UN Secretary General election process kicks off

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United Nations: The UN has kicked off the process to elect the next Secretary General, with the Security Council and General Assembly making an unprecedented call to member states to recommend woman candidates for the top job that has been held by a man for the past 70 years.

In a first, UN Security Council President for December US envoy Samantha Power and General Assembly President Mogens Lykketoft circulated a letter yesterday to the 193 UN members soliciting names of candidates for the next UN chief and vowing to make the process more transparent and inclusive.

The two also made a special emphasis on the need for members states to nominate women candidates for the job of the world's top diplomat.

No woman has served as Secretary General in the 70 years that the UN has been in existence.

"Convinced of the need to guarantee equal opportunities for women and men in gaining access to senior decision-making positions, Member States are encouraged to consider presenting women, as well as men, as candidates for the position of Secretary-General," the letter said.

Lykketoft said that so far two candidates had been put forward for selection - Croatia's woman Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic and former UN General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim of Macedonia.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has served two five-year terms and his tenure as UN Chief will end next year.

He has been a strong proponent of electing a woman as his successor and has said at several public venues that "it's high time for a Secretary-General to be a woman".

India has also called for changing and improving the existing process of selecting the world body's chief, with its UN envoy Ambassador Asoke Mukerji saying that gender equality and regional rotation should be given due regard.

The next Secretary-General will assume the role in January 2017 and will serve a five year term, which can be renewed by Member States for an additional five years.

According to the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly following the recommendation of the Security Council.

Until now the selection of the Secretary General was made behind closed doors by the Security Council with the five veto-wielding permanent members having the last word.

However as the time to elect Ban's successor nears, there is a growing demand from member states not only to make the process more transparent and inclusive but also to have a woman leader assume the role.

In another unprecedented move, Power and Lykketoft said potential candidates will be given the opportunity to interact with members of the Security Council and General Assembly.

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