

SPOTLIGHT

Director-General selection process

The process for the appointment of a new Director-General was launched in May 2020 after the then Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo, announced he would step down on 31 August 2020 – a year before the end of his term. The selection process culminated in February 2021 with the appointment of Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the first African and first woman to hold the post.



The nomination period ran from 8 June to 8 July 2020.

The process was led by the General Council Chair, David Walker (New Zealand), and conducted in three phases: phase 1, the nomination period; phase 2, when candidates made themselves known to WTO members, including at a special General Council meeting; and phase 3, the consultation period with members. In phase 3, the General Council Chair was assisted by the Chair of the Dispute Settlement Body, Dacio Castillo (Honduras), and the Chair of the Trade Policy Review Body, Harald Aspelund (Iceland).

Period of nomination

The nomination period ran from 8 June to 8 July 2020. The following eight candidates were nominated by their respective governments: Dr Jesús Seade Kuri (Mexico); Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria); Abdel-Hamid

Mamdouh (Egypt); Tudor Ulianoschi (Republic of Moldova); Yoo Myung-hee (Republic of Korea); Amina C. Mohamed (Kenya); Mohammad Maziad Al-Tuwajiri (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia); and Dr Liam Fox (United Kingdom).

Presentation of candidates

Candidates were given the opportunity to make themselves known to WTO members and to engage in discussion on the issues facing the organization. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the General Council shortened this normally three-month period to two months. A special General Council meeting was held on 15-17 July, at which WTO members met formally with the eight candidates. Each candidate made a presentation with their vision for the WTO and responded to questions.

The DG selection process was overseen by “the Troika” of David Walker (centre), Harald Aspelund (left) and Dacio Castillo (right).





Consultations

Consultations to narrow the field of candidates and ultimately to arrive at the membership's choice were conducted by Ambassador Walker, assisted by Ambassador Castillo and Ambassador Aspelund. They were often referred to as "the Troika".

Three rounds of consultations were held, with three candidates withdrawing after the first round and three more after the second round. This left just two candidates – Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Yoo Myung-hee – remaining in the third and final round.

The outcome of each round was reported to members at heads of delegation meetings on 18 September, 8 October and 28 October. The General Council Chair praised the membership for remaining fully engaged in and committed to this process. On 28 October, the General Council Chair announced that, based on consultations with all delegations, the candidate best placed to attain consensus and become the next Director-General was Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. Ambassador Walker stressed that this was the assessment of the Troika and that a final decision had to be taken by members at a General Council meeting scheduled for 9 November. That meeting was subsequently postponed until further notice "for reasons including the health situation and current events", Ambassador Walker said.



On 15 February 2021, WTO members agreed to select Dr Okonjo-Iweala as the WTO's 7th Director-General.

Ambassador Walker continued consulting with delegations. In December, he noted that the situation had not changed. On 5 February 2021, Ms Yoo withdrew her candidacy. The administration of newly elected US President Joseph Biden then declared its "strong support" for the candidacy of Dr Okonjo-Iweala. On 15 February, WTO members made history when the General Council agreed by consensus to select Dr Okonjo-Iweala, a former Nigerian finance minister and senior World Bank official, as the organization's seventh Director-General. She is the first African and the first woman to hold the post. Dr Okonjo-Iweala began her mandate on 1 March 2021.



8
candidates were nominated for the post of DG



Dr Jesús Seade Kuri
Mexico



Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
Nigeria



Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh
Egypt



Tudor Uliianovschi
Republic of Moldova



Yoo Myung-hee
Republic of Korea



Amina C. Mohamed
Kenya



Mohammad Maziad Al-Tuwaijri
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Dr Liam Fox
United Kingdom

Note: The order of the names reflects the order in which the nominations were received.