



No Second Term for Guterres: It's Time for a Woman Secretary-General

February 1, 2021: United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has [announced](#) that he is available for a second five-year term.

Will he get it? Probably, yes. Does he deserve a second term? The answer is an emphatic “no.”

In his inaugural [address](#) as Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres described the eradication of sexual offenses by UN peacekeeping and all other UN personnel as the first item on his reform agenda. During his first year in office, he convened a high-level meeting on combatting sexual exploitation and abuse and established a task force to address sexual harassment within the UN system. Yet he has been largely silent as the crisis has continued over the past three years. His “New Approach” to sexual offenses by UN personnel has proven to be little more than a public relations campaign marked by cosmetic adjustments that fail to address the systemic flaws that sustain a culture of [impunity](#).

You need look no further than the highest-ranking UN official dedicated to addressing the issue of sexual offenses by UN personnel. Ms. Jane Holl Lute, who serves at the Under-Secretary-General level, was appointed as Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Ms. Lute—who is a highly paid public speaker on cyber security issues, a member of six separate boards of directors, and president and CEO of the North American branch of the digital security giant SICPA—works as a part-time, “when-actually-employed” UN official, based out of her Washington D.C. home. She is also the UN Special Envoy to Cyprus.

She has not made a trip to a peacekeeping country—outside of Cyprus—since April 2016. She seems not to have made a public appearance or statement on sexual exploitation and abuse since 2018. However, in what seems to be the ultimate parody, for \$7,070 you can join Jane Holl Lute on a [World Affairs](#) summer cruise.

Such is the track record of Mr. Guterres’ Special Coordinator.

Mr. Guterres has also boasted of the establishment of the Victims’ Rights Advocate (VRA) position. The VRA concept, as we have [shown](#), is a fatally flawed hindrance to justice. In January 2021, a UK Parliamentary Committee [found](#) “not much evidence of the impact” of VRA initiatives. The Secretary-General has also made much of his heartfelt wish to “meet personally with victims to hear from them directly.” Has he met with even one victim? Our organization has advocated on behalf of three victims who have written detailed letters asking for a meeting. Mr. Guterres has declined to meet.

The Secretary-General's failure to address the scandal of sexual offenses by UN personnel is of a piece with his dispiriting unwillingness to speak up on behalf of human rights. Mr. Guterres has been mind-numbingly circumspect on the murder of Jamal Khashoggi; the repression of Uyghur Muslims in China; the Myanmar army's onslaught against Rohingya Muslims; the bombing of Syrian hospitals by Russian-Syrian forces; the various Trump administration outrages, including the inhumane child separation policy at the border; and other issues that might conflict with the sensibilities of the permanent five members of the Security Council (whose support is critical for his reappointment as Secretary-General).

The result? A Secretary-General who isn't taken seriously by the nations of the world. When he asks for financial contributions—for COVID relief, for climate change, for victims of [UN-introduced cholera in Haiti](#)—he has trouble garnering an even middling response. When he decries countries that reject the truth about the COVID-19 pandemic and ignore World Health Organization guidelines—as he [did](#) in December—he does so *without naming any of the countries*. He becomes easy to ignore.

But Mr. Guterres has a chance to take a bold action that could secure his place in history. He could write a letter to Member States thus:

Excellencies: Throughout my term in office, I have endeavored to promote gender equality. Yet I must admit that the United Nations remains the embodiment of patriarchy. I have concluded that the most fundamental and dramatic way to advance gender equality is to end the uninterrupted 75-year run of male Secretaries-General.

I shall therefore step down on December 31 of this year. And I do so with the exhortation that my successor must be a woman. I have no doubt that my wishes will be respected by the Member States.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of my highest consideration.

António Guterres

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