



Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Room S 3800
United Nations
New York
New York 10017

14 March 2008
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Dear Secretary-General,

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, has set a high standard in promoting and protecting human rights throughout the world. As you begin to look for the next High Commissioner, we are writing to emphasize the high expectations which our organizations have for the successor to this important office. Appointing an extremely capable and highly qualified High Commissioner is crucial at this time when fundamental principles of human rights are challenged and the independence of the High Commissioner's Office is under attack. We appreciate the strong statement you made in Geneva, supporting the High Commissioner's Office as well as its independence, and we urge you to continue to defend vigorously the office's ability to operate without interference from any source.

Criteria /Qualifications for appointment

Our organizations believe that the new High Commissioner must be a person of the highest international standing and integrity, and have a proven track-record of public advocacy for human rights. She or he must be a human rights champion ready to be outspoken and independent in fulfilling the office's mandates. The High Commissioner must be a strong leader with a clear vision for the protection of all human rights, and bring dynamism, courage and commitment to the position. She or he must be able to inspire those working for the promotion and protection of human rights and the broader international community. In addition, the next High Commissioner should be someone with proven management skills and the ability to navigate effectively within a complex human rights community which comprises governments, civil society and other stakeholders.

We urge you to look at candidates from all countries and to select an exceptionally well-qualified candidate who would be able to meet the demands of this important post from the moment he or she assumes the post.

Selection process

The selection process will be very important in ensuring that the best qualified candidate for the position of High Commissioner is identified. You have stressed the importance of accountability, professionalism and transparency for the United Nations, and we urge that you apply these principles as well to the selection of the new High Commissioner. We recommend the following:

A formal description of the qualifications you are seeking in the next High Commissioner should be formulated relying on the qualities set out above, and should be made public. This description would assist in the identification of candidates and facilitate your assessment of their competencies. The process must be transparent and include wide consultation with all stakeholders, governmental and nongovernmental, including civil society, notably NGOs dealing with human rights. There should be a set timetable for nominations, shortlists and final selection to provide a framework for the selection process that ensures transparency and accountability.

The appointment processes for both the current UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Administrator of UNDP provide useful guidance in this regard. In both cases, the shortlist of candidates was made public, an important step in ensuring that the Secretary-General had the broadest possible input in making those appointments. A similar process would greatly enhance the credibility of your ultimate appointment, and assist you in selecting the most outstanding candidate for this crucial post.

Human rights, with peace and security and development, are one of the three pillars of the United Nations. It is vital that the next holder of this position be a compelling leader for human rights within the United Nations system and throughout the world. In this year of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we urge you to put in place a process that reflects the gravity and significance of this appointment to human rights victims and defenders worldwide.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan
Secretary General
Amnesty International

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director
Human Rights Watch