



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

BOARD TO “RESTART THE PROCESS” OF SEARCHING FOR A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Citing concerns about the process, the Global Fund Board has decided to prolong the search for a new executive director.

The decision was taken on 27 February at the Board Retreat in Geneva, Switzerland. “Due to issues encountered in the recruitment process, the Board felt they were unable to bring the process to conclusion,” the Fund said in a brief [news release](#). “While expressing its complete support for the work of the Nominations Committee, the Board decided to restart the process.”

Until recently, the Fund had been expected to choose between the candidates who had been short-listed by the Board’s Executive Director Nomination Committee (EDNC). When the Board Retreat got underway, there were two candidates, as follows:

- Dr Muhammad Ali Pate, a visiting scholar at Harvard’s Chan School of Public health, a former World Bank health specialist, and a former health minister of Nigeria; and
- Subhanu Saxena, a drug executive who in August 2016 stepped down as chief executive of Cipla, a major Indian pharmaceutical company.

However, in the days leading up to the Board meeting, concerns about the process began to take center stage. In the end, Aidspan understands, the two candidates were not even interviewed by the full Board.

The EDNC had also listed a third candidate – Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and a former prime minister of New Zealand – but she dropped out of the race well before the Board Retreat.

The EDNC was chaired by Jan Paehler, the vice-chair of the Board’s Ethics and Governance Committee, and included Amy Baker, Michèle Boccoz, Sarah Boulton, Hristijan Jankuloski, Vinand Nantulya, Filipe da Costa from various Board delegations; and two independent members, Eric Goosby and Mphu Ramatlapeng.

“The Board is committed to a process that adheres to the highest possible standards, and is fair, transparent, merit-based, and conducted with due diligence and professionalism,” said Norbert Hauser, Chair of the Board.

“The Board’s overarching priority is to continue looking for a new Executive Director to provide visionary leadership and implement an ambitious new strategy to end AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria as epidemics” the news release said. It added that more information would be provided as soon as possible.

Events leading up to the decision

It has been a tumultuous couple of weeks.

As we [reported](#) in our last issue, on 13 February the final report of the EDNC was sent to Board members and alternates via a secure portal. The report contained the names of the finalists for the position (i.e. the short list) as well as a rationale for picking them. The committee had been mandated to provide up to four names. Board members and alternates were asked to keep the list strictly confidential.

However, as seemed inevitable, word leaked out as to who the final candidates were. Emails were flying in all directions, but the first person to “go public” with the information was Donald McNeil of the New York Times. McNeil revealed that there were three candidates on the list and he identified them as Dr Pate, Mr Saxena and Ms Clark.

McNeil wrote that whoever is selected would likely draw harsh scrutiny from the Fund’s largest donor, the U.S. “While all might have been considered excellent candidates for the job in earlier years, global health officials are worried that their backgrounds could push the Trump administration away from historical commitments to the Fund.”

(The United States has always donated a third of the Global Fund’s budget and is by far its greatest source of support.)

McNeil said that Dr Pate has used Twitter posts to call Mr Trump a fascist, saying he has much in common with ISIS for his anti-Muslim stance. (Later in the same article, McNeil explained that Dr Pate did not say these things about Mr Trump directly. Rather, he re-tweeted tweets from other people saying these things.)

Concerning Mr Saxena, McNeil wrote that “American officials may look askance at the hiring of an executive from a large pharmaceutical company for whom the Global Fund has been a major customer. By 2015, six million Africans were receiving antiretroviral drugs made by Cipla.”

Regarding Ms Clark, McNeil said that “the Trump administration has expressed hostility toward United Nations programs.” He added that the administration has considered cutting its support for U.N. international operations by at least 40%.

McNeil quoted Seth Faison, the Global Fund's Director of Communications, as saying that no candidate should withdraw.

"Lots of people said things about Trump during the campaign who now are working with him," he said of Dr Pate.

Of Mr. Saxena and Ms. Clark, Faison said that U.N. connections and business connections were unavoidable in virtually any candidate not from a major donor country. The director does not oversee buying from drug companies, he said, and the Fund gives money to many recipients, including \$300 million to UNDP and \$800 million to Nigeria.

"Anyone who ever worked in any government that got funds from the Global Fund would be off limits, which is not realistic," Faison said. A director could recuse himself from decisions with potential conflicts, Faison added, and a different fund representative could approach the U.S. during the next appeal for donations.

Aidspan understands that on 14 February, in a letter to Board Chair Norbert Hauser, Ms Clark withdrew from the race. She was critical of the selection process. The letter was not made public. Shortly after, Aidspan understands, Jan Paehler, Chair of the EDNC, sent a letter to the Board refuting Ms Clark criticism of the selection process.

Later, on 17 February, an article in [Firstpost](#) revealed that the three finalists had been ranked by the Nomination Committee in the following order: Dr Pate, Mr Saxena and Ms Clark.

Prior to the deliberations of the full Board, the two finalists were interviewed via teleconference by representatives of the three civil society constituencies on the Board – Dr Pate on 20 February, and Mr Saxena on 24 February.

Reaction

The reaction of people to what was transpiring made it clear that they were concerned about the suitability of the candidates as well as the selection process. Although no one was speaking publicly, the release of the names on the short list generated widespread consternation among many of the Global Fund's constituencies.

Some of the concerns echoed what Donald McNeil reported in the New York Times – i.e. that at least two of the candidates on the list – Muhammed Pate and Subhanu Saxena – might antagonize U.S. officials. (Once Helen Clark withdrew, these were the only candidates left.)

Regarding Mr Pate, people questioned why the EDNC gave serious consideration to someone who had publicly attacked President Trump. In addition, people pointed out that in May 2013, the Nigerian Parliament adopted a very repressive anti-gay law while Mr Pate was working for the government. They said that Mr Pate did not speak out against the law, either then or after he left the government. Others claimed that Mr Pate has no record of any advocacy or support for LGBT rights or other key human rights issues.

With respect to Mr Saxena, people said that his recent tenure as CEO of Cipla raised questions about his suitability for the position of Executive Director of the Global Fund. They also pointed out that Saxena has no clear record of advocacy on human rights and gender equality issues.

Michael Igoe said in an [article](#) on 24 February in Devex, an online platform for development professionals, that Devex had spoken several "well-placed global health and development leaders" and that "each

expressed mixed feelings and some disappointment that the selection process had not generated candidates known for visionary global health leadership.”

In an article in [ScienceInsider](#) on 27 February, Jon Cohen said that Dr Pate told him in an email that he has no plans to reapply for the position. Dr Pate called the Board’s decision “unfair and unjustified.” Dr Pate later tweeted, “I think @GlobalFund board should resign for incompetence.”

Finally, to put the Board’s decision in perspective, objections have been raised about every E.D. candidate ever proposed to the Global Fund, including the current incumbent, Mark Dybul.

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