

Ecuadorian politician and poet, becomes 4th woman to preside over UN General Assembly

The United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday elected Ecuadorean Foreign Minister María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of its upcoming 72nd session; only the fourth woman to hold that position in the history of the world body, and the first since 2006.

In her acceptance speech, she also noted that she was the first woman ever from Latin America and the Caribbean to preside over the Assembly.

She said she would maintain an open-door policy during her presidency and “act as an impartial, objective and open facilitator.”

“As you know, I am also a poet as well as a politician. As such, I am fully aware that no view is useful if we do not see, and no word has value, if we do not listen. I will be ready to listen to you all and work for, and with you,” she said.

In his congratulatory remarks, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) introduced her as an experienced diplomat and politician who understands “the need to cooperate when addressing current global challenges.”

Ms. Espinosa had served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Minister of Defence, and Coordinating Minister of Cultural and Natural Heritage.

She was the first woman to be named Permanent Representative of Ecuador in New York, after having served as Ambassador in Geneva.

“Your direct knowledge of the intergovernmental negotiations on human rights, indigenous women and climate change will help the General Assembly advance the agenda of the United Nations,” Mr. Guterres said.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Foreign Minister María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador, newly-elected President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, addresses Member States.

As a writer and poet, Ms. Espinosa has published more than 30 academic articles on the Amazon, culture, heritage, development, climate change, intellectual property, foreign policy, integration, defence and security. She has also published five volumes of poetry and received the Ecuadorian National Poetry Prize in 1990.

The current Assembly President, Miroslav Lajčák, also congratulated Ms. Espinosa on her election, saying that having only four women among the 73 Assembly Presidents, is “not a record to be proud of”, urging continued efforts towards full gender parity.

Speaking to reporters at UN Headquarters, Ms. Espinosa said she believed the UN was going at a “firm pace” towards “becoming every day, a more relevant, a more efficient, a more transparent, and more democratic organization. I will work with 193 States, hand in hand.”

She promised to lead in a way that would “strengthen multilateralism, and to better deliver on the commitments that we have taken.”

She said her priorities during the upcoming Assembly session, which starts in mid-September, include UN reforms, finalization of the global compact on migration, and implementation of the Addis Ababa Agenda on financing for development.

Climate action, employment, inequality, and peace in the Middle East, including the rights of the Palestinian people, are also on the agenda.

The previous women leaders of the Assembly were India’s Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in 1953; Liberia’s Angie Elisabeth Brooks in 1969 and Sheikha Haya Rashed Al

Khalifa of Bahrain in 2006.

This year's election was also unique in other ways. It was contested for the first time since 1991. By tradition, the UN's regional groups nominate a single candidate who is then rubber-stamped by the Assembly, which now consists of 193 Member States.

The Latin American and Caribbean Group could not agree on a single nominee this year, leading to the contest between Ms. Espinosa and UN Ambassador Mary Elizabeth Flores Flake, of Honduras.

Ms. Espinosa, who needed support from the majority of 190 countries present and voting, secured 128 votes against Ms. Flake's 62 votes.

And in a newly established practice to enhance transparency and inclusivity of the selection process, the Assembly held informal interactive dialogues with candidates presenting their vision statements.

Made up of all the 193 Member States of the UN, the Assembly provides a forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the [UN Charter](#).

Also today, the Secretary-General drew lots to determine which Member State will have the first seat in the GA Hall at the 73rd session, with Mali gotten picked.