



By: TA | AP Insight

Lana Nusseibeh faces questions over her country's support for Sudan rebels



A female diplomat from the United Arab Emirates is the newest contender for the role of United Nations secretary-general.

Lana Nusseibeh brings Palestinian roots and defense of the UAE's historic relations with Israel to her candidacy, but she faces sharp criticism over her country's alleged role in **backing paramilitary fighters** who have killed thousands in Sudan's **civil war**. The Gulf nation has denied the claims.

Nusseibeh, who has a master's in Israeli and Jewish Diaspora Studies, declared her candidacy this week in a race that had largely stalled.

No woman has ever led the world body throughout its 80 years of existence.

Any leader succeeding Antonio Guterres in January would inherit a U.N. weakened by harsh criticism and steep **funding cuts** by the Trump administration.

The U.N.'s role has perhaps never been more questioned as global powers create **alternative bodies** of influence, wars rage, hunger grows and epidemics like Ebola pose fresh challenges every day.

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Nusseibeh, who was nominated this week by the UAE government and has taken a leave of absence from the foreign ministry, spent over a decade as her country's ambassador to the U.N., from 2013 to 2024.

She has been outspoken on issues including aid for Palestinians in Gaza, the historic **Abraham Accord** with Israel in 2020 and the role of women on the international stage.

A request for an interview brought no immediate response Friday. Already, the six state members of the Gulf Coordination Council, which also includes Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have unanimously backed her.

"I will bring greater urgency to the work for peace," Nusseibeh's statement declaring her candidacy says. "I believe deeply in this institution because of where I come from. People in my region see what diplomacy and collective action can achieve. And they feel the consequences when it fails."

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Nusseibeh, born in 1978, wants to "rebuild trust" in the U.N. and says it should use "quiet diplomacy" to keep disputes from escalating.

She also addresses a booming global issue, artificial intelligence, saying the U.N. should build "practical international cooperation before divisions harden, including voluntary incident reporting."

Nusseibeh, whose uncle Sari Nusseibeh is a well-known Palestinian scholar, has family roots in Jerusalem and long interest in the region beyond Gulf affairs. She is known for her advocacy for helping to get aid to the 2 million or so Palestinians trapped in Gaza.

"How did UAE become the largest global provider of humanitarian aid to Gaza, according to U.N. data? Because of Lana Nussaibeh — a diplomat who knows everyone and works with them to (get stuff done). She would be an inspired choice for this impossible job," Brett McGurk, former White House envoy, said on X this week.

While holding the rotating presidency of the U.N. Security Council in 2023, several months before the war in Gaza began, Nusseibeh organized a special session on Palestine. And in 2025, she openly warned that Israeli annexation of the occupied West Bank would be a "red line" for the UAE.

The UAE's role in Sudan will be questioned

But Nusseibeh could face what some believe is a conflict of interest over **Sudan**.

The war and the UAE's alleged role in it has been explored by various arms of the U.N.



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The RSF has been accused of atrocities including the attack on the city of el-Fasher in October 2025 in which U.N. said at least **6,000 people were killed**.

“The U.N. has concluded, in part based on the evidence of our lab at Yale, that the massacre has the **hallmarks of genocide**,” Nathaniel Raymond, executive director of the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health, told the AP.

He said the el-Fasher massacre could not have happened without the UAE's provision of drones, mercenaries to operate them and artillery and mortars used in the siege of the city.

“An official of the government that did this cannot be allowed to lead the United Nations, especially when this conduct is under investigation by the ICC, a U.N. body,” Raymond said.

Last year, Sudan filed a case at the **top U.N. court** accusing the United Arab Emirates of

breaching the genocide convention by arming and funding the RSF. The UAE asserted the case was a “nothing more than a cynical publicity stunt.”

Nusseibeh was the UAE's point person on Sudan, according to Justin Lynch, managing director of the Conflict Insights Group research organization. “Throughout this war, she assured other governments that the UAE was not backing the RSF, even as Washington and other capitals knew internally that it was,” he told the AP.

The U.N. secretary-general's role is to protect civilians from horrors like el-Fasher, Lynch said. “Handing the job over to the diplomat who ran cover for it would be an insult to the survivors.”