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Information Note - Office of the President of the General Assembly

Background

This information note provides a short overview of the institution of the President of the General Assembly (PGA) and his/her office. It draws directly on the work of the 65th PGA, H. E. Mr Joseph Deiss, who led the publication of a [“PGA Handbook”](#), in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). It utilises the text of this publication extensively, melding it with some more up to date information. The Permanent Mission of Switzerland has been consulted and is supportive of the initiative of this information note. Switzerland is also considering ways to update its published PGA Handbook.

This information note is not an official UN document. Rather it is a short background communication, made in the spirit of transparency, to try to enhance broader public understanding of the institution of the PGA and his office. Hyperlinks and footnotes are used throughout the paper to direct readers to further sources of relevant information.

1. About the President of the General Assembly

1.1. Who can become PGA?

The position of President of the General Assembly is referred to in the [Charter of the United Nations](#)¹. Any Member State of the United Nations (except for the Permanent Members of the Security Council²) can put forward a candidate for PGA. Member States are free to choose their own candidates using any method, vetting and due diligence they decide. The PGA is elected in his/her personal capacity and for the duration of the term of office (one year) represents the membership as a whole.

The position of PGA rotates among the five regional groups³, for example the Group of Asian States (66th session), the Group of Eastern European States (67th session), the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (68th session), the Group of African States (69th session), the Western European and other States Group (70th session). The [full list of past PGAs](#) is available on the General Assembly website.

1.2. How is the PGA elected?

The President is elected by a simple majority vote of the General Assembly⁴. Usually, the Member States of the regional group, who's turn it is to nominate a candidate, agree on one candidate through an informal process of discussion about the relative credentials of potential candidates. In such cases, the election can take place by acclamation⁵.

The President is elected at least three months before formally assuming office, usually in mid-June⁶. This allows him/her to prepare and to assemble a team before the General Assembly session begins in September. During the transition period until formal assumption of office the PGA-elect and his transitional office have limited support in form of office space and computers, but are not entitled to direct UN funding or staffing or other services such as travel, website etc.

¹ Article 21.

² General Assembly Rules of Procedure (RoP), Rule 38.

³ A/RES/33/138.

⁴ UN Charter, Article 18. RoP, Rule 30.

⁵ RoP, Annex V, para. 16.

⁶ A/RES/58/126, Annex, sect. B.

1.3. What is the role and mandate of the PGA?

The exact role and mandate have been defined and agreed on by the General Assembly and are described in the [General Assembly Rules of Procedure](#), in [General Assembly revitalization resolutions](#), and in other General Assembly resolutions which assign responsibilities and tasks to the PGA.

1.3.1. PGA mandates from the GA Rules of Procedure

According to the General Assembly Rules of Procedure, the PGA shall⁷:

- open and close each General Assembly plenary meeting
- direct the discussions in plenary meetings (e.g., managing the list of speakers and according the right to speak)
- ensure observance of the General Assembly Rules of Procedure
- rule on points of order
- propose adjournment or suspension of a meeting.

It should be noted that in exercising his functions the President remains under the authority of the General Assembly⁸.

1.3.2. PGA mandates from revitalization resolutions

The revitalization resolutions request the PGA to:

- organize thematic debates⁹
- suggest the theme for the general debate¹⁰
- prepare a report on best practices and lessons learned for his/her successor¹¹
- enhance public visibility of the PGA and the General Assembly¹²
- meet regularly with the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, and the President of ECOSOC¹³
- play a role in supporting General Assembly participation in the selection of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (including convening informal General Assembly meetings with candidates)¹⁴.

⁷ RoP, Rule 35.

⁸ RoP, Rule 36.

⁹ A/RES/60/286.

¹⁰ A/RES/58/126.

¹¹ A/RES/60/286.

¹² A/RES/60/286.

¹³ A/RES/60/286

¹⁴ A/RES/69/321.

1.3.3. PGA mandates from individual General Assembly resolutions

Mandates assigned to the PGA by individual [General Assembly Resolutions](#) can pertain to the organization of events such as high-level meetings, the negotiation of outcome documents, or consultations on a specific topic. The PGA may appoint one or more facilitators or advisors for such processes. This potentially covers the full spectrum of the work of the General Assembly from sustainable development to peace and security, human rights, humanitarian and the rule of law. When the PGA appoints facilitators, the ultimate responsibility for the process rests with the PGA, who through his Office follows the proceedings of the negotiations closely.

1.4. What else does the PGA do?

The PGA interacts and engages with Member States, the media, civil society and the wider public. He/she can participate in UN Conferences, and other international and regional meetings, and visit Member States as well as co-host events with Member States and other partners.

2. Funding available to the PGA

The PGA has up to three direct funding sources at his/her disposal.

2.1. Regular budget of the Office of the PGA¹⁵

In 1998, Member States approved the establishment of an annual budget of 250,000 USD for the Office of the PGA (OPGA). The budget for the 69th Session (recently concluded) was 322,000 USD. It has not changed since 1998, except for inflation adjustments¹⁶.

The regular budget covers the PGA's official hospitality, official travel and other expenditures relating to the PGA's official responsibilities. Communication devices

¹⁵ The Programme Budget of the United Nations (more commonly referred to as the regular budget) is governed by General Assembly resolutions 41/213; 42/211; and 58/269. Main documents considered during the budget cycle (or biennium) include the programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 (General Assembly resolutions 69/262; 69/263A-C; and 69/247A and B) and the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 (A/70/7 (Introduction) and A/70/7 (Section 1 and Section 2) and A/70/7 Supp). Other legal instruments include the UN Financial Regulations and Rules (ST/SGB/2013/4) and the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, revisions to which were recently endorsed by the General Assembly and will be promulgated by the SG early next year. The relevant documents include A/68/74 and Corr.; A/70/16 and A/C.5/70/L.3.

¹⁶ A/70/6 (Sect.1), paras 1.19 to 1.22.

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and/or other ad hoc computer equipment for the Office of the PGA are also charged against this budget.

Expenditures from the regular budget are managed on behalf of the OPGA by the Executive Office of DGACM in accordance with the United Nations Financial Regulations and Rules (UNFRR)¹⁷. In line with the legislative budgetary process, budget performance is reported to the General Assembly on the second year of the biennium for the Assembly's review and approval in the context of the second performance report on the Programme budget¹⁸. These funds are subject to audit by the board of auditors and reported on every two years to the General Assembly¹⁹.

2.2. Donations in support of the Office of the PGA

Donors can directly support the work of the PGA through contributions channelled through the UN system.

In support of the Office of the PGA, a trust fund was established by the Secretary-General in 2010. Member States (including the member state which nominates the PGA) and others may contribute to the trust fund. The fund has mainly been used for general administrative, logistical and management support, and to support thematic debates.

The trust fund is also administered by DGACM in accordance with the UNFRR and Secretary-General bulletin and administrative instructions on the administration and management of trust funds²⁰. All contributions are subject to "program support costs" (i.e., an overhead charge) of 13 percent of the total annual expenditures. The trust fund is also to be charged with an amount equivalent to one per cent of the remuneration or net salary of persons whose engagement is financed by the trust fund, to provide a reserve for coverage of any claim for service-incurred death, injury or illness, under the applicable United Nations Regulations and Rules. The reserve is not refunded to donors. The trust fund is subject to audit by the board of auditors and reported on every two years to the General Assembly²¹.

The operation of the trust fund is covered in its terms of reference²². Relevant details of these terms of reference are summarised below. Terms of reference are made available by DGACM to donors or interested parties on request.

¹⁷ ST/SGB/2013/4, ST/SGB/188, ST/AI/284.

¹⁸ Latest available is A/68/628. Current biennium is being prepared at the end of this calendar year.

¹⁹ Latest available is found in document A/69/5 (Vol. I) and General Assembly resolution 69/249.

²⁰ ST/SGB/2013/4; ST/SGB/188 and ST/AI/284.

²¹ Latest available is found in document A/69/5(Vol. I) and General Assembly resolution 69/249.

²² The framework within which voluntary contributions and establishment of United Nations Trust Fund (UNTF) is managed is defined by the Secretariat. United Nations General Trust Funds (UNGTFs) are established by the General Assembly or by the Secretary-General. All UNGTFs are established and administered in accordance with the UN Financial Regulations and Rules

2.2.1. How are new contributions made to the trust fund

Contributions to the trust fund can be made by a) states and intergovernmental organisations; and b) national institutions and non-governmental organisations, as well as natural and judicial persons, provided that such contributions as set forth are made in accordance with the United Nations Financial Regulations and Rules, in particular with regulation 3.11²³.

Contributions may only be accepted by the Assistant Secretary General, Controller of the Department of Management, or the person officially designated by the Controller to receive contributions for this trust fund. Contributions in cash to the fund may be accepted in United States dollars or other fully convertible currencies. Contributions in non-convertible currencies and in-kind contributions may be accepted only if the Controller determines that the respective currency or in-kind contribution can be fully utilised in the implementation of the purpose covered by the Fund. Contributions in kind are given an estimated monetary value by the Controller at the time the pledges are received.

The making of a pledge and its acceptance are recorded in an exchange of letters and if requested by the donor in a more formal agreement. Any interest income derived from contributions to the fund is credited to the fund in accordance with the applicable United Nations regulations, rules, policies and procedures.

The Controller has designated the following bank account in which the resources of the fund are kept:

Bank name: JP Morgan Chase
International Agencies Banking

Bank address: 270 Park Avenue, 43rd Floor
New York, NY, 10017-2014, USA

((ST/SGB/2013/4) and applicable administrative instructions and SG's bulletin on the establishment and management of Trust Funds (ST/SGB/188) and administrative instructions on General Trust Funds (ST/AI/284).

Programme Managers are encouraged to conduct discussions with prospective donors relating to the possibility of making contributions to TFs and make prospective donors aware that funds are subject to the regulations, rules, policies and procedures of the Organization. The acceptance and use of the voluntary contributions to the TF has to be consistent with the "policies, aims and activities" of the UN. Thus, all funds in the TF can only be used for activities programmed by the GA through the programme planning and budget process, or used for activities otherwise approved by the GA.

It should be noted that Financial Regulation 3.12. on voluntary contributions, whether or not in cash, may be accepted by the SG provided that the purposes for which the contributions are made are consistent with the policies, aims and activities of the Organization".

²³ ST/SGB/2013/4.

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Account name: UN General Trust Fund
Bank account: 485-0019-69
SWIFT code: CHASUS33
ABA number: 021-000-021
Reference: Earmarked for the Trust Fund in Support of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

Contributions are normally received for general administrative, logistical and management support of the implementation of the activities of the Office of the President of the General Assembly. However, contributions may be earmarked for a specific initiative which falls within the purpose of the fund.

Similar to expenditures from the regular budget, disbursements from the trust fund are managed on behalf of the OPGA by the Executive Office of DGACM in accordance with the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations. These funds are subject to audit by the board of auditors and reported on every two years to the General Assembly²⁴.

When a contribution is made to the trust fund, the earmarking and disbursement should respect the intention of the specific donor. If it could not be used as intended, consultations are held with the donor on the appropriate use of the contribution.

2.3. Funding from the member state that nominates the PGA

The Member State nominating the PGA may decide to cover certain expenses associated with his position, such as his/her salary, accommodation etc. The extent of this contribution varies from year to year. In this case disbursements follow the rules and regulations of the member state.

3. Staff profile of the OPGA

3.1. The President of the General Assembly

The PGA is not a UN employee and does not receive a UN salary. Payment of the PGA's salary is usually a matter for the government of the country that nominates the PGA. The Permanent Mission of the sponsoring country usually provides the PGA's accommodation in New York.

UN Transportation (under the Department of Management) provides a car and driver to the PGA for official activities in New York. The UN Department for Safety

²⁴ Latest available is found in document A/69/5(Vol. I) and General Assembly resolution 69/249.

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and Security also provides a security detail for the President for his official term. PGA is given security liaison support during all of his/her official functions.

3.2. UN budget - temporary positions available during the official term in office²⁵

Four professional temporary positions are provided for the OPGA:

- Two D2 level posts.
- One D1 level post.
- One P5 level post.

One General Service temporary position is also provided for the OPGA.

The PGA is free to select these members of his staff, but UN staff members in the OPGA remain subject to all relevant UN staff rules, regulations policies and procedures.

Two DGACM General Service staff members are also assigned to the Office of the PGA. These staff members liaise with DGACM on all administrative matters. As they usually stay for several presidencies, they constitute an important part of retaining the institutional memory of the Office of the PGA (which is also a key part of the General Assembly revitalization process).

The President's Spokesperson is provided to the PGA by the Department of Public Information (DPI). The PGA can select the individual based on the recommendations of DPI.

3.3. Secondees

A way for Member States, including the member state which nominated the PGA, to support the PGA is to second staff to the Office of the PGA. Seconded staff are fully integrated into the Office of the PGA, but retain their contracts and diplomatic status with the Permanent Mission of the respective Member State. Secondments are also possible from other parts of the UN-system and external organizations.

3.4. Associate Experts

The PGA can request additional support from the [Associated Experts Programme](#). This programme is funded by Member States through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and gives young professionals a chance to work for the UN

²⁵ A/RES/58/126, A/RES/59/313.

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for two to three years. The selection of Associated Experts rests with DESA. The Associated Experts Programme is similar to the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme.

3.5. Interns

OPGA can also obtain the support of [United Nations Interns](#). Advertisement and selection is processed via a job opening in Inspira.

4. Official Travel

The PGA usually visits a number of countries in his/her official capacity, generally on a written invitation by the host government or by an international organization.

Most of the PGA's travels take place during the resumed part of the General Assembly session (after New Year) or in the transition period from the time of election until assumption of Office.

Funding for travel can be supported by the host country or by the regular budget of the Office of the PGA. In the latter case, all airplane or train tickets must be obtained through the UN in-house travel agency. The Executive Office of DGACM processes the necessary travel authorizations. The PGA is reimbursed for the expenses incurred during the trip according to UN rules and regulations.

In addition, the PGA is entitled to reimbursement from the regular budget of the Office of the PGA for travel between his/her home country and New York. It is recommended that up to two members of the PGA team can accompany the PGA on official visits on the regular budget of the Office of the PGA (this is an EO/DGACM recommendation only in view of limited funds, however, the final decision is up to PGA). All arrangements and reimbursements of costs for such travel are processed by DGACM in accordance with UN Regulations and Rules.

Other funding sources, including from the host country, or host organization, or the member state which nominates the PGA, may be used for official staff travel. This is particularly relevant in the transition period until formal assumption of office, since UN funds are only available for use of the PGA once he is formally in office.

For secondees, funding can also come from their Permanent Missions and for Associated Experts, from the Associated Experts travel/training budget.

The PGA is accompanied by a security detail on official travel which is funded by the United Nations Department for Security and Safety.

Annex 1: Principles of good governance of the President of the General Assembly and his office during the 70th session

The UN General Assembly is the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations. It has a unique role in global governance because in it, all voices are equal and the concerns of all members are heard. Since taking office for the 70th session, President Lykketoft has committed to performing his duties in an open, transparent and inclusive manner.

As a concrete reflection of this promise, the President and his Office, is committed to the following principles:

1. Integrity and impartiality

Adhering to the highest standards of conduct during his tenure, the President will conduct his duties from the moment he is elected in accordance with the values of this Organisation and the purposes and the principles of the UN Charter. He will remain independent and his conduct and that of his office will reflect that independence at all times. He will seek to avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of any conflict, and will not place himself under any obligation that might influence his mandate and the performance of the functions of the Presidency. He will also ensure that his Office is balanced both geographically and from a gender perspective.

2. Transparency and accountability

Conducting his Office from the time of his election in an open and transparent manner, the President will be accountable to the UN General Assembly. He will provide relevant, accessible, timely and accurate information regarding the activities, engagements and finances of his Office in the discharge of his mandate. He will continue to periodically brief Member States on his activities, including official travel, will engage proactively with other stakeholders and will make full use of the website of the PGA to communicate the work of his Office.

3. Professionalism and effectiveness

He will aim for the highest standards of efficiency and competency in discharging his mandate and in achieving objectives and results in a timely manner. He will ensure that the staff of his Office conduct their work efficiently and in a manner becoming of this Office. He will endeavour to preserve the institutional memory of the Office and to provide the next President with best practices and lessons learned. He will ensure a smooth transition to the President of the seventy first session.