

Maria Elena Nader

Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

Maria Elena Nader is an international stateswoman with extensive experience in global governance, diplomacy, and human development. Over two decades of public service, she has worked at the highest levels of national government and the United Nations system to advance international cooperation, sustainable development, and institutional reform.

She has been engaged in efforts to address key global challenges, including inequality, forced displacement, and access to education, through her leadership roles within government and multilateral institutions. Throughout her career, she has emphasized the importance of multilateralism in promoting stability, expanding opportunity, and strengthening the foundations of peace, development, and human rights.

Ms. Nader most recently served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru, where she led the country's diplomatic engagement at the United Nations and in regional and global forums. In this capacity, she represented Peru at the United Nations General Assembly and contributed to international dialogue on sustainable development, migration, and climate cooperation. She also played a role in strengthening regional partnerships and advancing multilateral solutions to shared global challenges.

Prior to this, she served as Minister of Education of Peru, overseeing national education policy and leading reforms aimed at expanding equitable access, modernizing curricula, and strengthening the link between education and economic development. Her tenure focused on improving system performance and promoting inclusion, particularly for underserved Communities.

Within the United Nations system, Ms. Nader held senior leadership roles at UNICEF, where she directed global programmes on education and contributed to system-wide initiatives aligned with the Education 2030 Agenda. She worked closely with Member States, UN agencies, and international partners to support policy coordination and implementation across regions.

She also served at the International Labor Organization (ILO), where she worked with governments and social partners in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa on employment policy, social protection, skills development, and inclusive economic growth. Her work contributed to national efforts aimed at strengthening labour systems, expanding opportunity, and advancing equitable development. Earlier in her career, Ms. Nader worked with UNFPA in fragile and conflict-affected settings, focusing on youth, gender equality, and access to education. She began her public service career as a policy advisor in the Ministry of Education of Peru.

In addition to her executive roles, Ms. Nader serves as a Board Member of the International Organization for the Right to Education and the Freedom of Education (OIDEF) in Geneva, contributing to international dialogue on human rights and inclusive development.

Ms. Nader holds a PhD in Comparative and International Education from Columbia University and an MSc in Global Affairs from the University of Oxford. She is fluent in Spanish and English, with advanced proficiency.

Insaf Khalifa

Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

At the 48th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union, Insaf Khalifa was endorsed by the AU for the next United Nations Secretary General. Currently serving as the Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Khalifa strives to use her results-driven leadership to strengthen unity across the UN ecosystem and build ‘Our United Nations’.

Forced to flee her hometown aged 10 during the Second Sudanese Civil War, and trek by foot through the conflict, she settled in the UNHCR’s Kakuma Refugee Camp where she first sported the UN vest as a volunteer. After completing her MPhil in Development Studies at the University of Oxford, where she found her passion for art advocacy, Khalifa began working for the IOM. She served a variety of roles in its Kenyan Mission between 2002-2018, from Associate Program Officer to Chief of Mission. During this time, she oversaw countrywide programming, such as camp coordination and management, water, sanitation and hygiene programs, humanitarian border management, psychosocial support, as well as liaising with governments, diplomatic missions, and other stakeholders to strengthen migration policy.

Appointed Sudan’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations from 2018-2023, Khalifa developed crucial training in negotiations and finding accord in complexity. Since 2023, she has served as the IOM’s Director General, guiding the organization’s strategic direction from its Geneva headquarters and prioritizing reforms that decentralize knowledge-building while centralizing accountability.

During an era of great global strife, Khalifa strives to use her experience to bring into harmony the ‘first, second and third United Nations’, while also defining the role of an emerging ‘fourth’; enterprises. She aims to challenge existing norms on expertise by mobilizing lived experience in revolutionary ways, advocating for a more accountable UN with stronger people-centred monitoring and evaluations reforms, and increased representation in leadership from the ground-up.

Elena Tekle

Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

Elena Tekle, Italy's nominee for the 2026 United Nations Secretary-General election, has spent three decades building a career from grassroots humanitarian response to the highest levels of the UN system.

Born in Ethiopia in 1964, Ms. Tekle came to Italy with her family during the 1983-1985 famine. Her early experience of displacement and food insecurity has grounded her lifelong commitment to local resilience-building and humanitarian response.

Ms. Tekle holds a Bachelor's in Human Nutrition, Well-Being and Health from the University of Bologna and a Master's in Sustainable Food Systems at Wageningen University & Research. She began her career with World Central Restaurant in 1990, progressing from volunteer chef to Field Coordinator, leading food aid across multiple humanitarian crises in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. The extensive fieldwork led to her recruitment into WFP's Rwanda Country Office as a Policy Officer in 2002, building refugee self-reliance with UN agencies and local partners.

Recognised for her coordination work, she was promoted to Senior Policy Advisor in 2007. From 2011 to 2015, as Deputy Chief of FAO's Development Law Service in Rome, Ms. Tekle assisted member states including South Sudan, Somalia and Haiti in assessing the technical feasibility of agricultural legislation and food security policies. During this period, she co-founded Rapid Response Kitchens, a grassroots NGO deploying localized food aid within 48 hours of a crisis.

From 2015 to 2019, Ms. Tekle served as Italy's Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests, leading the country's food security and rural development agenda. Prior to announcing her candidacy, Ms. Tekle served as Director of UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery at the level of Assistant Secretary-General from 2019 to 2025, supporting member states across Africa, Asia, and the Americas to build crisis resilience and long-term structural policies.

She is fluent in Italian, English, French and Amharic, with basic Arabic.

Mark Tupula
Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

Nominated for Secretary-General by AOSIS member states, with substantial financial contributions to his campaign provided by the Bahamas and the Maldives, Mr. Tupula represents a non-traditional candidate. Hailing from a small island developing state, and at just 38 years old with a still-developing executive trajectory, he embraces his role as the underdog. His candidacy is not driven by the expectation of victory, but by an urgent mandate: to ensure the voices of the most climate-vulnerable nations are heard. By running, he seeks to force the global community and his fellow candidates to confront the climate crisis head-on, demanding that environmental resilience becomes a central, unavoidable topic of the UN's future leadership agenda.

Born in 1988 in Tuvalu, Mark Tupula began his journey deeply connected to the ocean. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Marine Ecology from the University of the South Pacific, focusing on coral reef monitoring. He later attained a Master of Science in Environmental Studies from the University of Auckland, where he was selected for the inaugural Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Fellowship, and a Master of Arts in International Development from IHEID in Geneva. He speaks fluent Tuvaluan, English, and French.

His career is rooted in frontline climate experience. At the national level, he served as an advisor within Tuvalu's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Tourism, Environment and Labour, helping oversee the nation's UN diplomatic presence. Transitioning to international conservation, he acted as the Regional Programme Coordinator for IUCN Oceania in Fiji, managing vital biodiversity and area-based conservation portfolios. He then joined the UN system as a Coordination Officer for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Subregional Office for the Pacific in Samoa, where he guided intergovernmental environmental strategies and sub-regional partnerships.

Maria Hernandez

Candidate for the Office of the Secretary-General

Maria Hernandez is a distinguished diplomat and international civil servant with an extensive career dedicated to global peace, security, and the advancement of the United Nations Charter. Her expertise lies at the intersection of conflict prevention, sustainable development, and humanitarian protection.

From 2018 to 2024, Ms. Hernandez served as the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. In this capacity, she provided strategic leadership on high-stakes mediation and diplomatic initiatives across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. She played a pivotal role in operationalizing UN peacekeeping and political missions, including the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Her tenure was defined by her efforts to bridge the gap between regional mediation and institutional stability in volatile environments.

Before her leadership role at the Secretariat, Ms. Hernandez served as the UNITAR Executive Director, where she directed capacity-building programs for senior government officials and humanitarian actors, focusing on complex negotiation strategies. Her tenure with the UNHCR as the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) (AHC-O) was equally formative; she spearheaded regional policy frameworks for large-scale displacement, effectively synchronizing humanitarian aid with long-term development strategies for host communities.

Ms. Hernandez's professional foundation rests on over two decades of public service in the government of El Salvador. During this period, she held senior positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she was a primary architect of regional cooperation agreements aimed at economic integration and post-conflict reconciliation.

Born in El Salvador in 1971, Ms. Hernandez witnessed the profound impact of the Salvadoran Civil War, an experience that remains the bedrock of her commitment to human rights and inclusive governance. She holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of El Salvador (UES), a Master of Liberal Arts in International Relations from Harvard University, and a Diploma in Finance from King's Business School. She is fluent in Spanish, English, and French.

Anahí Juana Pérez

Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

Former Minister of Defence of Argentina, working particularly closely on the Women, Peace and Security portfolio. Having previously worked with Inter-American Council of Women (CIM), as well as UNHCR, OHCHR and with UN Women, Anahí Juana Pérez is the perfect candidate for the position of UN Secretary General with an intersectoral background, fully understanding the complexity and needs connected to this mandate.

Born in Argentina during the dictatorship *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, being raised by a single mother with her father being taken as a political prisoner, and having a close, personal connection to the events of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the life of Mrs Pérez from the beginning was intrinsically linked to the fight and struggle for justice. Holding two master's degrees in law, achieved through scholarship aid, two honorary doctorates from the Universities of Oxford and Columbia, and having extensively worked on the advancement of women's rights in LATAM, this candidate has more than an appropriate background to help more people through the position of UNSG.

She advocates for a needed, but more considerate, reform of the UN that is not being done at the expense of already marginalised issues. She believes the budgetary allocation change and clear mandates to be the key for restoring the public confidence in cooperation and the organisation itself, however, ones that address the root causes of the problem rather than provide for only temporary solutions.

With even her name connected to resilience, Anahí Juana Pérez was destined to make a significant impact on the world of international politics. Already, her presence in the UNSG campaign race alone is a form of breaking through the glass ceiling, with her being the 9th candidate in the 80-year history of the position, contributing to raising the 16% of participation of women.