

## INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW PARISH

A former UN peacekeeper with the Balkans, and before that a lawyer with the World Bank, Dr Parish was the Chief Political Advisor to Vuk Jeremic, the Serbian candidate to be Secretary General who came second in the race after former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres. Here he expresses his views about the 2016 race to be UN Secretary General and what he expects for the direction of the United Nations under Mr Guterres's stewardship.

### **EVERYONE WAS SAYING THAT THE NEXT SECRETARY GENERAL WAS DESTINED TO BE AN EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMAN. INSTEAD IT TURNED OUT TO BE A MALE PORTUGUESE FORMER PRIME MINISTER. WHAT HAPPENED?**

I had been confident for a very long time that Mr Guterres was going to win. The idea that the next Secretary-General had to be from Eastern Europe was always a smokescreen. Nobody actually insisted upon that; not even Russia. Otherwise they would have vetoed Mr Guterres. And they never voted against him: not once, in all six voting sessions of the Security Council. But the Eastern European message had a purpose. Russia is insisting upon a greater operational role in the United Nations. I think we're going to see Russia, and those states close to it, wanting more senior jobs than it has sought in the past.

Ultimately, all the most serious Eastern European candidates were seen as too close to Russia. That was why Security Council voting upon them was so divided. Even my candidate, who came second, received only nine votes in his favour at his peak, compared to twelve for Mr Guterres. The Eastern European candidates were divisive, whereas Mr Guterres was not. There was consensus that he is truly impartial and an honest broker. That is why he won.

It's a shame Mr Guterres isn't a woman! There are not enough women at the highest management levels in the United Nations. But I know that Mr Guterres intends to change that, as indeed did my own candidate, who campaigned for action to ensure that the highly skilled women at the UN are given the recognition that they deserve and the opportunity to use their skills at the UN for the good of the whole organisation and the wider world. Indeed Mr Guterres is committed to ensuring the fair representation of women across senior UN management roles. And after Mr Guterres, the next Secretary General may well be a woman. As a matter of statistical odds, with so many talented women working on so many of the UN's projects, there will be a female general secretary soon.

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR OWN CANDIDATE? WHAT WILL HE DO NEXT?**

Mr Jeremic rose from a relative outsider to almost seizing the crown. But ultimately he couldn't overcome US opposition. Alas, the recent history of the Balkans may

have been a burden for him. But he's a young man, and he's a decent man: one of the most decent I have ever met, from that region or any other. I think he will pursue domestic politics in Serbia, and then he may be back upon the international arena.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK MR GUTERRES WILL DO DURING HIS TENURE AT THE HELM OF THE UNITED NATIONS?**

I think you have to separate out two very different roles that the Secretary General has. The first is that he is the world's chief diplomat. His main responsibility is to serve as an envoy and intermediary in wars and conflict. When there is no other way of hostile groups and nations talking to each other; and where dialogue might prevent war or bring it to a more rapid conclusion, the Secretary General can play a virtually unparalleled role.

At the same time he must be able to manage, administer and steer the United Nations Organisation itself with its many different bodies, and the competing priorities of UN agencies and the many countries whose people they serve. This alone requires tact and diplomacy, as well as strategic vision and the ability to draw on and implement the best advice.

It's an enormously difficult job. Every Great Power thinks that the Secretary General owes them a substantial favour for helping him enter office, and everyone thinks that he should listen to them more than to anybody else. That is particularly the case in the multipolar world in which we now live, and which has changed dramatically since the election of the last Secretary General ten years ago. The Secretary General gets pulled in every direction. His temperament must be calm and his nerves firm.

I know that Mr Guterres has these qualities in abundance. I met him during his campaign to become Secretary General and I immediately felt profound respect for him as a man and for his vision. His tenure at the helm of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which he ran for ten years, earned him widespread admiration. He was the quintessential diplomat during some of the world's worst civil conflicts, which have produced tragic refugee crises, including many of the civil conflicts that continue to plague the world today such as Syria, Somalia, Yemen and Iraq. He inspires confidence and has consistently earned the trust of people who cannot trust one another. He proved he was able to work with people from lots of very different countries, whose values and interests were often at odds. There's not many diplomats you can say that about.

There's another quality about Mr Guterres that I think makes him well-suited to his daunting new role. He's renowned as a wise, hands-off, manager. It is well known that both during his period as Portuguese Prime Minister, and his time as High Commissioner for Refugees, he surrounded himself with people of the highest calibre. I am sure that will continue. Mr Guterres knows from his long and broad experience that with high public office comes the need to surround himself with managers he can trust, confide in, and have confidence that they will exercise their duties with fealty. He cannot micro-manage. This is perhaps one of the most important matters that any Secretary General needs to know.

**A RECURRING THEME OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR UN SECRETARY GENERAL, ALLUDED TO BY MR GUTERRES IN HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, IS THAT THE UN NEEDS REFORMS. DO YOU AGREE, AND WHAT SORTS OF REFORMS DO YOU THINK THE UNITED NATIONS NEEDS?**

I certainly agree with Mr Guterres that there are changes that need to be made within the United Nations to enable it to fulfil its vital humanitarian mission more effectively and efficiently. The global geopolitical landscape is constantly changing and there have been many changes over the years; and the United Nations must and will adapt to fulfil its role.

Most importantly, the world is a far more multipolar and complex environment than it used to be. The United Nations needs to become both more politically sensitive, and also more politically impartial.

The fundamental goals of the UN as established in the Treaty of San Francisco in 1945 are the diplomatic resolution of conflict and its broader humanitarian mission. Everyone at the UN needs clearly defined responsibilities, recognition of their individual merits and to work together in the best and most efficient way possible given the resources available.

This will probably involve some re-distribution of responsibilities, and re-structuring of departments and agencies. Cooperation and efficiency will become the heraldic themes of a rejuvenated United Nations institutional structure. Nobody need be concerned by these changes. They will probably be fundamental, but the staff of the United Nations are some of the most competent and flexible people I have ever worked with. They are up to the task of accommodating the revisions to institutional integrity I perceive that the next Secretary General will advance as a central component of his progressive platform.

**DO YOU SEE ANY REFORMS NECESSARY TO THE INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE UN SECRETARIAT?**

That is a very difficult question to answer. United Nations staff work remarkably effectively and efficiently in cooperation with one-another in the most exceptionally difficult of circumstances amidst the world's most acute crises. They can and should be commended for their exceptional efforts.

Yet every administration can and must strive to do better. In this regard, flexibility and adaptation in response to sometimes rapidly changing geopolitical events and circumstances one can never predict, such as unforeseen natural disasters, is essential. In my view the administration of the United Nations needs to become more nimble. This entails both clearer performance evaluation goals for staff, so that they understand more clearly the standards to which they are being assessed with respect to their future promotion; but also an understanding on the part of all international civil servants that they may be called upon sometimes suddenly, and for well-grounded reasons external to the organisation, to adapt their roles to changing circumstances.

I feel confident that whenever changes of this nature are suddenly required, members of the UN secretariat and its specialist agencies have the willingness and capacity to react in a flexible way to what the torrent of suddenly changing events may ask of them. It is my belief that a more thorough-going, objective and fair regime of performance management is required, so that UN staff are incentivised in the appropriate ways to achieve the very highest standards that they consistently display in the performance of their daily duties.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING MR GUTERRES IN THE FIRST YEAR OF HIS TENURE?**

The greatest diplomatic challenge facing the whole world right now is how to make positive steps toward a just and fair peace in Syria. To observe the suffering of Syria's refugees and know the extent of the human cost is heart-breaking. The complexity of the conflict, the dangers it poses to other countries in the region, the safe haven offered to international extremists and the increased tensions between the world's major powers have combined to create an unprecedented morass. I believe that only the United Nations, acting in its capacity as an honest broker, can facilitate a negotiated ceasefire that is the essential first step to resolving the crisis.

Although Syria may be among the worst international crises of modern times, there are many more that must not be neglected. In Somalia international diplomacy and UN peacekeeping is helping finally to stabilise that country after three decades of civil war and religious extremism. Sadly, in many other places this progress is occurring more slowly, but the UN operates in the most challenging of environments where others might give up hope. The UN stays engaged, works for long-term solutions and facilitates global co-operation to alleviate the symptoms even where a cure may appear elusive.

With ten years experience as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres is all too aware of the plight of those forced from their homes by conflicts. As UN Secretary General he will be at the forefront of negotiating better funding of the temporary safe havens that so many ordinary families whose lives have been destroyed by conflict depend upon. Only international cooperation can save these innocent victims from falling prey to the people-smugglers and others who seek to exploit them.

Of course there will be new and unforeseen challenges and crises from day one of his tenure. Too often in the past, the UN has reacted too slowly to political crisis and natural disaster. Part of the challenge in international cooperation is now to plan for, prevent or mitigate future events so that hastily conceived solutions to disasters might be avoided by better contingency planning.