

Former Portuguese PM Guterres sworn in as 9th UN Secretary General

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United Nations: Former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres was on Monday sworn in as the ninth Secretary General of the UN to head a world, succeeding Ban Ki-moon as the chief of the 71-year old world body.

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Guterres will formally take over on January 1 from Ban Ki-moon, who led the UN for two terms from 2007.

The incoming UN head has an Indian connection - the family of his wife, Catarina Vaz Pinto, is from Goa.

While he was making his global rounds to build support for his candidacy, India was the only non-permanent member of the Security Council he visited.

The election of Guterres was one of the smoothest ever, when he got the nod on October 6 from the fractitious Security Council after only six internal polls. His appointment was endorsed by the General Assembly the next week.

His election was also one of the relatively open ones with the candidates for the job making presentations before the General Assembly and civil society groups and answering questions. Diplomats said that Guterres made a strong impression at these sessions.

His quick election by UN standards confounded early expectations that a woman, most likely from Eastern Europe, would get the job.

Russia and China came around to backing him, even though he was from a NATO member.

Heavy lobbying for the election of a woman by several UN members and civil society organisations preceded the election. All the Secretary Generals have been men.

Under the system of geographic rotation it was the turn of Europe and countries from Eastern Europe had staked their claim as none from the region had held the job. Irina Borkova, the director general of UNESCO who is from Bulgaria, was one of the candidates they pushed.

Ultimately in the Security Council with 14 male ambassadors and one female, Guterres prevailed.

- (With IANS inputs)