Arab Organisation for Human Rights in UK
المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

OPEN LETTER

Mr Emmanuel Macron
President of the French Republic
Palais de l'Élysée
55 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris, France

Date: 26 November 2026

Re: France's vote on the candidacy of Ms Lana Zaki Nusseibeh for Secretary-General of the United Nations

Dear Mr President,

We, the undersigned human rights organisations, human rights defenders, Members of the French and European Parliaments, call on France to oppose publicly the candidacy of Ms Lana Zaki Nusseibeh for the office of Secretary-General of the United Nations, nominated by the United Arab Emirates on 21 October 2026, and to veto any Security Council resolution recommending her appointment.

In the Security Council's straw poll of 20 November 2026, Ms Nusseibeh reportedly received seven "encourage" and six "discourage" ballots, with two members expressing no opinion. Three of the five permanent members cast "discourage" ballots; two encouraged her. Straw polls are secret and non-binding, and those positions can still shift before a formal vote. France should state its position now, while it can still shape the Council's decision.

Our request is not directed at Ms Nusseibeh's nationality, nor at the right of any State to put forward a candidate. It rests on three grounds, each drawn from the record of the United Nations itself.

First, United Nations investigators have documented the role of the United Arab Emirates in the war in Sudan. In January 2024 the Security Council's Panel of Experts on the Sudan found credible the allegations that the United Arab Emirates was supplying military support to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In May 2025, an Amnesty International investigation identified Chinese-made guided bombs and howitzers used by the RSF and concluded that the United Arab Emirates had almost certainly supplied them. In February 2026 the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan concluded that the RSF's siege and capture of El Fasher bore the hallmarks of genocide, and in September 2026 it found that individuals and entities operating from or linked to the United Arab Emirates played a significant role in the networks that recruited and deployed foreign fighters for the RSF. In the same report, the Mission finds reasonable grounds to believe that a transnational network supplied weapons to

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the RSF. It identifies a significant role for individuals and entities linked to the United Arab Emirates in providing military support to the RSF. Authenticated imagery confirms the presence of Chinese AH-4 howitzers among the weapons recaptured from the RSF in Khartoum. The Panel of Experts' most recent reporting, as described by Reuters and by PassBlue, identifies an Abu Dhabi-based company as the employer of Colombian mercenaries who fought in El Fasher, and military bases in Abu Dhabi as their training sites. The United States determined in January 2025 that members of the RSF and allied militias had committed genocide, and sanctioned seven RSF-owned companies based in the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates rejects these findings. They stand nonetheless as the findings of the United Nations' own mechanisms, in a war that has displaced more than thirteen million people and brought confirmed famine to El Fasher.

Second, Ms Nusseibeh has personally and publicly contested those mechanisms. Asked on CNN in July 2024 whether she disputed the findings of the Panel of Experts, she answered: "Yes, absolutely." Two months later she wrote that the United Arab Emirates was "not providing weapons or any other support" to the RSF. The pattern is older than Sudan. In 2016 she told the Security Council that the listing of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen for grave violations against children was "problematic legally and practically". In 2020 she signed two letters rejecting the findings of the Panel of Experts on Libya that her country had repeatedly breached the arms embargo. Her government voted against the creation of the very Fact-Finding Mission whose conclusions on El Fasher are now before the world. In the General Assembly's dialogue with candidates on 27 October 2026, she was asked whether she would continue to reject the findings of United Nations mechanisms; she did not answer directly and referred questions about the United Arab Emirates to its government.

Third, the office she seeks is the guardian of those same mechanisms. The Secretary-General appoints the members of the Security Council's panels of experts and heads the Secretariat that services the Human Rights Council's investigations. Article 100 of the Charter requires that the Secretary-General neither seek nor receive instructions from any government. A candidate who has spent years contesting United Nations findings about the government that now nominates her, and who will not say whether she accepts them today, cannot offer the independence that the Charter demands.

These concerns are not ours alone, and they are not new. Human Rights Watch and other rights groups have urged States to reject this candidacy. More than sixty Members of the United Kingdom Parliament have asked their government to use its veto. A leading Sudanese women's rights defender has written of what her appointment would mean for the women of Sudan. The calls have been repeated; the evidence has only grown.

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What is at stake goes beyond one appointment. If the Security Council entrusts the United Nations to an official who denied the findings of its investigators while the crimes they documented were being committed, every future commission of inquiry, panel of experts and fact-finding mission will work in the knowledge that the surest answer to its findings is to place their critic at the head of the Organization. The architecture of international justice, built since 1945 to establish facts and attribute responsibility, would be hollowed out from the top. And the survivors of El Fasher, the families of the dead and the millions driven from their homes would be told, by the institution created to protect them, that those who denied their suffering have been rewarded with its highest office. For victims everywhere, the world would have become a more frightening and more repressive place.

France has a particular responsibility. It holds one of the five vetoes that can decide this question. It co-hosted the international conference on Sudan in Paris in April 2024 and co-chaired the London conference a year later. It has long presented itself as a defender of multilateralism, of international justice and of the fight against impunity. That commitment is now being tested, not in a declaration, but in a ballot.

We therefore ask you, Mr President, to state publicly that France opposes Ms Nusseibeh's candidacy; to instruct France's representative to cast a "discourage" ballot in any further straw poll; and to commit to vetoing any draft resolution recommending her appointment. We also ask France to seek a written commitment from every candidate to defend the independence of United Nations investigations and to uphold the integrity of their findings, including when those findings concern the government that nominated them; and to work with its European partners and the other members of the Council so that the next Secretary-General is a person whose independence from any government is beyond question.

The victims of Sudan's war are watching what the permanent members will do. We ask France to stand with them.

Yours respectfully,

Signatories

Organisations

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) – United Kingdom
Darfur Women Action Group (DWAG) – United States
Fikra for Studies and Development – Sudan
Priority Peace Sudan – France

Individuals

Niemat Ahmadi – CEO and founder of Darfur Women Action Group

Anas Altikriti – CEO and founder, Cordoba Foundation

Stéphane Buchou – Member of the French Parliament, Ensemble pour la République

Mélissa Camara – Member of the European Parliament, The Greens

David Cormand – Member of the European Parliament, The Greens

Alain Gresh – Journalist and Founder of Orient XXI and Afrique XXI

David Haigh – Human rights lawyer and former prisoner in the UAE

Matthew Hedges – Academic and former prisoner in the UAE

Philippe Kalfayan – Secretary General of the International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia

Christophe Marion – Member of the French Parliament, Ensemble pour la République

Sherif Osman – US human rights activist and former prisoner in the UAE

Kenneth Roth – Senior fellow at Yale University and former executive director of Human Rights Watch

Jean-Louis Roumégas – Member of the French Parliament, The Ecologists

Mounir Satouri – Member of the European Parliament, The Greens

Madjouline Sbai – Member of the European Parliament, The Greens

Marie Toussaint – Member of the European Parliament, The Greens

Sarah Leah Whitson – Founder of Democracy for the Arab World Now and former Middle-East director for Human Rights Watch

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