Former Portuguese PM Guterres set to become next UN chief

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United Nations: In a unanimous choice declared in the sixth straw poll conducted on Wednesday, Portugal's former premier Antonio Guterres is set to become the next UN Secretary-General.

Former Portuguese PM Antonio Guterres

Russia's envoy to the UN and President of the Council for October Vitaly Churkin announced that after the sixth straw poll, Guterres has emerged as the "clear favourite" even as hopes for a woman to succeed Ban Ki-moon as the world's top diplomat suffered a major setback.

"Today after our sixth straw poll we have a clear favourite and his name is Antonio Guterres," Churkin told reporters.

Guterres, 67, received 13 encourage votes and two no opinion votes.

The 15-nation Council will go for a formal vote tomorrow, a mere formality, where Guterres's name for the next Secretary-General will be decided upon by acclamation.

"We have decided to go to a formal vote tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock, and we hope it can be done by acclamation," said Churkin.

"I wish Guterres well in discharging his duties as the Secretary-General of the UN for the next five years," Churkin said, flanked by the Permanent Representatives of all UNSC members.

After the UNSC formal vote, Guterres's name will then be officially transferred to the General Assembly, whose membership historically chooses the candidate that the Council decides upon.

The current Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, is the eighth occupant of the Organisation. He took office in January, 2007 and will end his 10-year tenure on December 31 this year.

Guterres had emerged as the front-runner from the first straw polls that began in July.

There was a growing call among several UN member states and civil society organisations to choose a woman as the next Secretary General, given that the world body has had no female head in its 70-year history.

- (With inputs from PTI)