

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE UN CORRESPONDENTS ASSOCIATION**

22 September 2015

Dear colleagues,

Some of you may know that I have been working as a consultant for The Elders on UN reform. But I write to you today as a journalist myself and as the former Director of Communications for Secretary-General Kofi Annan, on behalf of the 1 for 7 Billion campaign, which I strongly support.

A new Secretary-General will be appointed next year. There is growing momentum at the UN to change the current process, in which just five countries – the permanent members of the Security Council – hold sway over the appointment. At present, there is no formal job description, timetable or public list of candidates. Backroom deals are common, including promises made by candidates to states, in return for their support, to appoint nationals of those states, chosen by their governments, to other senior UN posts.

On 11 September, thanks in part to efforts by *1 for 7 Billion*, the General Assembly passed a landmark resolution (69/321) aimed at improving the process. It set out basic selection criteria, called for candidates' names and CVs to be circulated and asked the Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council to write to UN member states with a description of the entire selection process. It also decided that informal dialogues or meetings should be held with candidates.

While this is a major achievement, it is still far from what a modern recruitment process should be – particularly for an organisation that promotes good governance. The Assembly did not endorse media or civil society engagement with candidates, nor did it condemn the practice of extracting promises. It also failed to implement its own 20-year-old commitment to discuss a single, non-renewable term for the Secretary-General, which would free her or him from the constraints of seeking re-appointment. And there is still no mention of a formal vetting process or of a search committee.

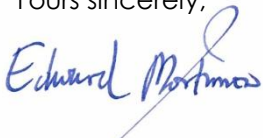
If we are to see a better process this time round, it is very much up to us journalists to monitor closely whether, and how, resolution 69/321 is implemented. *1 for 7 Billion* is keeping a watching brief on country positions as they evolve, but we need your help to shine a light on any states that are blocking progress, whether overtly or through behind-the-scenes manoeuvres.

We also need journalists, particularly those like you who really know and understand the UN, to scrutinise candidates' experience and, as far as possible, to engage them in public discussion. Any undertakings they give should not necessarily be taken at face value, since with the best will in the world they will not always be able to deliver. More important is that the global public should be able to form an impression of the candidates' personalities, especially their integrity and ability to lead. We hope that an official list will soon be published. In the meantime, *1 for 7 Billion* has drawn up a list of confirmed and rumoured candidates in an effort to improve transparency.

Without your help, we will not be able to shine a spotlight on candidates' records or assess to what extent they are pandering to powerful states during the appointment process.

Like the UN itself, journalists play a crucial role in facilitating free and fair elections around the world. With your support, we can help the UN live up to its own standards.

Yours sincerely,



Edward Mortimer