

United Nations Security Council formally approves Antonio Guterres as next UN Secretary General

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New York: Portugal's former prime minister Antonio Guterres, who was formally approved on Thursday to be the next UN secretary-general, said he faces "huge challenges" and hopes to see unity and consensus during his term.

Security Council President Vitaly Churkin, Russia's UN ambassador, said Guterres was approved by acclamation for a 5-year term during a closed-door meeting on Thursday.

Antonio Guterres formally approved as UN secretary-general

The Security Council's recommendation now goes to the UN's 193-member General Assembly, which is expected to vote on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's successor next week. Ban's second 5-year term ends December 31.

Speaking at the Foreign Ministry in Lisbon, Guterres said that he hoped the consensus vote would turn out to be symbolic, bringing "swift decisions which the troubled world we live in demands."

Guterres topped all six informal polls in the council after receiving high marks from almost every diplomat for his performance in the first-ever question-and-answer sessions for candidates in the General Assembly.

He was the only candidate of the 10 in the race to receive no "discourage" votes in Wednesday's poll, which was the first to use colored ballots to distinguish the votes of the five veto-wielding permanent members — the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

The result disappointed campaigners for a woman or an East European to be the world's top diplomat for the first time.

"Antonio Guterres has won this race because he was the best candidate for the race," Britain's UN Ambassador Matthew Rycroft said before entering Thursday's meeting. "It was a crowded field, it was a strong field and I'm delighted that seven of the 13 candidates were women but I and others have always been clear that while now is the right time for a woman that we were going to pick the strongest person."

The veteran politician and diplomat said in an interview with media during his campaign that if he got the job his aim would be to work with all countries to help solve the myriad problems on the global agenda.

Guterres will almost certainly select a woman as deputy secretary-general and he said in the interview that one of the things that is "crucial" at the male-dominated United Nations is "to have gender parity."

He said that his 10 years as the UN high commissioner for refugees, which ended in December, were "excellent preparation" for a secretary-general who needs to be an honest broker and be seen by countries as independent in order to promote consensus and overcome crises.

"I think we are living in a world where we see a multiplication of new conflicts, and you see an enormous difficulty in solving the conflicts," Guterres said. "There is a clear lack of capacity in the international community to prevent and to solve conflicts."

Whatâ€™s needed, he said, is a new â€œdiplomacy for peaceâ€• which requires discreet diplomatic contacts and shuttling among key players in conflicts and disputes. The secretary-general should also engage as much as possible and â€œact with humility to try to create the conditions for member states that are the crucial actors in any process to be able to come together and overcome their differences,â€• he said.

The 10 years as high commissioner were â€œthe most remarkable experience you can imagine,â€• he said. â€œItâ€™s the most fascinating work you can have, very demanding â€” and I gained a lot of experience in dealing with all crises and all governmentsâ€• involved in crises everywhere.

After his term ended, Guterres said, he felt an obligation to do something â€œhaving had this dramatic experience of dealing with people that are suffering enormouslyâ€• as refugees and having no solution to their plight.

He said the place where he could probably contribute the most to solve that problem and other global crises was at the United Nations so he decided to apply to be secretary-general.