

RECOMMENDATION 19 OF 20

CONTINENTAL

Act within 100 days · by February 2027 AU summit

Keep asking for permanent seats, and win smaller Security Council gains now

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IN BRIEF

- The African Union should keep its demand for permanent seats on the Security Council and bargain now for three gains that need no change to the UN Charter.
- Those gains are African members drafting Council decisions on African crises, steady UN money for AU missions and a real say in choosing the Secretary-General.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe, Africa's Council members in 2027, can test the first gain at once.

Why this matters

The talks on who sits on the Security Council have run for 17 years without a text to negotiate. In July the General Assembly continued them with no end date. The United States backs two permanent African seats without the veto, and France also opposes giving the veto to new members. Africa's demand for the veto is where the talks stop.

Eighteen of the 24 binding Council decisions under Chapter VII in 2025 concerned African crises. The member that drafts a decision, called the penholder, shapes what it says. France, the United Kingdom and the United States hold most of these roles, so African members rarely write the texts about Africa.

In March at least 20 AU members blocked AU support for Macky Sall as Secretary-General. They said his bid had bypassed the AU's rules on candidates. Two of the seven candidates in the fourth straw poll on 29 September were African, and Africa had agreed a position on neither. Winning smaller gains now would build the discipline that permanent seats would need.

Sources for this section (9)

- [President of the UN General Assembly: the July 2026 decision on the reform talks](#)
- [CSIS: US and French positions on African seats and the veto](#)
- [Al Jazeera: 18 of 24 Chapter VII resolutions in 2025 concerned Africa](#)
- [Security Council Report: penholders and who holds them](#)
- [Amani Africa: how AU members blocked an endorsement of Macky Sall](#)
- [Security Council Report: the fourth straw poll](#)
- [Sierra Leone State House: the Committee of Ten calls for text-based talks](#)
- [Amani Africa: Burkina Faso and Niger suspended from AU decisions](#)
- [PassBlue: the new Security Council members for 2027 and 2028](#)

Four levels of action

1 What Africa asks of the world

Move the reform talks to a written text. Meanwhile, let African elected members lead the drafting on African crises, and use Resolution 2719 to pay for missions led by the African Union.

WHO	The five permanent members, which hold most drafting roles, and the President of the General Assembly, who runs the talks
WHEN	The reform talks in the General Assembly session that opened in September 2026

2 What the African Union does

The Committee of Ten, the heads of state who speak for Africa on reform, is coordinated by Sierra Leone. With the AU Commission it drafts a two-track paper. The paper keeps the demand for permanent seats, lists three demands for now and sets a date to review progress. AU leaders adopt it at their summit.

WHO	The Committee of Ten, the AU Commission and the AU Assembly
WHEN	Draft by 15 December 2026; adoption at the AU summit in February 2027

3 What regional groups do

No regional bloc takes part in the reform talks, so the work runs through the AU and the African Group, the caucus of African states in New York. Each regional bloc should make sure its members' bids for Council seats follow the paper. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are suspended from AU decisions but still vote in the General Assembly. The African Group should brief them and ask for their support.

WHO The African Group in New York and the regional blocs

WHEN By March 2027

4 Which country goes first, and why

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe go first. They are Africa's three Council members in 2027, and they can ask to lead the drafting on African crises at once, with no change to the Charter.

WHO The UN missions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe

WHEN By March 2027

Before another country can do this

- ☒ A Council seat, or a firm place in the AU order for one.
- ☒ A mission in New York able to draft and negotiate texts on at least one African crisis.
- ☒ A government that follows the AU rule on candidates for UN posts.
- ☒ AU contributions paid, so that the demand for UN money for AU missions is believable.

What does not carry over from the first country

- Sierra Leone's standing comes from its role as coordinator of the Committee of Ten.
- The chance to draft depends on which African crises are on the Council's agenda during a member's term.

Who else is ready

COUNTRY	WHY	SOURCE
Sierra Leone	It coordinates the Committee of Ten, which in February 2026 called for talks based on a written text.	Source
Senegal	The dispute over Macky Sall's bid shows why Africa needs a firm AU rule on candidates.	Source
Somalia	The AU mission there was the first test of Resolution 2719 funding, which the United States blocked.	Source

Has this worked before?

In 2015 the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/321, which requires public lists of candidates, their CVs and open question sessions when the Secretary-General is chosen. It needed no change to the Charter. A group of states pressing for better UN working methods, the Non-Aligned Movement led by Algeria, and citizen groups pushed it through. A change in how the UN works can come without waiting for Charter reform. [Source](#)

Ethics and International Affairs: how the Secretary-General selection reform was won

First steps

- 1** **AFRICAN UNION** the Committee of Ten and the AU Commission send the two-track paper to member states by 15 December 2026. AU leaders adopt it in February 2027.
- 2** **REGIONAL GROUPS** the African Group in New York puts the three demands into the reform talks by March 2027, after briefing Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.
- 3** **FIRST COUNTRIES** the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe each ask to lead the drafting on at least one African crisis by March 2027.

Who acts, and with what

WHO LEADS	The Committee of Ten and the AU Commission, carried by the African Group; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe as first users
INSTRUMENT	A decision of AU leaders and a paper put into the reform talks at the UN
HOW PROGRESS IS CHECKED	At least one of the three demands accepted, and at least one African member leading the drafting on an African crisis in 2027
SIGNAL TO CHANGE COURSE	Another year of talks with no text and no African member leading any drafting
WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY	Some states fear that smaller gains will weaken the demand for permanent seats. Countries hoping for a seat avoid steps that force a choice between them. Permanent members that hold drafting roles may refuse to share them.
COST AND MONEY	The cost is not yet known. It is mainly the time of diplomats in Addis Ababa and New York. Research institutes would work out the cost of the three demands, including UN funding under Resolution 2719.

Who else contributes

WHO	CONTRIBUTION
The African Group in New York	Carries the paper into the reform talks
AU Peace and Security Council	Links the paper to UN funding under Resolution 2719
AU ministers' committee on candidates	Holds Africa to one position on UN appointments
The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe	Test drafting roles on the Council
Research institutes	Cost the options

What each audience can do

AU and regional bodies

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Adopt the paper in February

WHAT YOU GAIN

Progress without dropping the long-term aim

Governments

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Back the paper at home and in New York

WHAT YOU GAIN

Real influence on decisions about Africa

Researchers and media

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Work out which smaller gains can be won

WHAT YOU GAIN

A realistic path to reform

NGOs and civil society

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Explain to the public what is at stake

WHAT YOU GAIN

Citizens who follow UN reform

Young people and citizens

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Ask foreign ministers to report each year on what Africa gained on the Council

WHAT YOU GAIN

Diplomacy judged by results

The briefings behind this

Sector · Observed

Politics and governance

Africa stays united on Security Council reform because its position never forces a choice between countries, while coups and unpunished killings at home weaken its case.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Observed

The UN and diplomacy

The UN is shrinking because its largest members do not pay, and Africa entered the one big decision of the year, the choice of the next Secretary-General, divided and with its own candidates trailing.

[Open the briefing](#)

Words used on this page

African Union (AU)

The organisation of 55 African states, based in Addis Ababa. Its heads of state meet each February. It can suspend members after a coup. [Glossary](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

Veto and permanent members

China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States hold permanent seats on the Security Council. Each can block any decision on its own. Africa has no permanent seat. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

UN Security Council

The 15-member UN body that decides on war and peace. It can impose sanctions and send peacekeepers, and its decisions bind all UN members. Five permanent members can each block any decision. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

UN Secretary-General

The head of the UN's staff and its main public voice. The Security Council recommends a candidate and the General Assembly appoints them, usually for five years. António Guterres's term ends on 31 December 2026. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Africa's second-largest country by area, in central Africa. Its east has seen armed conflict for three decades, and it holds much of the world's cobalt. [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

Chapter VII

The part of the UN Charter that lets the Security Council order action, including sanctions or force, to deal with threats to peace. Chapter VII decisions bind all UN members. [Glossary](#)

Penholder

The Security Council member that leads the drafting and negotiation of decisions on a given crisis. France, the United Kingdom and the United States hold most of these roles. [Politics and governance briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: securitycouncilreport.org](#)

Straw poll

An informal, secret vote in which Security Council members mark each Secretary-General candidate "encourage", "discourage" or "no opinion". Several rounds are held before the Council makes its formal choice. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Security Council reform talks

Talks among UN members on changing who sits on the Security Council. They have run since 2009 without a negotiating text or a deadline. Any change needs a two-thirds vote and approval by the five permanent members. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Resolution 2719

A Security Council decision of December 2023. It allows UN member states' regular contributions to help pay for peace missions led by the African Union, decided case by case. It lets the UN pay up to three-quarters of such a mission's budget. It has never been used: the United States blocked its first use, for Somalia. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: issafrica.org](#)

The Committee of Ten

Ten African heads of state chosen by the African Union to speak for Africa on Security Council reform. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

African Union Commission

The African Union's secretariat. It prepares decisions for heads of state and carries them out. [Glossary](#)

The African Group at the UN

The 54 African member states working together as one of the UN's five regional groups. The groups put forward candidates for elections to UN bodies. The African Group itself has no vote on the Security Council. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

Regional economic communities

Africa's regional groupings of states, such as ECOWAS in West Africa, the East African Community, SADC in southern Africa and IGAD in the Horn. They carry out many African Union policies. [Glossary](#)