

## **Statement by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group**

**at the**

### **General Assembly Thematic Debate on the Secretary-General Selection Process**

Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group, or in short ACT, which is a cross-regional group comprised of the following 25 small and mid-sized countries seeking to improve the working methods of the Security Council: Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay and my own country, Denmark.

ACT reiterates its appreciation of the leadership shown by the President of the General Assembly in spearheading this process and commends the work of the co-Chairs of the Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly for their commitment and dedication throughout the current session.

ACT also welcomes the joint letter of the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council dated 5 February outlining the procedure for Member States presenting candidates and their subsequent consideration, thereby setting in motion the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General for the mandate beginning in 2022.

The appointment of the current UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, followed a historic process implemented by the General Assembly and the Security Council, which enabled a more inclusive and transparent selection process for the first time in the history of the UN. ACT seeks to consolidate the standards and guiding principles already established for the selection and appointment process and, in this regard, recalls the lessons learned and recommendations made by the Group following the previous selection process. These must be seen as the baseline, not the ceiling, for further strengthening future appointment processes. We recall the commitments made by the GA in resolution 73/341 to continue to explore possible steps to improve further the process.

ACT welcomes the decision by the incumbent Secretary-General to run for a second term and acknowledges that this will have a bearing on the process compared to 2015-16. Likewise, ACT welcomes the incumbent Secretary-General's willingness to meet the expectations of the UN membership regarding transparency and inclusivity in line with relevant GA resolutions. In this regard, we welcome his submission of a vision statement and his scheduled participation in an informal dialogue on 7 May at the General Assembly Hall. At a time of grave global challenges, it is vital that the UN leads by example, by continuing to undertake an open, inclusive, well-structured and merit-based process for this crucial role.

Mr. President,

Guided by the provisions of Article 97 of the UN Charter and as reflected in resolutions 69/321, 70/305, 73/341 and other relevant resolutions reaffirming the role of the General Assembly, ACT calls for the adoption of the following proposals, which can act as a point of reference for the current and for future selection processes. These have previously been conveyed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of

the Security Council in the form of an ACT non-paper. We encourage delegations to give due consideration to the recommendations contained in the non-paper sent by Costa Rica and Denmark on behalf of the Group about this crucial issue:

**On the process for soliciting candidates:**

ACT reiterates the importance of establishing a more specific timeline for the overall process. ACT also calls for building on the practice established in 2015/16 and establishing further clarity regarding the nomination of candidates as well as for their withdrawal. ACT calls on all candidates to participate in an informal dialogue with the General Assembly as a necessary step for further consideration. This should happen following the joint circulation of the letter formally presenting the candidate and prior to the Security Council's consideration of the candidate.

**On candidates and interaction:**

ACT strongly encourages Member States to consider the nomination of female candidates for the position as Secretary-General as there has never been a woman leading this organization in its 75-year history. By doing so, the international community would be honoring its commitments to gender equality and parity at all levels of the UN, including the recent achievements in senior management. ACT urges the Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council to reinforce the call for female candidates, which has been a key element of the selection and appointment process for the Secretary-General since 2015, including in their joint letter launching the selection and appointment process. Moreover, we encourage the early presentation of qualified candidates to allow sufficient time for a full, open, and transparent, process to conclude with sufficient time for the Secretary-General-designate to prepare for their term in office. ACT encourages all candidates to interact with civil society organizations throughout the process, and we call on the President of the General Assembly to

facilitate that interaction and ensure the active and significant participation of civil society throughout the process, both in general and especially in this session's process. ACT calls on all candidates to participate in all elements of the selection process, as this will strongly increase their legitimacy.

### **On the selection process timeline:**

The ACT Group recalls the indicative timeline for the appointment of future Secretary-Generals produced in 2017 and encourages consideration of its main recommendations. Moving ahead, the joint letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council, encouraging Member States to nominate qualified candidates, should be sent out in October of the year preceding the appointment. A deadline for the submission of candidatures should be 1 April, and the deadline for completing GA hearings should in ACT's view be set for 30 June of the appointment year. The process should be concluded upon entering the final quarter of the calendar year ahead of the new Secretary-General's term starting. This means that the Security Council recommendation and the resolution from the General Assembly regarding the appointment of the Secretary-General should be finalized by 1 October of the appointment year, in order to leave the Secretary-General-designate three months to prepare. In light of this suggested timeline, ACT would encourage that if any further Member States were considering submitting candidates this year, to do so soon.

### **On vision statements and dialogues with Member States and other stakeholders:**

ACT stresses the need to uphold the practice of candidates producing a vision statement setting out clear priorities consistent with resolution 73/341. As expressed before, we welcome the incumbent candidate's submission of a vision statement and his willingness to participate in an informal dialogue as an opportunity for accountability. This is also a chance for Member States to reflect on the work and achievements, the lessons-learned,

and the challenges faced during the incumbent's first term and to hear clear objectives and plans for a second term in office. We welcome the PGA's commitment to transparency by continuing to provide a section on their website on the topic of the selection process of the Secretary-General, as well as to hold informal dialogues with eligible candidates and Member States. More in-depths interaction with candidates within regional groups must also be encouraged. ACT notes the contribution made by civil society in the 2016 General Assembly informal dialogues and the global town hall and urges for this element to be replicated and, where possible, strengthened by allowing for greater participation, including through virtual modalities, which are even more important this year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACT underlines the high and legitimate expectations of global civil society to be more closely included in UN affairs after the successful and global outreach during UN75. ACT reiterates its call to the President of the General Assembly to facilitate these interactions. We expect the PGA to continue the practice of town hall meetings or other relevant formats allowing direct interaction between civil society and eligible candidates. Such a meeting would also be a chance for the Secretary General to get inputs from civil society on the work and achievements of his first term as well as on his vision for a second term in office.

**On the appointment:**

ACT encourages regular updates from the President of the Security Council to the wider membership on developments in the selection process and in a competitive scenario, full transparency on the results of the straw poll process. In addition, and in accordance with the active role attributed to the General Assembly in Article 97 of the UN Charter, ACT welcomes discussion on the prospect of multiple candidates being nominated by the Security Council for the General Assembly's consideration. ACT notes that the GA

resolution appointing the Secretary-General provides an important tool to increase accountability and ownership for the future agenda of the UN. ACT supports the continuation of an inclusive and transparent process for its drafting, as was the case in 2016, and using this tool in the best possible way.

In line with the Charter provisions and the oath taken by the Secretary-General, ACT believes that the Secretary-General should exercise full independence in the selection of any senior official and urges candidates and Member States to desist from any actions, which could compromise this principle. For example, the practice of reserving certain senior appointments for nationals of a particular Member State should be discontinued, in line with GA resolution 46/232. ACT calls for a thorough discussion to take place on the term of office of the Secretary-General, including on a longer, single, non-renewable term for future Secretary-General appointments.

In closing, ACT would like to provide assurances of the Group's strong and unwavering commitment to transparency and establishing an inclusive, well-structured and merit-based process for the crucial role as UN Secretary-General: Both in this year's process, and through further building on progress achieved, and codifying best practice in the Revitalisation resolution, for the benefit of processes in the years to come.

Thank you.