



# Dialogue on Globalization

FACT SHEET

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## Special Representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General

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### Summary

Throughout the history of the United Nations (UN), the number and tasks of Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) have evolved considerably. Particularly after the end of the Cold War, as the UN's reactions to peace and security threats have become more complex, there has been an array of heterogeneous tasks that are all summarized under the label SRSG. As diverse as the conflict situations they have been appointed to resolve are the SRSG's statuses and functions. This Fact Sheet explores how SRSGs have grown quantitatively and qualitatively into an increasingly sophisticated tool of the UN's activities to promote peace and security.

### SRSGs' Formal Status

While the role and function of SRSG is not explicitly spelled out by the UN Charter, SRSGs derive their rights and responsibilities from different Charter provisions. To begin with, as representatives of the Secretary-General (SG) their roles are derived from that of the SG's as the leader of an impartial international civil service loyal only to the UN and its mission. As SGs became more proactive political agents on behalf of the organization, under Article 99 SGs appointed SRSGs for fact-finding missions on matters that may threaten international peace and security. In addition, under Article 98, the UN main organs, and particularly the Security Council can entrust upon the SG tasks and responsibilities. While technically speaking the first would be a "Personal Representative" and the second a "Special Representative", these distinctions became blurry as in reality for the nomination of such a representative there is always a bargain between the SG, the Security Council, and the General Assembly. Moreover, unlike the Representatives that work in the country under consideration, there are also Special and Personal Envoys that operate out of the UN Headquarters in New York<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, in the following the term SRSG will be used interchangeably for all of them.

SRSGs have the rank of an Assistant- or even Under-Secretary-General. They may be hired on a contractual basis for a limited time, "when actually employed", or for a symbolic \$1 remuneration. Likewise, financial means may come from different parts of the UN budget or have even been provided by private foundations. Depending on their mission, SRSGs report to the Secretary-General via the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) or the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). Under Kofi Annan, SRSGs for the first time briefed the Security Council directly, thereby cutting short the flow of information.

### Historical Evolution

The earliest SRSGs were appointed after 1947 to help mediate conflicts on the Indian continent and the Korean Peninsula. Yet the first SRSG taking center stage on the global political arena was Count Folke Bernadotte who was appointed by the General Assembly to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict. After Bernadotte's assassination in 1948, his co-worker Ralph Bunche finished the peace talks and was the first SRSG receiving a Noble Peace Prize in 1950. With the end of the Cold War interstate wars were increasingly superseded by intrastate conflicts, which urged the UN to refine its tools dealing with threats to peace and security. Concomitantly, also the number of SRSGs rose. While there were 4 in 1980, to date there are 62 SRSGs engaged all over the world in conflict resolutions and peace making<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the quantitative surge, also the qualitative features changed. Boutros Boutros-Gali, but especially Kofi Annan triggered a development and a modification of the role of SRSGs, which transformed this

<sup>2</sup> There are an additional 27 high-level appointees that do not have a geographic, but a thematic focus (see Table 1). These SRSGs are assigned to raise awareness for major problems of a transboundary nature and help the UN member states develop relevant policy solutions.

position into the highest UN authority in the field, combining diplomatic and managerial skills.

**Table 1: Overview of SRSGs**

Region/ Tasks	Number of SRSGs*	Selected Prominent SRSGs
Africa	31	Jan Eliasson (Sweden), Special Envoy for Darfur
Americas	3	Edmond Mulet (Guatemala), SRSg for Haiti
Asia and Pacific	10	Tom Koenigs (Germany), SRSg for Afghanistan
Europe	8	Martti Ahtisaari (Finland), Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo
Middle East	10	Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), Special Advisor on the International Compact with Iraq
Other High Level Appointments	27	John Ruggie (United States), SRSg on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations

\* including currently vacant positions

Source: United Nations,

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/SRSg/table.htm>

The SRSGs of the early days could best be characterized as skilled mediators and interlocutors for peace accords. Later on, in exceptional cases, SRSGs have been involved in both brokering and implementing a peace accord (e.g. Jean Arnault in Guatemala). To date many SRSGs have to juggle the various duties of the UN's multidimensional peace operations: SRSGs are the personification and the leader of the UN team on the ground; the principal of a political peace process; the manager of a peacekeeping or a peacebuilding mission; and the transitional administrator in cases where the UN has taken over transitional authority.

To accommodate such broad and multifaceted tasks and to allow for a maximum of flexibility, definition and mandate for SRSG's roles normally remains unspecific. Under these circumstances the capabilities of the nominated individual become crucial. Despite

the varying demands the profile seems to be relatively homogeneous: Currently one hundred percent of SRSGs are male, and a majority is 60 years or older. Most SRSGs have been diplomats of their home country either to the UN or to one of the permanent five members of the Security Council. Obviously, there is a path dependence which is also reflected by the fact that a majority of SRSGs has been in that capacity more than once<sup>3</sup>.

### Challenges Ahead

The historical development of SRSGs has been determined by changes in the political landscape as well as by the UN's institutional "learning by doing." This poses several challenges and developments for the future of SRSGs:

- Measurable success: SRSGs are no panacea, neither for mediating conflicts nor for post-conflict peace building. SRSGs can only succeed where there is strong support and strategic coordination of the international environment.
- New partnerships: As new collaborations between the UN and regional organizations evolve, the role of SRSGs will have to adapt. For instance in Dafur, the SRSg at the helm of the first hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping mission will have to cater to two multilateral organizations at the same time.
- Efficiency versus legitimacy: Particularly in situations where the UN is the interim or transitional authority, the SRSg exercises unchecked executive and legislative power over a population that has limited participatory rights. The success of an SRSg's efforts in reestablishing peace and security will depend on the careful balance of efficiency and legitimacy.
- Inflation of SRSGs: The quantitative growth of appointed SRSGs – particularly for thematic issues - may on the one hand reflect the UN's laudable effort to address an increasing number of global problems. On the other hand, such extension runs the risk of symbolism that spreads the UN's limited resources, its normative and political capital even thinner.

### Further Reading

Fröhlich, M., Bütof, M., and J. Lemanski (2006): Mapping UN Presence. A Follow-Up to the Human Security Report. Die Friedens-Warte, 81, 2, pp. 13-23.

Peck, C. (2004): Special Representatives of the Secretary General, in: Malone, D.M. (ed.), The UN Security Council. From the Cold War to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Boulder/London, pp. 325-339.

<sup>3</sup> See "The Peace Makers-Zur Rolle der Special Representatives des UN-Generalsekretärs." retrieved 07/17/2007 from [http://www.oegpw.at/tagung06/papers/ak6\\_froehlich.pdf](http://www.oegpw.at/tagung06/papers/ak6_froehlich.pdf)