

## GWL Voices Insights

### Madam Secretary-General: From 44% support to 100% commitment – A path to gender equality in global leadership

In the last quarter of 2024, significant progress was made in our #MadamSecretaryGeneral campaign. From the explicit acknowledgment that a woman has never served as Secretary-General in the Pact for the Future to more than 10 member states that highlighted this issue during their addresses at UNGA 79. This 2025 is up to a promising start with 42% of member states officially committed to the urgent need for greater representation of women in United Nations leadership roles through a joint statement led by Slovenia, Mexico, and Spain. **But what will it take to engage the remaining 56%?**

#### Written in Stone

September marked a pivotal moment for advancing gender equality in the international system. The Summit of the Future concluded with the adoption of the Declaration on the Pact for the Future, although the final version is weaker in several areas compared to previous drafts, key language on women and gender equality was preserved. For example, the term "gender" appeared 10 times in Draft Zero and 35 times in the final version. Besides, the Pact for the Future emphasizes that the selection and appointment process for the Secretary-General should adhere to principles of merit, transparency, and inclusiveness. Crucially, it highlights the need for gender balance and regional rotation, acknowledging the **"regrettable fact that there has never been a female Secretary-General."** The Declaration encourages Member States to actively consider nominating women as candidates in upcoming elections.

Despite challenges during its approval, the Pact for the Future establishes a significant precedent. By including this explicit commitment, Member States are now bound to work towards a multilateral system that embodies the parity and inclusion central to the Sustainable Development Goals. **The Pact serves as a powerful accountability tool, urging nations to uphold their promise of gender equality and prioritize female candidates for the next Secretary-General selection.**

#### UNGA 79 Falls Short on Female Representation

The 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly once again underscored the glaring gender disparity in global leadership. Over the course of four days, representatives from 196 countries addressed the Assembly, yet only 20 were women—a deeply unsettling statistic in an era that prioritizes gender parity as a global goal. Despite increasing calls for equal representation, systemic barriers persist, obstructing capable women from accessing leadership roles at the highest levels.

This imbalance extends beyond the speakers to the institution itself: in its 79-year history, only four women have served as President of the General Assembly. This troubling fact,

highlighted in GWL Voices' "Women in Multilateralism 2024" report, was starkly apparent during the September meeting of former UNGA Presidents, where María Fernanda Espinosa, GWL Voices' Executive Director, stood as the sole woman in the room. Her presence served as a powerful reminder of how far the world remains from achieving true gender equality in multilateral governance.

Nonetheless, there were signs of progress. Eleven countries explicitly advocated for a female Secretary-General during UNGA79, including Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Germany, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liechtenstein, Namibia, Norway, Slovenia, and Spain. Notably, Chile and Ecuador emphasized the importance of having a woman from the Latin American region, while Canada and Namibia focused on the urgent need for female leadership at the helm of the United Nations. Brazil went further, framing the election of the first **Madam Secretary-General** as an integral part of the broader UN reform agenda.

These statements reflect both the growing momentum behind the campaign for a female Secretary-General and the challenges still facing the international system. They underscore the transformative potential of female leadership as a means to address systemic inequalities and reimagine global governance for a more inclusive and equitable future.

### Almost Half of Member States Supporting Equality

One of the most significant milestones in the pursuit of gender equality at the United Nations came with the **joint statement from Slovenia, Mexico, Spain, and 78 other Member States, delivered by Slovenian Ambassador Samuel Žbogar**. These 81 Member States made this call to action during the process of Revitalization of the UN General Assembly. The initiative underscores the pressing need for greater representation of women in UN leadership roles, **urging Member States to nominate and support female candidates**. It marks a pivotal step toward achieving gender parity at the highest levels of global governance.

As the international community approaches landmark anniversaries—the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and the 25th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325—this commitment to systemic change offers a beacon of hope. Entering 2025, we can note that **42% of Member States now support having a female Secretary-General, rising to 44% when including those that explicitly endorsed the initiative during their UNGA 79 addresses**. Notably, three of the P5 countries in the Security Council have already expressed support for a Madam Secretary-General—a critical factor as the 2026 election approaches. This progress underscores a growing momentum for transformative leadership within the UN system.

### How to reach the remaining 56%?

As we enter 2025, the key challenge will be to continue advocating for a Madam Secretary-General in the 57% of Member States that have yet to express explicit support—representing 111 countries. GWL Voices remains dedicated to securing the appointment of the first female Secretary-General, while building consensus through strong relationships within the UN system and with current governments. To this end, GWL Voices will continue providing critical information and insights each quarter to propel this vital objective forward. **Below is the list of countries that have signed the joint statement and/or expressed their support during UNGA 79:**

- |                                  |                                |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Albania                       | 28. Germany                    | 57. Norway                           |
| 2. Andorra                       | 29. Ghana                      | 58. Panama                           |
| 3. Australia                     | 30. Greece                     | 59. Philippines                      |
| 4. Austria                       | 31. Guatemala                  | 60. Portugal                         |
| 5. Bahrain                       | 32. Guyana                     | 61. Qatar                            |
| 6. Belgium                       | 33. Hungary                    | 62. Romania                          |
| 7. Bosnia and Herzegovina        | 34. Iceland                    | 63. Rwanda                           |
| 8. Brazil                        | 35. Indonesia                  | 64. Saint Kitts and Nevis            |
| 9. Bulgaria                      | 36. Ireland                    | 65. Saint Lucia                      |
| 10. Cabo Verde                   | 37. Israel                     | 66. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines |
| 11. Canada                       | 38. Republic of Korea          | 67. Samoa                            |
| 12. Chile                        | 39. Kyrgyzstan                 | 68. San Marino                       |
| 13. Colombia                     | 40. Latvia                     | 69. Senegal                          |
| 14. Costa Rica                   | 41. Lebanon                    | 70. Singapore                        |
| 15. Croatia                      | 42. Liberia                    | 71. Slovakia                         |
| 16. Cyprus                       | 43. Liechtenstein              | 72. Slovenia                         |
| 17. Czechia                      | 44. Lithuania                  | 73. Solomon Islands                  |
| 18. Democratic Republic of Congo | 45. Luxembourg                 | 74. South Africa                     |
| 19. Denmark                      | 46. Malawi                     | 75. South Sudan                      |
| 20. Dominican Republic           | 47. Malta                      | 76. Spain                            |
| 21. Ecuador                      | 48. Mexico                     | 77. Sweden                           |
| 22. Egypt                        | 49. Moldova                    | 78. Switzerland                      |
| 23. El Salvador                  | 50. Monaco                     | 79. Timor Leste                      |
| 24. Estonia                      | 51. Mongolia                   | 80. Türkiye                          |
| 25. Finland                      | 52. Montenegro                 | 81. Ukraine                          |
| 26. France                       | 53. Morocco                    | 82. United Arab Emirates             |
| 27. Georgia                      | 54. Namibia                    | 83. United Kingdom                   |
|                                  | 55. Kingdom of the Netherlands | 84. United States                    |
|                                  | 56. New Zealand                | 85. Uruguay                          |

## Sources

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