



The 21-22 April interactive dialogue with candidates for the position of next UN Secretary-General: **the most impossible job in the world or the most impossible job interview in the world?**

Leadership selection review.

by Dr. Augustina **ŞIMAN**

The 21-22 April interactive dialogue with candidates for the position of next UN Secretary-General: the most impossible job in the world or the most impossible job interview in the world?

What the world has witnessed between April 21 – 22 of 2026 is one of the most important diplomatic meetings on the international arena, with a profound historical significance. In the 80 years of UN's existence, it has had just 9 Secretary-Generals – all playing major roles in resolving global crises (such as *Dag Hammarskjold* negotiating prisoner releases between the USA and China following the Korean War and overseeing the UN's response to the 1956 Suez Crises; or *U Thant* facilitating negotiations between the US and Soviets during the Cuban Missile Crises, avoiding an all-out nuclear war between), in gathering a consolidated global international response and establishing policies for transboundary health concerns (such as *Koffi Annan's* efforts leading to the creation of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which went on to save millions of lives across the world), in addressing current pressing global issues – like climate change (with *António Guterres* mobilizing global efforts to combat climate change, advocating for the Paris Agreement and promoting clean energy transitions), etc., while withstanding attempts of political pressure or interference, serving as a moral compass for the 193 member states, and demonstrating leadership in times of divisions between states. A job that has been often referred to as “[the most impossible job in the world](#)”.

Now, the time has come for the international community to select and appoint a new UN Secretary-General. A process consisting of several steps (*thoroughly explained [here](#)*), with the Permanent Missions of UN member states in New York, forming the UN General Assembly, actively engaged in [interactive dialogues](#) with candidates.

What is an “interactive dialogue”? It is a fairly new practice, [introduced in 2015 \(A/RES/69/321\)](#), during the previous process of selecting and appointing the UN Secretary-General, with the goal of incorporating transparency and inclusivity into this important process, so that the wider UN membership no longer feels that it is solely the 15 states composing the UN Security Council deciding upon a matter of such magnitude and impacting on all states. This approach has been put in place for [the 2025 – 2026 selection and appointment process as well \(A/RES/79/327\)](#), with **[the 193 member states \(as well as civil](#)**

society organizations) being able to ask questions and interact with candidates, during a three-hour meeting, on two thematic segments: I. Proven leadership abilities, experience and skills of the candidates for a strong and fit-for-the-future organization; and II. The three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development, and human rights. Among the important house-keeping rules: the candidates' answers to questions addressed by a member state cannot exceed 2 minutes, and those referring to questions addressed by a group of states cannot exceed 3 minutes.

In the recent April 2026 practice, the much-needed transparency and inclusivity of the process translated into an avalanche of wide, complex, cross-cutting, sensitive, urgent, or even principled questions asked for the 4 candidates nominated thus far (Michelle Bachelet Jeria – nominated by Brazil and Mexico, Rafael Mariano Grossi – nominated by Argentina, Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis – nominated by Costa Rica, Macky Sall – nominated by Burundi) – quite literally making the interactive dialogue “**the most impossible job interview in the world**”.

What adds to this “impossibility” is also the enduring political realities of UN diplomacy behind the public stage – namely the bilateral political negotiations taking place between the candidates and the member states of the UN Security Council (which is not to be confused with the informal meetings of the Security Council as a whole body with the candidates).

Below, a leadership selection review based on the two aspects: the technical and the political.

I. The technical aspect of the interactive dialogues:

During the 4 informal interactive dialogues, which took place between April 21 – 22, candidates received anywhere between 100 to 200 questions per interactive dialogue, coming from the UN member states and the civil society organizations, to which they uninterruptedly answered throughout 3 hours. Just to frame it in a concrete example, in the case of the first interactive dialogue of the competition, which took place on April 21st, Madame Michelle Bachelet Jeria, the candidate of Brazil and Mexico, former President of Chile and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, received approximately 71 questions from 30 delegations that took the floor in national capacity or behalf of a group of states, not adding to this count the questions raised by the civil society organizations.

Candidates face an enormous number of questions on an equally diverse range of UN global pressing matters, which they must listen, memorize, and then answer within 2 or 3 minutes.

Moreover, given that it is the UN, and that there are many countries with opposing views, the candidate's answers need to be concrete, but not too narrow, diplomatic but not too abstract, and most importantly – one cannot step on anyone's toe, particularly of the current members of the UN Security Council whom ultimately decide on the single candidate they will recommend, through an adopted resolution, to the UN General Assembly (namely the same states and their respective diplomats asking questions during the interactive dialogue). **It's complex acrobatics of insightful knowledge (regarding the achievements of UN, its ongoing processes, and the issues that the Organization is facing), leadership, and balance that candidates need to demonstrate.**

To put it into perspective, the first question that Rafael Mariano Grossi, candidate nominated by Argentina, received during the interactive dialogue came from Uruguay (speaking on behalf of the Group 77 and China):

“First, with reference to the UN80 initiative, introduced by Secretary-General António Guterres, what is your assessment of the proposal, and how do you believe it could advance a United Nations that is more effective, efficient, and delivers greater impact on the ground? How would you ensure that any related reforms fully respect the intergovernmental nature of the United Nations, preserve the balance among its three pillars, and do not come at the expense of development mandates or other priorities of developing countries?”

With a 2030 deadline fast approaching, how would you ensure the full and timely implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, bearing in mind the universality and divisibility of the goals and targets, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and the commitment to leave no one behind? Specifically, how do you envisage the role of the Secretary General and the UN Secretariat in advancing this objective?”

If you were appointed as Secretary-General, how would you ensure equal and fair distribution based on gender and geographical balance, as prescribed by Article 101 of the Charter and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, particularly in terms of the overall increase in the representation of unrepresented and underrepresented countries, especially from developing countries at the senior level appointments within the UN Secretariat and the broader UN system?”

At a time of shrinking fiscal space, declining ODA, rising debt burdens, and widening development gaps, how would you, as Secretary-General, mobilize the United Nations system to defend and advance the development pillar, accelerate implementation of the 2030 agenda, and support financing for development in a manner fully responsive to the priorities of developing countries?”

In light of the organization's persistent liquidity crisis, including warnings of a potential raise to bankruptcy, what concrete measures would you, as Secretary-General, undertake to promote

compliance with member states' financial obligations, ensuring that assessed contributions are paid in full, on time, and without conditions?"

The above represents a word-by-word transcript of the questions asked by the G77 and China in a single setting as the representative of Uruguay took the floor. **The candidate was expected to answer all of these questions within 3 minutes.**

As the example clearly illustrates, the diplomat from the Permanent Mission of Uruguay managed to inquire within the allocated timeslot on a variety of issues: the UN80 initiative launched by the soon-former UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, the measures the candidate would undertake to ensure equal and fair distribution based on gender and geographical balance when appointing senior level officials within the UN Secretariat and the broader UN system, the need to advance the development pillar of UN, the measures the candidate would undertake to overcome the organization's liquidity crisis. **These are just the first 5 out of the over 100 questions that Grossi received on 21st of April 2026.**

Similarly, Macky Sall, the candidate of Burundi, was inquired regarding a multitude of UN issues presented by a speaker in one intervention, with – for instance – the representative of Singapore, speaking on behalf of the Small States Group, taking the floor to ask Sall about what steps the candidate will take to strengthen the role of the General Assembly, especially at a time when the Security Council has been unable to take decisive action; how will the candidate, if appointed Secretary General, support and strengthen the office of the President of the General Assembly; how will the candidate accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and the Pact for the Future; how does the candidate plan to galvanize support for the work of the United Nations, especially among younger people who represent the future in all our societies. This is just one of the tens of similar interventions states and civil society organizations had to assess the candidate's fit for the role of UN Secretary-General.

In another example, earlier on April 21st, towards the end of the interactive dialogue held between the UN General Assembly and Michelle Bachelet Jeria, candidate nominated by Brazil and Mexico, she received within the set of two questions coming from the delegation of the Russian Federation speaking in national capacity the following one:

"Do you believe that the principles of UN Charter can be ranked in order of importance and does the Secretary-General have the right to interpret the Charter and arbitrarily decide in which cases the principles of self-determination should be applied and in which territorial integrity should be applied?"

This is obviously a trick question, to which only lawyers specialized in public international law can provide an answer, which is also deeply rooted in Russia's war against Ukraine, and the

subsequent legal battles and statements across UN specialized meetings (such as the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization, debates on the annual Reports of the International Court of Justice, etc.). [The honest answer is that according to the UN General Assembly 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States there can be no conflict nor hierarchy between the principles](#) “In their interpretation and application the above principles are interrelated and each principle should be construed in the context of other principles. Nothing in this Declaration shall be construed as prejudicing in any manner the provisions of the Charter (...)”, and therefore the Russian Federation cannot orchestrate and invoke the principle of self-determination (as it did, in 2014 for instance, in the case of Crimea) to violate Ukraine’s territorial integrity. This honest answer would have, nevertheless, to be calibrated to ensure Russia’s support given its standing as a Permanent Member of the Security Council and the weight of its vote.

The question asked by the delegation of the Russian Federation represents a single issue with deep-rooted politicization. Now, let’s turn to an example of a **ramified formulation** (*as a metaphor imagine a branch of a tree – which is the main topic, and many smaller branches growing out of it – which are all the questions on the issues surrounding the topic*) often heard throughout all the informal interactive dialogues as member states and civil society organizations were delivering their questions.

During the interactive [dialogue held on April 22nd](#), Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis, candidate nominated by Costa Rica, was asked by the delegation of Mali, speaking on behalf of the African Group the following:

“What is your appreciation of the common African position on the reform of the Security Council? How can you use the authority and influence of the Office of the Secretary-General to advance intergovernmental negotiations on these issues?”

The Resolution 2719 of the Security Council created a permanent framework for peacekeeping operations led by the African Union to benefit from the United Nations' statutory contribution, but the implementation of this resolution remains in a deadlock. What is your approach to the Third Annual Review, and how do you intend to take charge of this continued absence of political will?

On the question of development, development remains a priority of the First Order for Africa (...). How do you plan to ensure the continued support of the United Nations in the framework of development defined and adopted by Africa? What concrete action do you plan to take to advance the reform of international financial institutions, including the improvement of the representation of Africa within these institutions (...).

African personnel within the Secretariat are faced with multiple challenges, such as the insecurity of contracts, visas, the under-representation at level P5 and above, and in some cases, discrimination. What measures do you plan to take to correct these problems?

(...) what program of the current Secretary-General for Africa do you plan to maintain and strengthen?"

As the April 2026 interactive dialogues demonstrated in the case of all 4 candidates, 80 % of the time the questions asked, particularly by delegations of UN member states, were lengthy, numerously conglomerated in one intervention, covering several issues for which delegations wanted the candidates to provide solutions within 2 and 3 minutes.

II. The political aspect of the discussions happening at the UN Security Council level:

While the interactive dialogues between the candidates and the UN General Assembly are public, the political negotiations happening at the UN Security Council are not.

Additionally to the informal meetings of the UN Security Council with each individual candidate held behind closed doors, candidates are also engaging on a bilateral level with each member of the Security Council or in group settings – such as the Permanent 5 Members (P5) meeting with the candidates, Elected Members (E10) meeting with the candidates, or the African countries within the Elected membership (A3) meeting with the candidates.

The discussions taking place during these confidential bilateral meetings often can vary from appointments of representatives of certain P5 member states in senior positions across the UN system and field missions to assessing whether the standing and opinions of candidates for the position of UNSG, on certain issues and conflicts, resonate with what constitutes a priority for E10 as a whole and individually, or for the A3 as a whole and individually.

Ultimately what matters is that once a political agreement is reached within the Council (through negotiations and [straw polls](#)), and it proceeds to adopting a resolution, with no P5 exercising its veto, recommending a single candidate for the appointment by the General Assembly as the new UN Secretary-General – the UN Security Council, and more particularly the P5 reconfirm its absolute authority in the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Historically the UN General Assembly has always moved on to appointing as Secretary-General the candidate put forward by the Security Council.

A scenario where the UNGA would not agree with the recommendation of the UNSC is difficult to envision given the huge administrative implications of such delay in the appointment process for the Organization, and the idea of a possible tension between the two main organs of the UN – which is exactly what diplomacy is meant to prevent and the interactive dialogues happening at the GA level are meant to balance.

Conclusions:

1. From a leadership selection review standpoint, the “impossibility” of this process / job interview resides both in its technical design of the informal interactive dialogues, as well as in the internal political processes at the UN Security Council level, but it can be improved.
2. What is different from the [current 2026 informal interactive dialogue](#) between the UN General Assembly and the candidates for the position of UN Secretary-General and the [2016 process](#), is that in 2016 a segment would last [2 hours](#), with civil society given the floor - time permitting, while in 2026 a segment would last [3 hours](#), with civil society given the floor on the same footing with member states. This effort to further enhance the transparency and inclusivity of the interactive dialogues made it difficult for candidates to maintain a steady coherence in their answers. In this sense, **a pertinent recommendation to improve the interviewing process, would be to introduce a 15-minute break, in the middle of the segment, for candidates to catch their breath, reset, and be able to continue answering the questions with the same intellectual stamina.**
3. Furthermore, at present, a single intervention may contain five or more separate questions across both related and unrelated themes, making meaningful answers nearly impossible within the two or three-minute reply limit. **As a solution, the next President of the General Assembly could request, in the next similar process years from now, to limit each intervention to one principal question and one follow-up question. This would improve answer quality, comparability across candidates, and fairness. The objective of the informal interactive dialogue should be to test judgment, not memory endurance.**
4. At present, interventions depend largely on who takes the floor, and therefore candidates are not always tested equally on the same issues. **As solution for this aspect is to publish standardized core questions for all candidates for which they can present written submissions and focus on more specific matters during the informal interactive dialogue. This will create a genuine fair comparability basis between candidates and off-load the interactive dialogues.** These core questions could be the following: How would you contribute to overcoming a P5 deadlock? What management reform would you implement in

your first 100 days? How would you protect the integrity of the staff of the UN Secretariat? How would you address the UN liquidity crisis? What is your vision for the advancement of geographic representation and gender equality in senior appointments across the UN? The candidates' answers to these can be published on the public candidate dashboard available online, alongside with the already existing information – such as letter of nomination, CV, vision statement, and financing disclosures.

5. The UN Member States are serious and deeply committed to selecting the strongest possible leader for an era of war, fragmentation, debt distress, climate disruption and institutional distrust. Future interactive dialogues should evolve from a marathon of questions into a sharper instrument for testing leadership, judgment and readiness to govern – **making this instead of the most “impossible job interview in the world” for candidates, the “most fulfilling job interview in the world” for the United Nations.**

About the author

Augustina ŞIMAN holds a **Doctoral Degree**, with a thesis in Public International Law, as well as a Master's Degree in International Law, from Moldova State University. She co-authored a monograph entitled „The Impact of International Organizations on the Development of Contemporary Public International Law” (Chişinău, 2019). She is an **alum of prestigious international law and diplomatic studies** at the Hague Academy of International Law (UN fellowship), Vienna Diplomatic Academy, the Romanian Diplomatic Institute, and the Jan Paderewski Institute of Diplomacy in Poland. In 2022, following her **endorsement by 3 members of the UN International Law Commission**, she was selected for the eminent International Law Seminar – where she conducted research on reparations to Individuals for gross violations of International Human Rights Law and serious violations of International Humanitarian Law.

Between 2023 – 2024 she served on the **UN Security Council**, focusing on issues such as: rules of procedure, working methods and documentation of the UN Security Council, counterterrorism, cooperation with the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, as well as regional conflicts and thematic files.

She holds a rich diplomatic acumen across the **UN General Assembly** as well on matters such as: UN elections, 6th (legal) - 5th (administrative and budgetary) - 3rd (social, humanitarian, and cultural) Committees. During her tenure as an accredited Moldovan diplomat to UN (2019 – 2022), elected by acclamation by the UN General Assembly, she served as **Vice-President of Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**. She also served as Advisor to the Chair of the UN Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization.

Prior to this, she taught Public International Law and other related courses at the Faculty of Law of Moldova State University, and since has continued to deliver guest lectures on contemporary pressing issues – “Modern Challenges to Public International Law and Multilateral Diplomacy at the UN”, “The impact of sea-level rise on statehood”, “Artificial Intelligence in Conflict – Reflections from the UN Security Council”.