection process and an effort should be made to identify qualified female candidates.

• The unwritten principle of regional rotation has helped to somewhat mitigate the arbitrariness of the process in the past, but this is not a compelling enough reason to stick with it. It would be ideal if the expectations of a region to have its turn coincided with the most qualified candidate. However, a candidate should not be accepted simply because it is his/her region’s turn.

• The time has come to expand the role of the UN General Assembly in the selection process. The assembly should play a role early on and assist in surfacing candidates. The president of the General Assembly should be engaged in seeking candidates and making those candidates available to the Security Council as envisioned in Resolution 51/241. Ideally, the selection process should start from both ends of the organization and meet in the middle—in other words, both the Security Council and the General Assembly should provide names of candidates for the other organ to consider informally.

• Greater transparency in the selection process within certain boundaries is achievable. In addition to meeting with members of the Security Council, candidates vying for the position should also meet with the presidents of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the regional groups. A deeper sense of process, including more extensive consultations would increase transparency in a significant way.

• General Assembly Resolution 11(1), which calls upon the Security Council to recommend one nominee for appointment as secretary-general, should be amended so that two or more well qualified candidates are submitted to the assembly for consideration. Following on the previous two recommendations, the General Assembly and the Security Council would have been working

Ideally, the selection process should start from both ends of the organization and meet in the middle—in other words, both the Security Council and the General Assembly should provide names of candidates for the other organ to consider.
closely together prior to this point, resulting in nominees who are already well known to the member states.

- In an effort to open up the process, the Security Council, working through its president, should appoint a nominating committee composed of highly regarded individuals with integrity and stature and task them with the responsibility of seeking out qualified candidates.

- The thinking on who can lead the organization should be expanded and qualified candidates from the business community and civil society as well as diplomats and political leaders should be considered for the post.

- The use of “slates”—where candidates for secretary-general and deputy secretary-general run together—should not be pursued. Instead, member states should select a qualified candidate who has the capacity to make the right choices in his/her future appointments, including a deputy.

**Agenda and Priorities**

- The process of selecting the secretary-general should be viewed as a component of the larger UN reform agenda. This is a critical moment for the organization, and a strong, capable leader is needed to ensure the implementation of reforms and to guide the transformation of the UN into a more efficient and effective body.

- During the selection process, each candidate should be expected to present a “platform” to the member states and the broader public that sets forth his/her views on what he/she regards to be the priority issues, how he/she would address those issues and what he/she would like to achieve as secretary-general.

- Related to the previous point, candidates seeking the UN’s top job should communicate how they propose to address the most pressing issues facing the organization and the international community at large, including development and the eradication of poverty, terrorism and weapons proliferation. They also should elaborate on how they would deal with the expanding demands on the UN system in the areas of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance as well as the UN’s increasing role as a central coordinator for global
action on issues relating to the environment and health. The next secretary-general will have to dedicate his/her full energy to seeking new international cooperation in these areas.

- Secretary-General Annan has already initiated a series of management reforms that fall within his authority. Those reforms that remain outside of his authority should be implemented by the member states before the end of this year in order to give his successor a solid basis from which to begin. In this regard, all candidates for secretary-general should be asked to commit themselves in advance to the full implementation of the reforms aimed at modernizing the organization.

- The next secretary-general should be prepared to immediately deal with the question of how much management authority he/she will delegate to the deputy secretary-general and other senior staff.
CONCLUSION

The negotiations leading up to World Summit in September 2005 revealed how far apart member states are on many fronts, including how to approach development, terrorism, disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation. Making improvements to the process for selecting the UN’s next leader in the current climate of strained relations will undoubtedly be difficult. But there is too much at stake to do otherwise.

In some ways, the process of reform is an issue of the triumph of imagination over reality. Imagination is required to overcome entrenched realities that always seem to steer the conversation toward the next secretary-general rather than focusing on effecting real changes at the present time. The urgency of the issues at hand call for changes in thinking in time for the election in 2006, rather than waiting until 2011 or beyond.
APPENDIX A:
A UNA-USA FACT SHEET
An Historical Overview on the Selection of United Nations Secretaries-General

Background

There have been seven Secretaries-General of the United Nations—the world organization’s top post. These include: Trygvie Lie of Norway (1946-1952); Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden (1953-1961); U Thant of Burma/Myanmar (1961-1971); Kurt Waldheim of Austria (1972-1981); Javier Perez de Cuellar of Peru (1982-1991); and Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt (1992-1996). Kofi Annan of Ghana is the current secretary-general; his term ends in December 2006. Below is a look at the way in which each secretary-general was elected.

1946: The first selection of a secretary-general at the UN was, inevitably, precedent-setting. Eminent names were floated, including those of United States President Dwight Eisenhower and the United Kingdom’s Winston Churchill, but the political dynamic quickly moved the selection process toward a lower common denominator. The US supported Lester Pearson, the Canadian ambassador to the US (and future prime minister), but the then Soviet Union refused to support a North American. Arguing that the post should go to someone whose country had suffered Nazi occupation during World War II, the Soviets suggested the little-known Norwegian foreign minister and one-time labor leader Trygve Lie. The Security Council recommended Lie on January 29, 1946, and the General Assembly appointed him to a five-year term three days later.

1951: The Soviet Union became bitterly hostile to Lie in 1950 because of his support of the UN intervention in Korea and soon ceased all dealings with him. It vetoed his nomination and proposed four other candidates from developing countries (India, Lebanon, Mexico and the Philippines), foreshadowing a long-term Soviet strategy of making common cause with the developing world in order to reduce Western influence at the UN. Western nations rallied to Lie’s side and refused to support any alternative candidate. With the Security Council unable to recommend someone, the US circumvented the Soviet veto of Lie by proposing to the General Assembly that it approve an extension of his current term by three years. The assembly passed the extension 46 to 5, with eight abstentions. Lie, however, faced continuing Soviet opposition during his extended term and announced his resignation late in 1952.
1953: The US initially supported the candidacy of Carlos Romulo, the Filipino originally nominated by the Soviets in 1951; this time Moscow opposed him. The Soviets also vetoed the European favorite, Lester Pearson, establishing the principle that no “NATO national” need apply. Instead, the Soviet Union nominated a woman from India, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who was vetoed by China (then represented by the nationalist government in Taipei). After two ballots, the Security Council’s Western members privately offered the Soviets four new names. Three of these were promptly rejected, but the Soviet Union had no objection to the fourth—a relatively obscure Swedish deputy foreign minister named Dag Hammarskjöld. Believing they had found a cautious, non-political technocrat who would not inspire strong feelings in either power bloc, council members voted on the third ballot to recommend Hammarskjöld, and he was quickly approved by the General Assembly by 57 to 1.

1957: Hammarskjöld, who said he would not serve a second term unless reelected unanimously, was again nominated by the Security Council and reappointed by the General Assembly in a single day without a dissenting vote.

1961: Angered by Hammarskjöld’s having gone beyond their narrow interpretation of Security Council mandates concerning the Congo crisis, the Soviets began touting the idea of a three-person executive (“troika”) to replace him. But in the face of steadfast Western resistance, they abandoned the idea following Hammarskjöld’s death in a 1961 plane crash. To avoid a prolonged public stalemate, the US and Soviet Union then conducted extensive preliminary talks on candidates before voting in the Security Council. Accommodating demands of the developing world for a non-European, the two powers eventually agreed to support Burma’s permanent representative to the UN, U Thant. Because of objections from the French and Arab states (the former were unhappy that Thant had chaired an Afro-Asian committee on Algerian independence, and the latter that Burma had diplomatic relations with Israel), the council could only agree to recommend his appointment with the caveat that he only serve out the duration of Hammarskjöld’s term. A year later, Thant was unanimously reappointed to serve a four-year term, effectively giving him the same five-year mandate enjoyed by his predecessors.

1966: Thant was unanimously reelected to a second five-year term.

1971: Thant gave more than a year’s notice that he would not serve a third term. Finland’s permanent representative, Max Jakobson, and Austria’s foreign minister,
Kurt Waldheim, both launched discreet but visible campaigns to line up support—a significant new development in the election process since candidates had not previously presented themselves or campaigned openly. Jakobson drew strong US and British support, but Arab states opposed him (his parents were Jewish) and the Soviet Union vetoed his nomination. The Soviets supported Waldheim, but China (now represented by Beijing) vetoed him, as did the United Kingdom. Two Latin Americans then gathered support in the early balloting but were blocked by superpower opposition—from the Soviet Union in the case of Argentina’s Carlos Ortiz de Rozas and from the US in the case of Chile’s Felipe Herrera. Waldheim pressed on and, with a Chinese abstention in a third round of voting, won the council’s recommendation and was unanimously appointed by the General Assembly the next day.

Note: A decade and a half later, it would be revealed that the post-war UN War Crimes Commission had branded Waldheim a suspected war criminal for his activities in the German army. The incriminating files, stored away in the UN archives, were never consulted during the election process, a fact that subsequently drew unfavorable public attention to the Security Council’s seemingly inadequate process for reviewing candidates.

1976: China blocked an East-West consensus on Waldheim’s re-nomination with a veto on the first ballot while a Latin American move to replace him with Mexico’s outgoing president, Luis Echeverría, drew US opposition. On a second ballot, China withdrew its veto and the council nominated Waldheim for a second term, which the General Assembly promptly approved.

1981: The US, Soviet Union and United Kingdom all supported Waldheim’s re-election to an unprecedented third term, but were frustrated by a Chinese veto through 15 ballots. China supported Salim Salim of Tanzania whom the US repeatedly vetoed for having thwarted US efforts to preserve a UN seat for Taipei a decade earlier. The six-week deadlock in the Security Council was finally broken when both candidates withdrew and Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, a Peruvian diplomat, won recommendation as a compromise candidate.

1986: Pérez de Cuéllar won unanimous re-election to a second term.

1991: With Pérez de Cuéllar retiring, African countries insisted it was “Africa’s turn” to claim the office of the secretary-general. They lined up commitments from the 102 members of the Non-Aligned Movement to vote against any non-
African candidate in the General Assembly and a pledge from China to do the same in the Security Council. The Organization of African Unity proposed six Africans for consideration—one from Egypt and five from sub-Saharan Africa. American and European efforts on behalf of Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek and Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland proved futile in the face of solid opposition from developing countries. For the first time in history, the Security Council conducted five anonymous “straw polls” among its members before proceeding to a formal ballot, during which none of the candidates from sub-Saharan Africa drew much support. Only Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali drew a sizable number of votes—rising to 11 on the last round. The council then took a formal vote that unanimously recommended him to the General Assembly, which approved his appointment.

1996: The US vetoed the re-election of Boutros Boutros-Ghali after accusing him of neglecting to carry out the necessary reforms of the UN bureaucracy. In his departing remarks, Boutros-Ghali said that inadequate resources, namely large debts owed to the UN, of which the US held the largest, had prevented him from achieving successful reforms. The General Assembly warmly applauded Boutros-Ghali before appointing Ghana native Kofi Annan as his successor. Annan first came to the attention of US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright during his work in the former Yugoslavia as head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. As such, he became the first career UN official to rise to the organization’s top position.

2001: After a successful first term of significant changes, including a more fiscally responsible budget and the strengthening of human rights and field missions, Kofi Annan was unanimously re-elected to a second term. The Security Council, in a display of strong support, quickly nominated Annan for re-election six months before the year-end deadline of his first term. In his swearing-in speech, Annan addressed the relationship between the people of the world and the UN as a primary priority in his future agenda. He also reaffirmed his continued commitment to the reform efforts of the organization.

2006: This election year for the UN’s top post could be the most important transition in the organization’s history.
APPENDIX B:
UNITED NATIONS CHARTER
CHAPTER XV
THE SECRETARIAT

Article 97

The Secretariat shall comprise a Secretary-General and such staff as the Organization may require. The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. He shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization.
APPENDIX C:

Resolutions Adopted on the Reports of the Fifth Committee

11(1). Terms of Appointment of the Secretary-General

The General Assembly resolves that, in view of the heavy responsibility which rest upon the Secretary-General in fulfilling his obligation under the Charter:

1. The terms of the appointment of the Secretary-General shall be such as to enable a man of eminence and high attainment to accept and maintain the position.

2. The Secretary-General shall receive a salary of an amount sufficient to bring him in a net sum of $20,000 (U.S.), per annum, together with representation allowance of $20,000 (U.S.), per annum. In addition, he shall be provided with a furnished residence, and repairs and maintenance of which, excluding provision of household staff, shall be borne by the organization.

3. The first Secretary-General shall be appointed for five years, the appointment being open at the end of that period for a further five-year term.

4. The following observations contained in paragraphs 18-21 of section 2, chapter VIII of the Preparatory Commission’s Report be noted and approved:

   (a) There being no stipulation on the subject in the Charter, the General Assembly and the Security Council are free to modify the term of office of future Secretaries-General in the light of experience.

   (b) Because a Secretary-General is a confident of many governments, it is desirable that no Member should offer him, at any rate immediately on retirement, any governmental position in which his confidential information might be a source of embarrassment to other Members, and on his part a Secretary-General should refrain from accepting any such position.

   (c) From the provisions of Articles 18 and 27 of the Charter, it is clear that, for the nomination of the Secretary-General by the Security
Council, an affirmative vote of seven members, including the concurring votes of the permanent Members, is required; and that for his appointment by the General Assembly, a simple majority of the members of that body present and voting is sufficient, unless the General Assembly itself decides that a two-thirds majority is called for. The same rules apply to a renewal appointment as to an original appointment; this should be made clear when the original appointment is made.

(d) It would be desirable for the Security Council to proffer one candidate only for the consideration of the General Assembly, and for debate on the nomination in the General Assembly to be avoided. Both nomination and appointment should be discussed at private meetings, and a vote in either the Security Council of the General Assembly, if taken should be by secret ballot.

Seventeenth plenary meeting, 24 January 1946.
APPENDIX D:

United Nations
A/RES/51/241
General Assembly
22 August 1997

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
[without reference to a Main Committee (A/51/24, para. 15)]
51/241. Strengthening of the United Nations system

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, by which it established the
Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United
Nations System,

Recalling in particular paragraph 2 of resolution 49/252,
Taking note of the report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the
Strengthening of the United Nations System, 1/

1. Adopts the text contained in the annex to the present resolution for
implementation effective from 1 January 1998;

2. Calls upon the relevant intergovernmental bodies to implement fully the
measures specified in the text to strengthen the work of the United
Nations system, in particular of the General Assembly and the Secretariat;

3. Requests the Secretary-General, as part of his ongoing efforts to improve
the functioning of the Organization, to implement fully those measures
specified in the text that are within his competence;

4. Also requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at
its fifty-second session on the implementation of the present resolution;

5. Invites other principal organs, the specialized agencies and other bodies of
the United Nations system to implement the measures for strengthening
the system that are specified in the text and that are within their respective
areas of competence, as appropriate;

6. Decides that the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the
Strengthening of the United Nations System has completed its work as
mandated in resolution 49/252.
ANNEX

XIX. THE SECRETARY-GENERAL*

56. The process of selection of the Secretary-General shall be made more transparent.

57. The General Assembly shall make full use of the power of appointment enshrined in the Charter in the process of the appointment of the Secretary-General and the agenda item entitled “Appointment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations”.

58. The duration of the term or terms of appointment, including the option of a single term, shall be considered before the appointment of the next Secretary-General.

59. In the course of the identification and appointment of the best candidate for the post of Secretary-General, due regard shall continue to be given to regional rotation and shall also be given to gender equality.

60. Without prejudice to the prerogatives of the Security Council, the President of the General Assembly may consult with Member States to identify potential candidates endorsed by a Member State and, upon informing all Member States of the results, may forward those results to the Security Council.

61. In order to ensure a smooth and efficient transition, the Secretary-General should be appointed as early as possible, preferably no later than one month before the date on which the term of the incumbent expires.

Notes


*Annex article XIX specifically relates to the Secretary-General. For the full text of the resolution, see http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/51/ares51-241.htm.