

UN tourism secretary-general race heats up

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Dhaka: The global tourism sector is bracing for a significant leadership transition as five candidates compete to become the next Secretary-General of UN Tourism, formerly known as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

With current Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili not seeking a third term, the race is wide open for new leadership to steer the organization from 2026 to 2029.

The UN Tourism Executive Council is set to meet in Madrid on May 29-30 to recommend a nominee. The final decision will be made at the organization's General Assembly in Riyadh this November.

This transition comes at a crucial time for the sector, as the industry continues to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to shifting global travel trends and sustainability demands.

With the incumbent no longer in the race, the field is open, and regional dynamics will play a significant role in the election outcome. Africa's substantial representation on the Executive Council positions its candidates, particularly Muhammad Adam and Habib Ammar, as strong contenders.

However, the presence of two African candidates could split the continent's vote, potentially benefiting candidates from other regions.

Gloria Guevara's extensive experience and international support, including endorsements from African tourism leaders, bolster her candidacy.

Harry Theoharis's proposal to expand UN Tourism's membership could appeal to countries seeking broader representation.

As the election approaches, candidates are intensifying their campaigns, seeking to build coalitions and secure the necessary majority within the Executive Council. The outcome will significantly influence the direction of global tourism policy in the coming years.

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