

## **A JUST AND SECURE PEACE FOR ALL**

### **Report of The Elders' visit to Egypt, Gaza, Israel, Jordan, Syria and the West Bank 15-22 October 2010**

#### **Introduction**

The Elders, a group of eminent global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela, made their second collective visit to the Middle East from 15-22 October 2010. Mary Robinson led the Elders' delegation composed of Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi and Jimmy Carter. The aim of their visit was to encourage peace efforts, with an emphasis on the need to reach "a just and secure peace for all" based on international law.

The Elders began their trip in Egypt and travelled to Gaza, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the West Bank. This long-planned visit came at a crucial juncture in the stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks. The Elders heard from a wide range of government officials, civil society representatives, opinion leaders and young people, among others, about their concerns and aspirations for peace, including those who are currently at the margins of the process. This report sets out the Elders' conclusions from the trip, which they hope will be a helpful contribution to peace efforts.

#### **Summary of conclusions**

- Peace cannot be achieved without an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.
- The window for a two-state solution is closing rapidly because of changing facts on the ground driven by settlement activity, evictions and deportations.
- An agreement on Jerusalem is central to any solution. The threats to the Arab identity of East Jerusalem are an obstacle to peace.
- In the event a negotiated settlement is not possible, alternative strategies to end the occupation and achieve Palestinian statehood are being explored.
- Israel is increasingly isolated and the population is cynical about prospects for peace.
- Challenges to Israel's right to exist in peace must not be tolerated.
- Popular disillusionment across the Arab world is creating a volatile environment.
- Arab countries should do more to support the Palestinians.
- Reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas is essential.

- Human rights violations committed by the authorities in both the West Bank and Gaza must end.
- Women should play a far greater role in peace negotiations.
- Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel perceive a genuine threat to their basic rights.
- The Gaza blockade is illegal and inhumane and must be lifted altogether.
- Marginalising the Hamas leadership from the current peace process is counter-productive.
- Violence against non-combatants, by Palestinians or Israelis, is an unacceptable violation of international law.
- A greater sense of urgency is needed to achieve a just and secure peace for all.

### The occupation

Ending the occupation of Palestinian land is the only way for Israel to achieve peace and enjoy normal relations with the Palestinians and with their Arab neighbours. This includes ending all settlement activities and upholding the right of Palestinians to live in dignity and freedom in their own state. Settlement activities are contrary to international law.

A short-term extension of the partial settlement construction moratorium is not sufficient. All settlement activity must be stopped while final status negotiations are completed.

### Two-state solution

The window for a two-state solution through final status negotiations is closing due to continued settlement construction and attempts to alter the multi-cultural and multi-religious character of East Jerusalem, the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Palestinians are tired of talking after almost two decades of peace efforts since the Madrid conference. An often-repeated message is that there is too much focus on process and not enough on results.

Israelis fear that, even if a two-state solution is reached, the current Palestinian leadership cannot deliver an agreement that puts an end to further claims.

The Elders believe that the two-state solution is the only outcome that can deliver peace – but a more even-handed, energetic and comprehensive approach based on rights is needed. International law cannot be compromised.

### The changing character of East Jerusalem

Jerusalem lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and agreement on its future must also be at the heart of any solution. Settlements, home demolitions and deportations are threatening the Arab character of East Jerusalem. All kinds of skillful city-planning methods are

being used to surround and squeeze the Palestinian population: tunnels, new roads and even tourist developments.

The Elders are concerned that Arab neighbourhoods are served very poorly in Jerusalem. Education, water, sanitation, garbage collection and roads in East Jerusalem receive a fraction of the investment of the rest of the city. This contributes to local tensions and a sense of injustice among 'Jerusalemites', as the residents of East Jerusalem call themselves.

All who hope and pray for peace in Jerusalem are concerned about growing tensions on the ground, which may have serious regional and global implications.

### Palestinian statehood strategy

The Elders discussed options to bring about Palestinian statehood with the Palestinian leadership and others in the region. Options under consideration include the possible recognition of a Palestinian state by the UN Security Council or the UN General Assembly, and strengthening international opposition to occupation and settlements through various international fora. There was a sense among many Palestinians that the door is closing on them and new and creative solutions are needed to achieve their objective of a viable Palestinian state.

Palestinian civil society is exploring alternative, non-violent ways to achieve Palestinian statehood, such as sanctions, disinvestment, boycotts and peaceful protest.

### Israel's growing international isolation

The 2008/9 war in Gaza, Israel's response to the Goldstone Report, the fatal attack on the Gaza flotilla earlier this year and international probes into these events, have contributed to increased international opposition to Israel's policies. This in turn is causing Israel to feel more isolated internationally.

Israel has been able to build a strong security apparatus which brings Israelis some sense of security. The Elders are concerned that the Israeli public mood appears to be one of cynicism or at best complacency about the peace process. They urge Israelis to consider that walls and military force can only achieve so much. Lasting security lies in peaceful co-existence between Israel and its neighbours.

### Israel's right to exist

Many Israelis are concerned that international criticism constitutes efforts to 'delegitimise' Israel, in other words challenge its right to exist. Israelis fear that many in the Arab world, including some Arab leaders, do not accept Israel's legitimate presence in the Middle East.

Israeli leaders are particularly anxious about Iran's stated desire to see Israel destroyed. This anxiety is deeply felt across Israeli society and should not be underestimated.

The majority of Israelis genuinely want to live in peace with their neighbours. The Elders stand firmly with them and the right of Israel to a secure place in the region. The Elders' concerns about Israeli policies are offered in that spirit and should not be interpreted in any way as being anti-Israeli.

### Disillusionment across the Arab world

Governments, civil society, young and old told the Elders about growing cynicism and disillusionment across the Arab countries about prospects for peace. Expectations across the region for the stalled talks between Israel and the Palestinians are very low.

These feelings, compounded by difficult socio-economic conditions, are creating a volatile environment. Young people in particular are, in their own words, "full of rage". They have little hope and feel a sense of frustration about peace processes and leaders that are not delivering results. The last two decades of negotiations have not contained the conflict, let alone resolved it. Right or not, there is a perception in the region that these processes have served only to extract concessions from the Palestinians.

Ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a matter of urgency. The Palestinians are paying the greatest price by living under occupation, but ending it is also critical for the Arab region and the rest of the world. Worryingly, extremists continue to exploit the conflict for their own ends, often using religious appeals, rather than nationalism, to recruit and mobilise followers.

### The role of the international community

In all the Arab countries and in the occupied Palestinian Territories, the Elders heard that the influence and leadership of the United States in the final status negotiations is essential. However the United States is also perceived across the region to be too close to Israel, and there are growing doubts about Washington's ability to play the role of "honest broker".

President Obama's Cairo speech raised hopes and expectations in the region, but many are disappointed with the Administration's policy since then.

Europe is perceived to be following in Washington's footsteps, squandering its potential leverage as the major donor to the Palestinian Territories and Israel's biggest trading partner. The Elders feel that the other two members of the Quartet, the UN and the Russian Federation, could play a more constructive role by deferring less to Washington.

## Regional responsibility

The Elders believe that the Arab Peace Initiative is a sound basis for sustainable peace and that Arab countries should do much more to support the Palestinians, rather than playing out their rivalries in the Palestinian arena.

As well as hearing views on regional attitudes to the Israeli-Palestinian process, the Elders discussed prospects for peace between Syria and Israel. Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel negotiations are integral to regional peace. However, it is important that talks start when all sides are ready. To start and fail repeatedly is not helpful to any process.

## Palestinian unity

Reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas has been a central theme in the Elders' discussions in the region, and is essential, regardless of the strategy the Palestinians pursue towards the two-state solution. In talks with Israel, or if they choose to pursue a solution in international fora, the Palestinians will be ineffective unless they unify.

The Palestinian people deserve leadership that reflects their priorities and properly represents their aspirations. Primary responsibility for reconciliation lies with the parties, but the Gaza blockade and the international boycott of Hamas complicate this effort.

## Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories

Occupation is the root cause of human rights abuses in the Palestinian Territories. Palestinians are subjected not only to violations by the occupying power, but also by the Palestinian authorities in both the West Bank and Gaza.

In meetings with the Gaza authorities the Elders raised allegations of human rights violations that had been reported to them. The authorities promised that they would investigate any specific allegations and report the outcome to the Elders. They also said that any mistakes would be corrected.

The Elders are especially concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation for girls and women in Gaza. Women and girls face insidious pressures to wear headscarves and are experiencing greater domestic violence. There is diminishing space for women to take part in public life. Women have much to contribute to a peaceful future and their participation at all levels in any peace negotiations should be increased. The Elders urged leaders in Gaza to enable women and girls to enjoy their full human rights.

In Ramallah, the Elders also discussed human rights violations committed by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. They expressed concern about ongoing reports of arbitrary detentions, allegations of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees, as well

as restrictions on civil society activity. Judicial reform to provide the necessary balance to the security sector is an urgent priority.

### Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel

The Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel, who make up 20 per cent of the population, do not enjoy equal social, economic and political rights. In addition to 35 existing discriminatory laws, more than twenty new laws are under consideration in the Knesset that would further erode their rights. In the Negev desert, Arab villages are being demolished and their inhabitants evicted from land they have occupied for generations.

Particularly concerning is a proposal that will require non-Jews acquiring Israeli citizenship to pledge loyalty to the country as a Jewish state. Such an oath cannot be consistent with the rights of Muslims, Christians and other minorities in Israel. Following the Israeli Foreign Minister's recent speech at the UN General Assembly, Palestinian-Arabs in Israel perceive a real threat to their basic rights in the country.

### Gaza blockade

The recent easing of the blockade means that more goods can be brought into Gaza, but people are not free to come and go, reconstruction materials are still highly restricted and there is no real economy to speak of. The Elders learned that important socio-economic indicators in Gaza are not just stagnant, they are going backwards.

It is important to state that the situation in Gaza is not primarily a humanitarian crisis – it is above all a political crisis and it must be solved politically. The economic isolation of Gaza is illegal collective punishment, but also an impediment to peace. Holding 1.5 million people, over half of them children, in what is effectively an open-air prison, is deepening the sense of anger and injustice among Palestinians and in the region. This situation is creating a generation of young people who have little to lose. This is not in anyone's interest.

It is not enough to ease the blockade, it must be lifted fully.

Negotiations for the release of Gilad Schalit, the Israeli soldier captive in Gaza since 2006, and Palestinian political prisoners in Israel must be brought to a conclusion urgently. The ICRC has not been allowed to visit Schalit. Some 650 Palestinian prisoners from Gaza have not seen their families for years.

### Political isolation of Hamas

Whether one agrees with Hamas or not, it is clear that they represent an important constituency among Palestinian people and sooner or later will have to play a role in decision

making. Marginalising the Hamas leadership from the current peace process is counter-productive.

The Elders detected bitterness among the Hamas leadership in Gaza and Damascus about the lack of acknowledgement by the international community of Hamas's acceptance of a Palestinian state within 1967 borders, the ceasefire Hamas has imposed in and around Gaza, and their willingness to accommodate the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Elders told Hamas leaders that the use of violence would not assist their cause and urged them to continue to pursue their political objectives through legitimate, non-violent means.

### Resistance

Twenty years of failed peace talks have prompted renewed discussion about Palestinian resistance. In this context, the Elders have made clear that violence against non-combatants, by Palestinians or by Israelis, is an unacceptable violation of international law.

While it is not easy to talk about non-violence with people who have to face violence every day, the Elders hope and believe that the people can find a peaceful way forward. They are encouraged by those who are working for peaceful coexistence, and hope that this kind of creative political action will spread.

### Urgency

At the conclusion of their visit to the region, having met and listened to a wide range of interlocutors, the Elders believe that a far greater sense of urgency, energy and commitment is needed to reach a just and secure peace for all.

## **Annex – Elders’ meetings and site visits**

Members of the delegation:

- Mary Robinson (delegation leader), former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Ela Bhatt, Gandhian and founder of the million-strong Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) of India.
- Lakhdar Brahimi, former Algerian Foreign Minister and former UN Envoy.
- Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States of America.

In Gaza, the Elders visited an UNRWA school made of shipping containers because construction materials are not available. They met representatives of human rights organizations, women’s groups and academia; opinion leaders, policy experts and business leaders; students; civil society groups and individuals promoting the role of women in peace-building, based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325; Director of UNRWA Operations John Ging; leader of the Gaza authorities Ismail Haniyeh; and member of the Hamas politburo Mahmoud al-Zahar.

In Egypt, the Elders met students and opinion leaders to discuss the peace process. They also met the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Amr Moussa, Minister of Intelligence Omar Suleiman, and Minister for Foreign Affairs Ahmad Abul Gheit.

In Syria, the Elders met President Bashar Al-Assad, Minister for Foreign Affairs Walid Al-Mouallem, and Chairman of the Hamas politburo Khaled Meshaal. They also held discussions with local opinion leaders and students on Syria’s role in the peace process.

In Jordan, the Elders met opinion leaders as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Judeh and Their Majesties King Abdullah II and Queen Rania.

In the West Bank, the Elders met representatives of human rights organisations, policy experts, independent politicians and opinion leaders. They also met President Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and senior PLO negotiator Nabil Shaath.

In Israel, the Elders met representatives of the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel; representatives of the Russian-speaking population of Israel; UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry; young Israeli political leaders (from Labor, Likud, Kadima and Shas); Speaker of the Israeli Knesset Reuven Rivlin; and Deputy Prime Minister Daniel Meridor.

To inform themselves about the situation in East Jerusalem, the Elders made a tour of East Jerusalem, visited the protest tent in the Al Bustan / Silwan neighbourhood to listen to local residents, and joined the weekly protest in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. They also met

experts on Jerusalem's planning policy and practices and met the Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat. They visited Palestinian Legislative Council members who have taken refuge at the ICRC after being threatened with deportation.

At the end of their visit, the Elders debriefed members of the diplomatic community including ambassadors to Israel, permanent representatives to the Palestinian Authority and representatives of international organisations.

Media releases, blogs, tweets and more information

The Elders have been blogging and tweeting during their visit and issued three detailed media releases. Please visit [www.theElders.org](http://www.theElders.org) for more information.