

SECTOR 12 OF 12

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

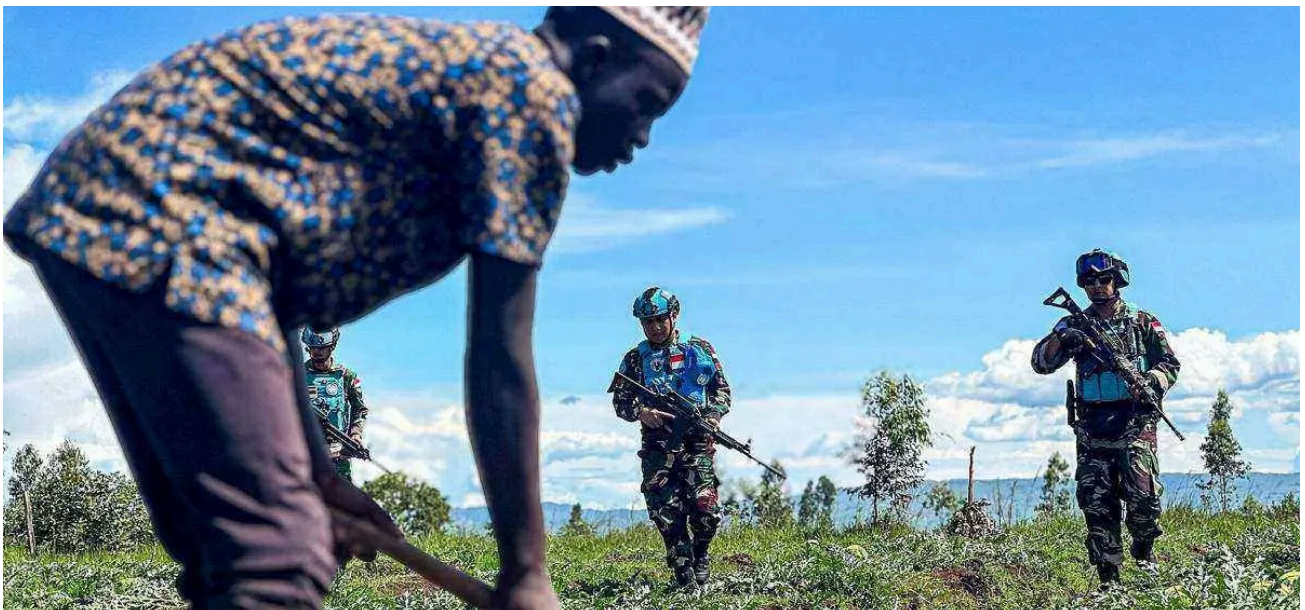
8 min read

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.

IN BRIEF

- The UN has cut its budget and 2,900 jobs because many members, above all the United States, have not paid what they owe.
- This year the Security Council chooses the next head of the UN, and both African candidates are trailing after four rounds of informal voting.
- Africa's best move now is to agree one written list of what it wants from the front-runners, and have its three Council members deliver it before the Council decides.



Indonesian peacekeepers with the UN mission MONUSCO on patrol near Bunia, Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo, April 2025.

Photo: MONUSCO / Didier Vignon Dossou-Gbakon, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via [source page](#).

\$3.45bn

UN regular budget for 2026, about 7% less than in 2025, with 2,900 posts cut

Source: un.org

56%

Share of what members owed the UN for 2026 that had been paid by 1 July

Source: passblue.com

33 of 54

African states that had paid their 2026 UN share in full by 21 September

Source: un.org

9

Council members who discouraged Macky Sall in the third straw poll, the most of any leading candidate

Source: passblue.com

\$5.1bn

UN peacekeeping budget for 2026 to 2027, 10% less than the year before

Source: securitycouncilreport.org

190

UN Women posts moving from New York to Nairobi and Bonn by the end of 2026

Source: unwomen.org

01

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

What happened at the UN

The candidates

Still in the race after the fourth straw poll, in order of support. Michelle Bachelet of Chile withdrew on 19 September.



Rebeca Grynspan

COSTA RICA

Led the fourth straw poll, with ten encouragements and three discouragements.

Photo: Gustavobarreto-un, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via [source page](#).



Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett

GUYANA

Eight encouragements in the fourth straw poll.

Photo: Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, [CC BY 2.0](#), via [source page](#).



Rafael Grossi

ARGENTINA

Eight encouragements in the fourth straw poll.

Photo: IAEA Imagebank, [CC BY 2.0](#), via [source page](#).



Macky Sall

SENEGAL

Nominated by Burundi, which chairs the African Union, on 2 March. Nine discouragements in the third straw poll.

Photo: US Department of State, [Public domain](#), via [source page](#).



Olara Otunnu

UGANDA

Nominated by Uganda on 24 July. Seven discouragements in the third straw poll.

Photo: Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cropped, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via [source page](#).

At the General Assembly in September, many leaders said Africa should have a permanent seat on the Security Council. The Secretary-General, António Guterres, called Africa's exclusion unjust and indefensible. The President of the General Assembly said Africa needs a seat at the table. Kenya's President William Ruto said Africa's 54 nations are "permanently discussed, yet permanently excluded". Yet the reform talks, renewed in July, still have no end date and no single text. The speeches did not change who holds power in the Council.

The more urgent contest was the race to succeed Guterres, whose term ends on 31 December. The Council tests support through straw polls, in which each member marks each candidate "encourage", "discourage" or "no opinion". In the third poll on 18 September, Rebeca Grynspan of Costa Rica led with nine encouragements. Macky Sall of Senegal drew five encouragements and nine discouragements. Olara Otunnu of Uganda drew five and seven. Michelle Bachelet of Chile withdrew the next day.

On 25 September, Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye asked the Assembly to back Sall. Four days later, the fourth poll left Grynspan further ahead, with ten encouragements and three discouragements. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett of Guyana and Rafael Grossi of Argentina followed with eight encouragements each. The Council now moves to colour-coded ballots, which show how the five permanent members vote. A winner needs nine votes and no veto, so an African Secretary-General this time is unlikely.

Sources for this section (5)

- [UN News: Ruto's address and the Secretary-General on Africa's exclusion](#)
- [UN: the July 2026 decision to continue reform talks](#)
- [PassBlue: results of the third straw poll](#)
- [AllAfrica: President Faye's appeal for Sall](#)
- [The National: results of the fourth straw poll and the next steps](#)

02

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

What is really going on

The UN is running out of money. In December 2025 the General Assembly approved a regular budget of \$3.45 billion for 2026. That is about 7% less than in 2025, and 2,900 posts were cut. The Secretary-General had asked for a deeper cut of 15%. His reform plan, UN80, expects resources across the whole UN system to fall by a quarter in 2026. Fewer staff and programmes means less UN work in the countries that depend on it.

The cuts follow unpaid bills. By 1 July only 56% of what members owed for 2026 had been paid. The United States had paid \$160 million of the \$767 million it owed for the year. In all, it owed about \$2 billion to the regular budget and \$1.8 billion for peacekeeping. China's \$428 million was due later in the year. In June the Assembly agreed to stop returning unspent money to members for a four-year trial. That keeps about \$1.2 billion over twelve months.

Africa has its own late payers. By 21 September, 33 of Africa's 54 states had paid their 2026 share in full. Nigeria, Uganda and Liberia were among the 21 that had not. A continent that asks for a fairer UN argues from a weaker position when its own members owe money.

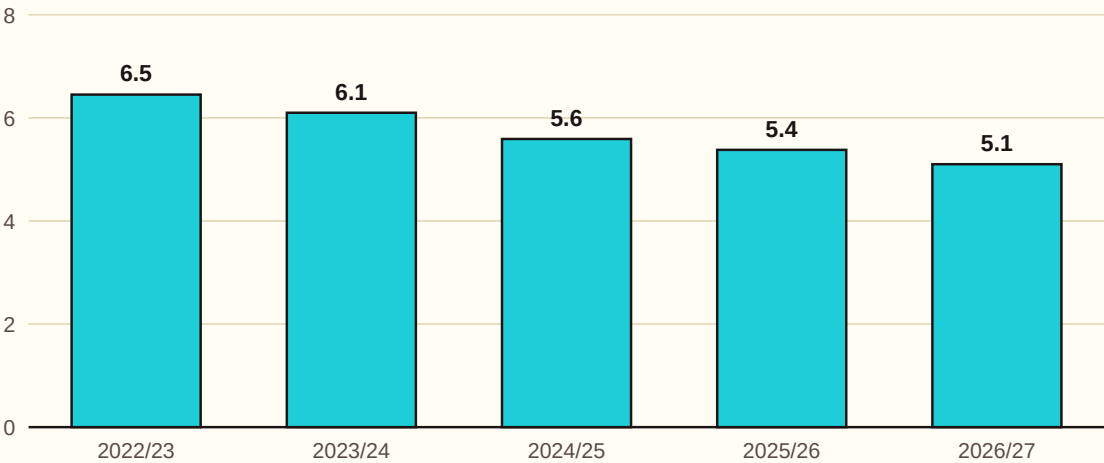
Peacekeeping carries the heaviest cost. Its budget for 2026 to 2027 is \$5.1 billion, 10% less than the year before. The missions began 2026 with no cash reserve and a gap of about \$2 billion. Late payment by members delays what the UN pays back to the countries that send troops. The Council has kept the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) until 20 December 2026, with up to 11,500 troops.

Missions led by the African Union are worse off. The AU mission in Somalia needs about \$196 million a year. By late September 2025 only \$24.6 million had been promised, and troops had gone about 15 months without their allowances. On 18 September 2026 the United States agreed that the UN office that supplies this mission will shrink over 12 months from January 2027, and then close. The AU will then have to feed, fuel and move its troops itself, or find another payer.

One reform moves jobs towards Africa. UN Women is moving about 190 posts from New York to Nairobi and Bonn, and expects to save at least \$8 million a year. A post in Nairobi costs on average \$32,000 a year less than one in New York. Yet the African share of the UN's central staff fell from 37.9% in 2020 to 34.1% in 2024. Cheaper jobs in Africa have so far come with a smaller African share of the staff.

The UN peacekeeping budget has shrunk by a fifth in four years

US\$ billion, approved budget (July-June fiscal year)

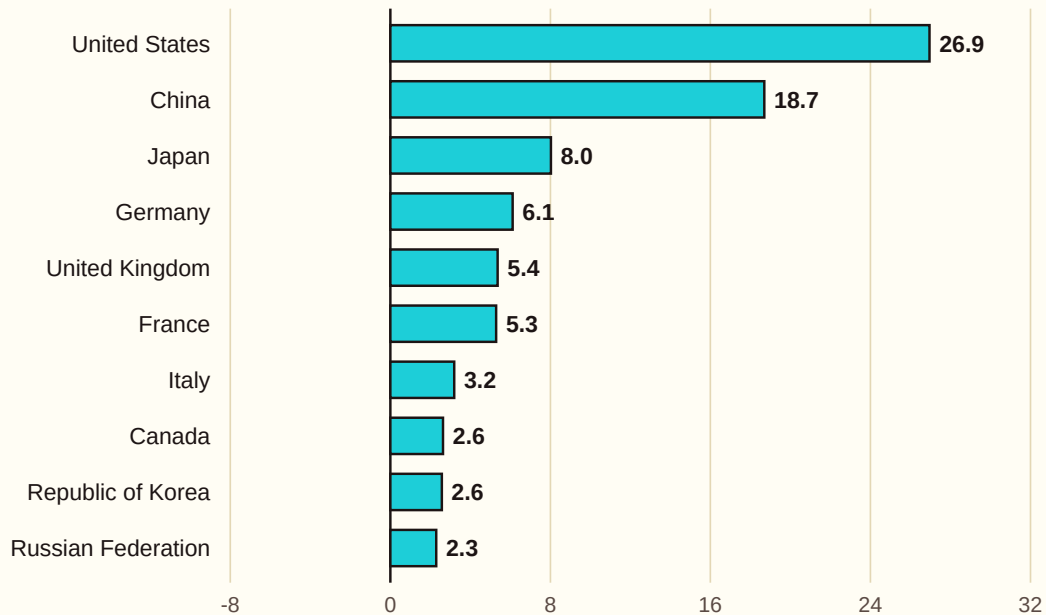


2023/24 given by the UN as 'about 6.1 billion'. Approved budgets, not cash received: arrears mean missions spend far less than approved. Excludes UNT SO and UNMOGIP, funded from the regular budget. Figures come from four separate pages, one per year or two.

Source: [UN \(The Delegate 29 June 2022 and 4 July 2025; UN Peacekeeping 'How we are funded'\)](#); [Security Council Report, September 2026 Monthly Forecast](#)

Two countries pay almost half of UN peacekeeping

% share of assessed peacekeeping contributions, 2024-25



Shares assessed, not paid; the US has accumulated significant peacekeeping arrears (Security Council Report, Sept 2026).

Source: [UN Peacekeeping, 'How we are funded' \(citing A/79/318/Add.1\)](#)

Sources for this section (12)

- [UN: the General Assembly approves the 2026 budget](#)
- [IISD: the Secretary-General's proposed 15.1% cut](#)
- [UN80 Initiative: resources across the UN system fall by 25% in 2026](#)
- [PassBlue: payments by the United States and China, and the four-year trial](#)
- [UN Committee on Contributions: which states have paid in full](#)
- [Security Council Report: the 2026 to 2027 peacekeeping budget](#)
- [NYU Center on International Cooperation: no cash reserve and a \\$2.07 billion gap](#)
- [UN News: the mission in the DRC renewed to 20 December 2026](#)
- [Africa is a Country: the funding gap of the AU mission in Somalia](#)
- [Dawan: the United States agrees a 12-month drawdown of the UN support office in Somalia](#)
- [UN Women: the move to Nairobi and Bonn and the savings per post](#)
- [UN: composition of the Secretariat, A/80/508](#)

Country by country

Burundi, which chairs the AU this year, nominated Macky Sall on 2 March. On 27 March, 14 African states objected to the AU backing him, among them Algeria, South Africa, Liberia, Nigeria and Rwanda. Six more, including Egypt, asked for more time. Senegal's own government kept its distance from its former president until July, when it told its embassies to campaign for him. Uganda nominated Olara Otunnu on 24 July. Africa ended up with two candidates competing for the same small pool of support.

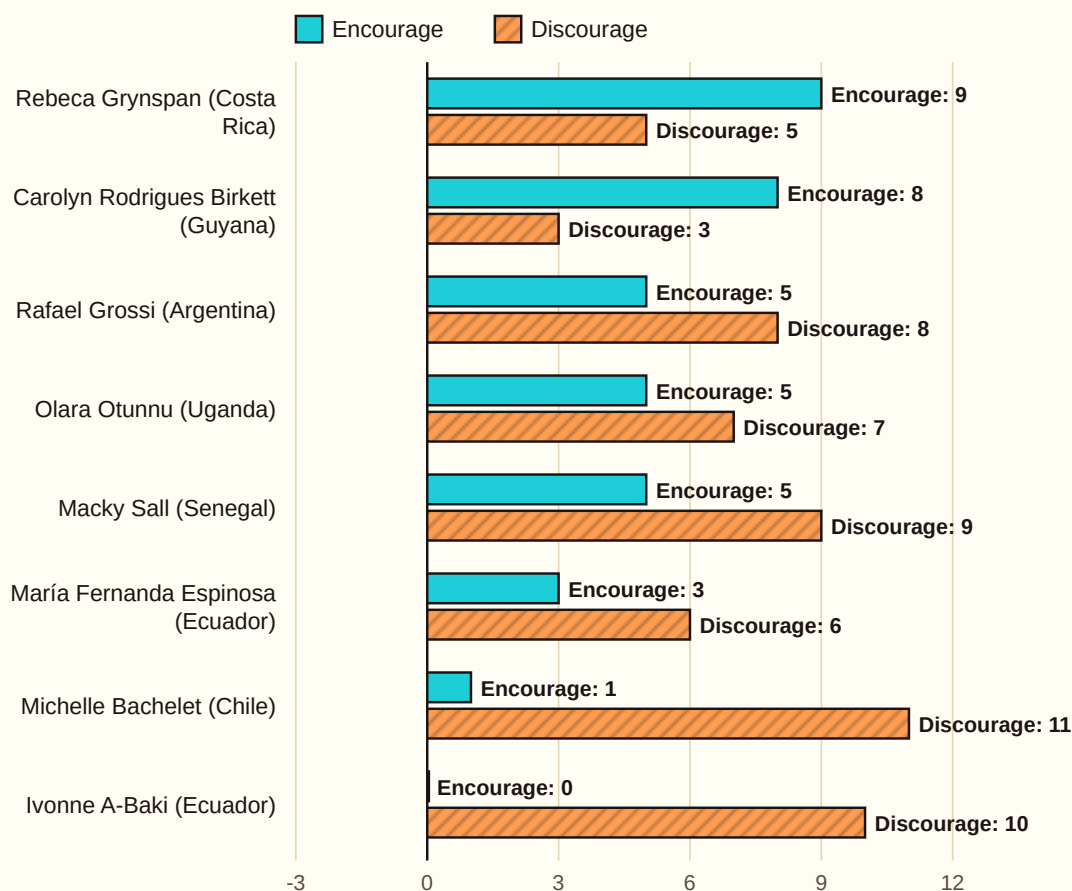
The DRC, Liberia and Somalia hold Africa's three Council seats in 2026. Somalia leaves at the end of the year. Zimbabwe, the only African candidate, won 182 votes in the Assembly and joins on 1 January 2027. The DRC paid its 2026 UN share within the 30 days allowed. Liberia sits on the Council, yet it had not paid in full by 21 September. Its arrears give other members an easy answer when it speaks for Africa.

Kenya gains most from the move of UN jobs. Nairobi already hosts about 6,500 UN staff. The UN children's agency UNICEF, the UN Population Fund and UN Women are all setting up global offices there. The United States has left 66 international bodies, including 31 parts of the UN. It stayed in the UN Environment Programme and UN-Habitat, which are both based in Nairobi. Kenya paid its 2026 UN share on 9 February.

Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Egypt and Kenya are among the countries that send the roughly 12,000 troops in the AU mission in Somalia. When Washington said it would stop backing the UN supply office, Uganda called these countries to a summit in Kampala. The AU's own Peace Fund covers only a small part of the cost. These governments carry the risk if the money runs out.

Both African candidates drew more discouragements than encouragements in the third straw poll

number of Security Council members, 18 September 2026

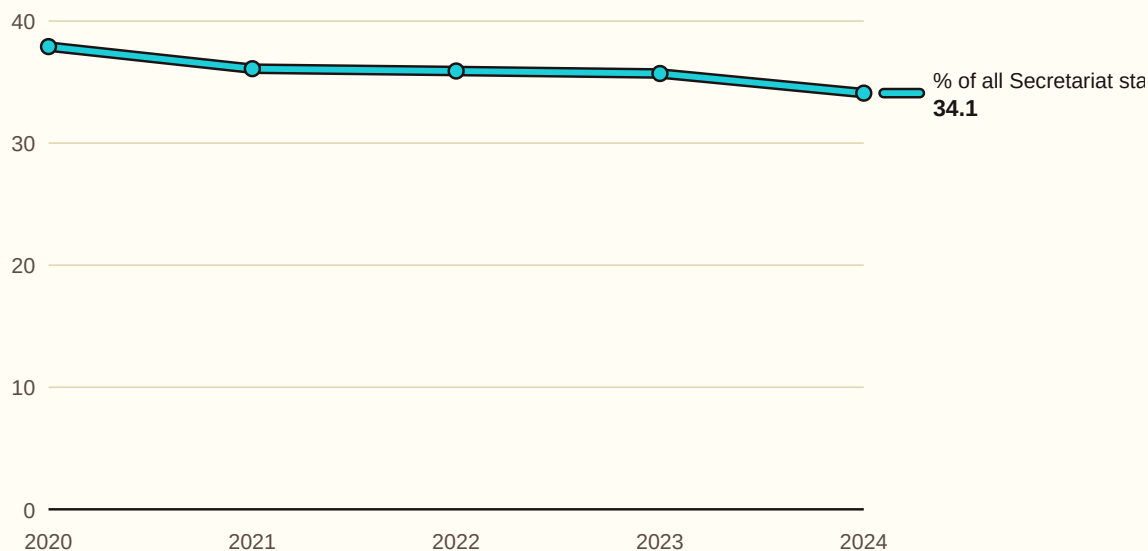


Straw poll results are not published officially; these were reported by diplomats. The remaining votes were 'no opinion'. Bachelet withdrew on 19 September. In the fourth poll on 29 September Grynspan had 10 encouragements and 3 discouragements, Rodrigues-Birkett 8 and 6, Grossi 8 and 7 (The National); results for other candidates were not reported.

Source: [PassBlue, Third straw poll for UN Secretary-General race shows no consensus \(18 September 2026\)](#)

Africa's share of UN Secretariat staff has fallen since 2020

% of all Secretariat staff from African member states



All staff at all levels, as at 31 December each year: 12,000 of 35,231 staff in 2024 (Northern Africa 3.5%, sub-Saharan Africa 30.6%). The report gives no regional breakdown for senior posts.

Source: [UN Secretary-General, Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics \(A/80/508\), annex table 1.A](#)

Sources for this section (9)

- [Institute for Security Studies: the states that objected to Sall's endorsement](#)
- [Africanews: Senegal backs Sall in July 2026](#)
- [UN: candidates for Secretary-General and who nominated them](#)
- [UN News: the Council members for 2026](#)
- [UN News: Zimbabwe elected to the Council with 182 votes](#)
- [UN Committee on Contributions: payment dates for the DRC, Liberia and Kenya](#)
- [Nation: new UN global offices in Nairobi](#)
- [Nation: the US withdrawal from UN bodies and Nairobi's role](#)
- [Africa is a Country: troop contributors and the Kampala summit](#)

Why this matters

A candidate for Secretary-General needs nine of the Council's 15 votes. Africa's three members hold a third of that number, so they can decide whether a front-runner gets there. October is therefore the moment to ask for written promises. Africa should ask for senior posts in peace operations and development, and for real decision-making power in the UN offices in Nairobi. The African Group, the 54 African states that coordinate at the UN, has no Council vote, so the three members must carry the request.

The fight over UN80 cuts, mergers and moves takes place in the Assembly's budget committee. African missions in New York have the fewest technical staff there. The UN Charter says staff should be recruited "on as wide a geographical basis as possible". That gives Africa a legal basis to ask for a fair share of senior posts. The closure of the UN supply office in Somalia in 2027 will then show whether the AU can pay for its own missions.

In 1972 Nairobi won the headquarters of the UN Environment Programme by an Assembly vote of 128 to none. Kenya had argued that every other UN headquarters was in North America or Western Europe. Fifty years later the UN is moving work again, this time to save money. Executive boards and hiring decisions still sit in New York. If only the staff move, Nairobi gains rent and jobs and little say over what the UN does in Africa.

Sources for this section (4)

- [The National: nine votes and no veto are needed](#)
- [UN Charter, Chapter XV: recruitment of staff](#)
- [UNEP: how Nairobi came to host the headquarters](#)
- [Dawan: closure of the UN support office in Somalia](#)

The case against this view

The AU has no formal role in choosing the Secretary-General, and its habit of endorsing candidates is only a custom. Under an informal rotation between regions, it is the turn of Latin America and the Caribbean this time. Backing that turn could strengthen Africa's claim in 2031. The UN Charter also makes "efficiency, competence, and integrity" the first test in hiring. A bargain that looks like a share-out of posts could weaken the case for the Africans the continent puts forward.

Sources for this section (1)

BY AUDIENCE

What you can do

Governments

DO THIS

Pay your 2026 UN share in full before the budget committee negotiates the 2027 budget in December.

WHY

Twenty-one African states had not paid in full by 21 September, which weakens Africa's case when it asks that cuts fall fairly.

Governments

DO THIS

The DRC, Liberia and Somalia should agree one position before the colour-coded ballots and give their requests to each front-runner in writing.

WHY

Three votes are a third of the nine a candidate needs, and promises made before the Council decides are easier to enforce.

AU and regional bodies

DO THIS

The AU Commission should publish, within two weeks, a short list of priority senior posts and a costed case for decision-making power in Nairobi.

WHY

Candidates respond to specific requests, and a public list lets African governments check what was promised.

AU and regional bodies

DO THIS

The AU Peace and Security Council should agree a funding plan for the Somalia mission before the Security Council discusses the drawdown in December.

WHY

The UN supply office shrinks from January 2027 and then closes, and troops have already gone months without allowances.

NGOs and civil society

DO THIS

Publish what each candidate says and promises on Africa, and track it after the appointment.

WHY

A Secretary-General held to specific promises is easier to hold to account.

Business and investors

DO THIS

Kenyan firms in housing, schools, health and office services should prepare for demand from UN offices moving to Nairobi.

WHY

UN Women alone expects to move about 190 posts, and other agencies are setting up global offices there.

Researchers and media

DO THIS

Publish yearly figures on Africans in senior UN posts, from Director to Under-Secretary-General.

WHY

The UN publishes regional shares for all staff but gives no regional figures for senior posts.

Young people and citizens

DO THIS

Ask the candidates in public forums what they will do for Africa's young people, and record their answers.

WHY

A UN leader who has answered to African youth in public can be reminded of it.

OCTOBER 2026 TO DECEMBER 2027

Dates to watch

OCTOBER 2026

Colour-coded straw polls and the Security Council choice for Secretary-General

The last point at which African votes can win written promises. [Source](#)

NOVEMBER 2026

Renewal of the UN missions in the Central African Republic and Abyei

Shows whether budget cuts reach missions that protect African civilians. [Source](#)

DECEMBER 2026

Security Council talks on closing the UN supply office in Somalia

Sets the timetable for the AU mission to lose its UN supplies. [Source](#)

20 DECEMBER 2026

The mandate of the UN mission in the DRC expires

The DRC sits on the Council that decides its future. [Source](#)

31 DECEMBER 2026

Guterres's term ends

The new Secretary-General's first senior appointments will test any promises made to Africa. [Source](#)

1 JANUARY 2027

Zimbabwe joins the Security Council and Somalia leaves

Africa's three members change just as the Somalia supply office begins to close. [Source](#)

Recommendations

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

CONTINENTAL

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

Leads: The AU Commission and the Committee of Ten, with the African Group; the DRC, Liberia and Somalia as the first negotiators

Dig deeper

Selection and Appointment of the Next Secretary-General

United Nations

Official list of candidates, who nominated them, and the timetable of dialogues.

Third straw poll for UN Secretary-General race shows no consensus

PassBlue

Full results for all eight candidates on 18 September 2026.

Fourth Security Council straw poll on UN Secretary-General candidates

Security Council Report

How straw polls work and what comes next, including colour-coded ballots.

Macky Sall's UN bid: a stress test for the African Union

Institute for Security Studies

How the AU failed to endorse Sall and which states objected.

UN80 Initiative

United Nations

Official hub for the reform drive: 86 actions in 31 work packages, mandate review and structural proposals.

General Assembly approves \$3.45 billion regular budget for 2026

United Nations (The Delegate)

The 2026 budget decision: about 7% lower than 2025 and 2,900 posts abolished.

Contributions received for 2026 for the UN Regular Budget (Honour roll)

UN Committee on Contributions

Which member states have paid in full, with dates and amounts.

UN Peace Operations Gone Broke

NYU Center on International Cooperation

June 2026 policy brief on how unpaid dues are scaling back peace operations and burdening troop contributors.

Somalia's uncertain hand-off

Africa is a Country

The funding crisis of the AU mission in Somalia and the end of UN logistics support.

Strengthening UN Women's global presence

UN Women

The move of about 190 posts to Nairobi and Bonn, with cost savings per post.

Words used on this page

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. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

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](#)

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. [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. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [Glossary](#)

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. [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. [Glossary](#)

UN80

A reform plan launched for the UN's 80th anniversary. It cuts budgets and posts, merges agencies and moves some jobs from New York and Geneva to cheaper cities such as Nairobi. [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](#)

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](#)

AUSSOM

The African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia. About 12,000 troops from Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Egypt, Djibouti and Burundi help Somali forces against al-Shabaab. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

UNICEF

The UN's agency for children. It works on child health, nutrition, schooling, water and protection, and is funded by voluntary donations. [Education briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: unicef.org](#)

UNEP

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

UN support office in Somalia

A UN office that supplies food, fuel, transport and medical care to the African Union mission in Somalia. The United States agreed in September 2026 to a 12-month drawdown from January 2027, followed by closure. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: unsos.unmissions.org](#)

AU Peace Fund

A fund paid for by African Union members to finance African peace work and missions. [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

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](#) · [Glossary](#) ·

Source: [un.org](#)

African Union Commission

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

AU Peace and Security Council

The African Union's 15-member body for conflicts. It can authorise African peace missions and suspend governments that take power by force. [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)