

Background information on The Elders' Cyprus initiative

About The Elders

The Elders are an independent group of eminent global leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela, who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity.

Nelson Mandela announced the formation of The Elders in July 2007 on his 89th birthday, at a ceremony in Johannesburg. Today he continues to inspire the work of The Elders, but has retired from public life and no longer takes an active role in Elders' initiatives.

The idea for The Elders started with entrepreneur Richard Branson and musician Peter Gabriel in a conversation about our increasingly interdependent world – often called the 'global village'. They asked whether a small, dedicated group of independent leaders could help the global village to resolve shared problems.

For inspiration, they looked to traditional societies, where elders often share wisdom and help to resolve disputes. They took their idea to Nelson Mandela, who agreed to support it. With the help of his wife Graça Machel and his friend Desmond Tutu, Mandela set about bringing The Elders together.

Prospective members were invited to join on the basis of a distinct set of criteria. Firstly, they should be independent and no longer hold public office. They should have earned international trust, demonstrated integrity and built a reputation for inclusive, progressive leadership.

Because The Elders are not bound by the interests of any single nation, government or institution, they are free to speak boldly and with whomever they choose. The Elders are committed to listening to ordinary people affected by crisis and conflict, especially women and young people who so often struggle to be heard.

They work both publicly and behind the scenes and at all levels - local, national and international - lending support and advice when invited, and sometimes when it is not. The Elders meet formally twice a year, and are in regular contact with each other and the Elders' team in London by phone and email.

About the work of The Elders

Since the formation of The Elders in 2007, they have focused their peace building and reconciliation efforts on Burma, Cyprus, the Middle East, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Just a few weeks ago (25-28 August), the Elders carried out their first visit as a group to the Middle East. They spent five days in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, meeting a wide cross-section of Israeli and Palestinian society including grassroots organizations, young people, representatives of civil society, independent experts, business and political leaders. They went to offer their support to those who are working hard for peaceful coexistence while also listening to the concerns and aspirations of a broad range of individuals on both sides. To read the Elders' blogs and see photos and videos please go to www.theElders.org/middle-east

In November 2008, Elders Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter and Graça Machel travelled to South Africa to draw attention to the escalating humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Zimbabwe. Their efforts successfully highlighted the cholera epidemic threatening the region, acute food shortages, economic collapse and the urgent need for regional governments in particular to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.

In 2007 the Elders visited Sudan, including Darfur, to show solidarity with the people and to support those working for peace.

The Elders also support efforts to address issues that are major underlying causes of human suffering such as human rights and health.

In 2008, to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), The Elders led an international campaign entitled Every Human Has Rights to promote awareness of human rights. It's estimated that the campaign reached more than 3 million people through partner organisations around the world.

More recently, The Elders have launched a new initiative calling for equality for women and girls with particular emphasis on the responsibility of religious and traditional leaders in changing discriminatory practices. <http://www.theelders.org/womens-initiatives>

The Elders and Cyprus

The Elders have been closely following the Cyprus peace process since the launch of formal talks between the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities in September 2008. They do not seek to intervene in the substance of the negotiations in any way. Rather, the Elders are trying to assist in promoting an environment conducive to the successful completion of the talks – recognising that a unique opportunity exists to reach a lasting settlement is within reach after decades of division.

In October 2008, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Chair of The Elders), former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi visited Cyprus to lend their support to the two Cypriot leaders as well as to those individuals and organisations on the island who seek to foster reconciliation and greater dialogue between the two communities. The Elders were encouraged by the commitment of Mr Demetris Christofias and Mr Mehmet Ali Talat – and the many members of the two communities – to reunifying the island.

The Elders are pleased that after a year of talks the leaders are making progress, yet they are aware that certain challenges remain in bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion. The Elders are especially keen to learn more about the views of women, young people and key opinion leaders on the future of the island and the prospect of peace. For this reason, the Elders

are returning to Cyprus on 10-11 September. They will also travel to Ankara (8 Sept) and Athens (9 Sept) to meet political leaders to discuss the peace process in Cyprus.

For more information please see <http://www.theelders.org/initiatives/supporting-peace-cyprus>

Three members of The Elders will take part in this trip to Turkey, Greece and Cyprus on 8-11 September: Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Dr. Gro Brundtland and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Unfortunately Jimmy Carter is unable to participate due to prior commitments.



Lakhdar Brahimi:

Lakhdar Brahimi is a distinguished diplomat and mediator. In 1989 he brokered the Taef Accords which ended Lebanon's 17-year civil war. He was Foreign Minister of Algeria from 1991 to 1993 and has led UN missions in South Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr Brahimi now lectures regularly on conflict resolution and international relations in several universities around the world.



Gro Brundtland:

A physician by training, Dr Brundtland was Norway's first female Prime Minister, holding office for ten years. In 1987 she led an agenda-setting UN commission on sustainable development, which has come to be known as the Brundtland Report. Dr Brundtland was appointed Director General of the World Health Organisation in 1988 and in 2007 was appointed Special Envoy to United Nations Secretary General on Climate Change.



Desmond Tutu (Elders' Chair):

Desmond Tutu is an active international advocate for peace, justice and reconciliation. His commitment to non-violence in the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa brought him international recognition and he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. In 1994 Tutu was appointed Chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate apartheid-era crimes. The model he established based on truth as a foundation for forgiveness and reconciliation, was central to healing South Africa's divided society. A tireless campaigner, he continues to speak out for the world's poor, to raise awareness of global crises, and to stand up for human rights.

Detailed biographies of all the Elders are available at www.theElders.org

A small team based in London, headed by CEO Mabel van Oranje, supports The Elders' work.



Mabel van Oranje: Mabel van Oranje is CEO of The Elders. She is also founder and co-chair, together with Martti Ahtisaari and Joschka Fischer, of the European Council on Foreign Relations. Mabel was International Advocacy Director of the Open Society Institute from 2003 to 2008.

For more information please visit our website – www.theElders.org. You can also contact us by writing to Anna.Jurgis@theElders.org. If you would like to receive regular updates about The Elders work, please use the Connect link on our website or follow The Elders on Twitter: twitter.com/TheElders.