

“Why Macky Sall Should Lead the UN”

Jean-Yves Ollivier, president of the Brazzaville Foundation, supports Macky Sall’s candidacy for the post of Secretary-General of the United Nations. He believes that his election would constitute a first step towards fairer representation within the UN system and the Security Council.



Former Senegalese president Macky Sall at United Nations headquarters in New York, 22 April 2026. © Selcuk Acar / Anadolu via AFP

By Jean-Yves Ollivier

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Before the end of the year, the United Nations must appoint a new Secretary-General. This is an opportunity to seize rather than a predicament to endure, precisely because multilateralism is facing strong headwinds.

The UN must remember its central mission as a guardian of peace and a provider of humanitarian relief at the intersection of national sovereignties — far removed from the fantasies of a world government lacking democratic legitimacy, and from the dysfunctions of a bureaucratic “talking shop”. It is also a way — indeed, I believe the only way — to pave the road towards fairer representation within the UN system and, in particular, the Security Council.

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President of the Brazzaville Foundation**

A first step in that direction would be taken through the election of the candidate who, in my view, best embodies such a renewal of the United Nations: Macky Sall, former President of Senegal, an experienced statesman known for his methodical approach rather than for raising his voice. Like a quarter of humanity by the end of this century, he is African.

On the continent often described as the “cradle of humanity”, people tend to remember their roots: the UN was born after the Second World War and its some 75 million dead, through the will of the victorious powers, which reserved for themselves permanent seats on the Security Council and the right of veto. It is this system — imperfect yet realistic — that must be made to function as effectively as possible, both in the service of its member states and of new victims of violence, above all by preventing conflicts wherever possible.

I am therefore surprised by today’s defeatism, which claims that the world is “more polarised than ever” and that the UN is “completely powerless”. During the Cold War, through the crises in the Congo, Korea, Cuba and Vietnam, was the East–West world not polarised, and did the UN always succeed in preserving peace? Likewise, how can one lament the “return of war” while forgetting that, although a Third World War was fortunately avoided, many proxy wars took place in the Third World, some of them in Africa. Macky Sall, who has served discreetly as a mediator for many years, including in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, is fully aware of this.

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Is multilateralism in crisis? Undoubtedly — but certainly not for the first time, nor always for the wrong reasons. “The nature of imbalance is to create movement,” declared the French demographer Alfred Sauvy, who coined the term “Third World”. What we now call the Global South may draw from this the calm certainty that, by the end of the century, a planet in which eight out of ten inhabitants will be, for half of them, either Asian or African, would no longer recognise itself in the UN mirror if that mirror remained distorted — something that is ultimately inconceivable. Provided, of course, that the international institution is preserved. Yet it can only be preserved by agreeing to reform itself *motu proprio*, of its own accord.

Only within a UN concerned with effectiveness in all its missions will a seat at the table remain preferable for everyone to the politics of the empty chair — and budgetary shortfalls. Macky Sall, accustomed to achieving much with little, is also fully aware of this.

Of course, it is technically “Latin America’s turn”; not all African states have rallied behind the candidate supported by the African Union; and finally, Macky Sall is not a woman. I speak all the more freely of these obstacles because I regard intercontinental rotation within international institutions as an important principle, because African unity would have been ideal, and because representation of the better half of humanity is an essential issue. But I also know that Macky Sall thinks as I do — and I do not need to take him at his word, since the actions he has taken throughout his career demonstrate his determination to include others in power and to share it fairly.

With that conviction firmly established, I support his candidacy as a rallying point for all supporters of the United Nations. Since these are difficult times, and the challenges ahead — from growing inequality to the challenge of artificial intelligence, not to mention the global crisis of representation — will require a steady and composed hand at the helm of the UN, I simply hope that “the best candidate wins”.