

RECOMMENDATION 1 OF 20

CONTINENTAL

Act within 30 days · by 28 October 2026

Agree one African list of demands for the next UN Secretary-General

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IN BRIEF

- Neither African candidate is likely to become the next Secretary-General, so Africa's influence lies in what it asks of the front-runners.
- The AU should agree one written list: named senior posts for Africans, yearly figures on senior staff by region, and real power for the UN offices in Nairobi.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Somalia hold Africa's three Security Council seats, so they should hand the list to each front-runner.

Why this matters

Guterres's term ends on 31 December 2026. In the fourth straw poll on 29 September, Rebeca Grynspan of Costa Rica led with ten encouragements. A candidate needs nine of the Council's 15 votes and no veto from a permanent member. In the third poll, Macky Sall drew nine discouragements and Olara Otunnu seven. Africa's realistic aim this year is to shape the winner's first term.

A front-runner who is short of nine votes will listen to three Council members who vote together. Promises made in writing before the Council decides are easier to enforce afterwards. Once a candidate has been chosen, Africa's three votes lose most of their value.

The request rests on facts. UN Women is moving about 190 posts to Nairobi and Bonn. Africans held 34.1% of posts in the UN's central staff in 2024, down from 37.9% in 2020. The UN publishes no regional figures for its senior posts, so no one can show how Africa fares at the top.

Africa's own discipline is the weak point. In March, 14 African states objected to the AU backing Sall, and six more asked for delay. A list agreed by all 54 states has force only if governments put it ahead of their own candidates and side deals.

Sources for this section (9)

- [The National: the fourth straw poll and the nine-vote rule](#)
- [PassBlue: results of the third straw poll](#)
- [UN Women: the move of posts to Nairobi and Bonn](#)
- [UN: composition of the Secretariat, A/80/508](#)
- [Institute for Security Studies: objections to Sall's endorsement](#)
- [Security Council Report: colour-coded ballots, as used in 2006 and 2016](#)
- [Sierra Leone State House: the Committee of Ten on UN reform](#)
- [Amani Africa: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and the AU](#)
- [UN News: the Council members for 2026](#)

Four levels of action

1 What Africa asks of the world

Africa asks each front-runner, and the five permanent members of the Council, for written promises on three things. These are named senior posts for Africans, yearly publication of senior staff numbers by region, and decision-making power for Nairobi as a main UN office.

WHO The front-runners and the Security Council, above all its five permanent members

WHEN Colour-coded straw polls, expected in October 2026 as in the 2006 and 2016 races; the new Secretary-General starts on 1 January 2027

2 What the African Union does

The AU Commission and the Committee of Ten, the heads of state who speak for Africa on UN reform, agree a one-page list. Sierra Leone coordinates the Committee. The list goes to the African Group, the 54 African states that work together at the UN.

WHO The AU Commission and the Committee of Ten, coordinated by Sierra Leone

WHEN By 9 October 2026

3 What regional groups do

No regional group has a role in UN appointments, so the African Group in New York carries the list. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are suspended from AU decisions after coups, yet they still sit in the African Group. The Group should share the list with them and ask for their support.

WHO The chair of the African Group in New York

WHEN By 14 October 2026

4 Which country goes first, and why

The DRC, Liberia and Somalia go first. They hold three of the 15 Council seats in 2026, a third of the nine votes any candidate needs. Only Council members vote in the straw polls. Their ambassadors hand the list to each front-runner and publish the replies.

WHO The ambassadors of the DRC, Liberia and Somalia to the UN

WHEN Hand over by 16 October 2026; publish replies by 28 October 2026

Before another country can do this

- ☒ A seat on the Council, or a close working link to the African members who hold one.
- ☒ A mission in New York able to follow the straw polls each week.
- ☒ A national position that puts the common list ahead of deals with individual candidates.
- ☒ For a country hosting UN offices, housing, schools and health care ready for staff who move there.

What does not carry over from the first country

- Somalia leaves the Council at the end of 2026, so its bargaining power lasts only for this race.
- Nairobi hosts the only UN headquarters in Africa and the Global South, and began a \$340 million expansion in May 2026. No other African capital has that base.

Who else is ready

COUNTRY	WHY	SOURCE
Zimbabwe	Elected on 3 June 2026, it joins the Council on 1 January 2027, in the new Secretary-General's first year.	Source
Kenya	Nairobi hosts one of the four main UN offices in the world, and the headquarters of the UN Environment Programme and UN-Habitat.	Source
Senegal and Uganda	Sall and Otunnu are still candidates, so these two governments decide whether Africa speaks with one voice.	Source

Has this worked before?

In 1996 the United States vetoed a second term for Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt. African states held together, and the next round was limited to African candidates. Kofi Annan of Ghana took office in 1997. [Source](#)

The Spokesman-Review: the US veto of Boutros-Ghali, November 1996

First steps

- 1** **AFRICAN UNION** by 9 October 2026, the AU Commission and the Committee of Ten agree the list and send it to the African Group.
- 2** **REGIONAL GROUPS** by 14 October 2026, the chair of the African Group sends it to all 54 African missions, including those of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.
- 3** DRC, Liberia and Somalia: by 16 October 2026, their ambassadors hand the list to each front-runner, and they publish the replies by 28 October.

Who acts, and with what

WHO LEADS	The AU Commission and the Committee of Ten, with the African Group; the DRC, Liberia and Somalia as the first negotiators
INSTRUMENT	A list of requests endorsed by the Committee of Ten, handed in writing to each front-runner by the three African Council members
HOW PROGRESS IS CHECKED	Written replies that name posts, promise to publish senior staff numbers by region, and address Nairobi
SIGNAL TO CHANGE COURSE	The Council recommends a candidate with no promises to Africa on record
WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY	Only three African states can bargain directly. Senegal and Uganda each back their own candidate. The Council may move faster than the AU can consult its members.
COST AND MONEY	The work uses the time of diplomats already in New York. No new budget is needed, and no cost figure is available. UN Women expects to save at least \$8 million a year from its move.

Who else contributes

WHO	CONTRIBUTION
The African Group in New York	Holds its members to the list
Kenya	Sets out what decision-making power in Nairobi would require
Zimbabwe	Carries the promises onto the Council in 2027
Senegal and Uganda	Keep their campaigns from undercutting the list
Research institutes and universities	Track whether the promises are kept

What each audience can do

Governments

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Instruct your UN mission to back the common list

WHAT YOU GAIN

Senior UN posts and a stronger Nairobi

AU and regional bodies

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Have the Committee of Ten endorse the list within two weeks

WHAT YOU GAIN

A tested way of bargaining as a bloc

NGOs and civil society

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Publish what each candidate has said about Africa

WHAT YOU GAIN

A Secretary-General held to specific promises

Researchers and media

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Compare the candidates' records on African issues

WHAT YOU GAIN

Better-informed public debate

Business and investors

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Set out what Nairobi offers UN offices that move there

WHAT YOU GAIN

Demand from staff who relocate

Young people and citizens

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Ask the candidates what they will do for Africa's young people

WHAT YOU GAIN

A UN leader who has answered to you in public

The briefings behind this

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](#)

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](#)

Words used on this page

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

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

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 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

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

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 duty station

A city where the UN bases its staff. The four main ones are New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. Nairobi is the only UN headquarters in Africa and the Global South. The UN and diplomacy briefing · Glossary · Source: unon.org

African Union Commission

The African Union's secretariat. It prepares decisions for heads of state and carries them out. Glossary

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

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. The UN and diplomacy briefing · Glossary · Source: un.org

UNEP

The UN Environment Programme, the UN's agency for the environment, based in Nairobi. Climate and energy briefing · Glossary