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FACT SHEET

THE ROLE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL



UN Secretary-General António Guterres (center) meets with former Secretaries-General Kofi Annan (left) and Ban Ki-moon (right)
© UN Photo/Mark Garten

The current Secretary-General, and the ninth occupant of the post, is Mr. António Guterres of Portugal, who took office on 1 January 2017.

The Charter describes the Secretary-General as “chief administrative officer” of the Organization, who shall act in that capacity and perform “such other functions as are entrusted” to him or her by the Security Council, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and other United Nations organs. The Charter also empowers the Secretary-General to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”. These

guidelines both define the powers of the office and grant it considerable scope for action. The Secretary-General would fail if he did not take careful account of the concerns of Member States, but he must also uphold the values and moral authority of the United Nations, and speak and act for peace, even at the risk, from time to time, of challenging or disagreeing with those same Member States.

That creative tension accompanies the Secretary-General through day-to-day work that includes attendance at sessions of United Nations bodies; consultations with world leaders, government officials, and others; and worldwide travel intended to keep him in touch with the peoples of the Organization’s Member States and informed about the vast array of issues of international concern that are on the Organization’s agenda. Each year, the Secretary-General issues a report on the work of the United Nations that appraises its activities and outlines future priorities.

The Secretary-General is also Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which brings together the Executive Heads of all UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies twice a year in order to further coordination and cooperation in the entire range of substantive and management issues facing the United Nations System.

One of the most vital roles played by the Secretary-General is the use of his “good offices”—steps taken publicly and in private, drawing upon his independence, impartiality, and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading.

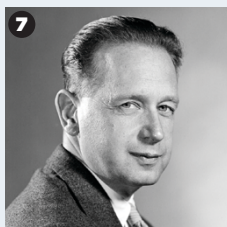
Each Secretary-General also defines his role within the context of his particular time in office.

HOW IS THE SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTED?

The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Security Council. The Secretary-General's selection is therefore subject to the veto of any of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Although there is technically no limit to the number of five-year terms a Secretary-General may serve, none so far have held office for more than two terms.

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HIS PREDECESSORS WERE:

- 1 **Ban Ki-moon** (Republic of Korea), who held office from January 2007 to December 2016;
- 2 **Kofi A. Annan** (Ghana), who held office from January 1997 to December 2006;
- 3 **Boutros Boutros-Ghali** (Egypt), who held office from January 1992 to December 1996;
- 4 **Javier Pérez de Cuéllar** (Peru), who served from January 1982 to December 1991;
- 5 **Kurt Waldheim** (Austria), who held office from January 1972 to December 1981;
- 6 **U Thant** (Burma, now Myanmar), who served from November 1961, when he was appointed acting Secretary-General (he was formally appointed Secretary-General in November 1962) to December 1971;
- 7 **Dag Hammarskjöld** (Sweden), who served from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in Africa in September 1961; and
- 8 **Trygve Lie** (Norway), who held office from February 1946 to his resignation in November 1952.

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