

Balkans NGOs Want Tolbert to Succeed Del Ponte

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Groups across the region call for chief prosecutor's deputy to take over from her.

Twelve non-governmental organisations from Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia have urged UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to appoint David Tolbert as a successor to the Hague tribunal's chief prosecutor Carla del Ponte when her second term expires in September.

Tolbert, from the United States, has served as the tribunal's deputy prosecutor since being appointed to that post in August 2004.

The Belgrade-based Fund for Humanitarian Law is one of the signatories of a joint letter by the NGOs, which was sent to Ban last week, the Serbian news agency Beta reported.

The NGOs say Tolbert enjoys respect and trust in the former Yugoslav republics and has the experience and skills to guarantee effective prosecutions of war crimes suspects at the tribunal.

They also pointed out that as a deputy prosecutor, Tolbert played a crucial role in making sure that local judiciaries are ready to deal with war crimes cases when the tribunal closes its doors in 2010.

The NGOs say it is crucial that Del Ponte's successor is someone with extensive knowledge of the situation in the Balkans.

According to media reports this week, the most likely candidate for the post is special UN prosecutor in Lebanon Serge Brammertz from Belgium, who currently leads an investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri.

The tribunal has yet to announce who is to succeed Del Ponte, but a decision is expected soon.

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