

Graça Machel

International advocate for women's and children's rights; former freedom fighter and first Education Minister of Mozambique.

- Minister of Education and Culture in Mozambique 1975-1989
- Founder of the Foundation for Community Development in Mozambique
- UN independent expert on the impact of armed conflict on children
- Founding member of The Elders

"I think The Elders can play the role of amplifying the voices of the millions of citizens of the world who daily are working very hard to make themselves heard."

Work with The Elders

Graça Machel is a founding member of The Elders with her husband, Nelson Mandela. A constant advocate for good governance, human rights and development in Africa, she joined the first Elders' mission in October that year, travelling to [Sudan](#) with her fellow Elders Lakhdar Brahimi, Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu. She spent time in Darfur, highlighting the issue of rape and gender-based violence in the region.

In November 2008 she attempted to visit Zimbabwe with her fellow Elders to draw attention to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country. "Either the leadership doesn't have a clear picture of how deep the suffering is of their own people," she told journalists in Johannesburg after the Elders were refused entry to [Zimbabwe](#), "or they don't care."

One of the world's best known advocates for women and children's rights, Mrs Machel travelled to Ethiopia with The Elders in June 2011 to convene an international meeting of experts and activists tackling the harmful traditional practice of [child marriage](#). "Activists working at the grassroots sometimes feel isolated when they are at the forefront of such change," she said. "We hope that we can unleash each other's energy and build the momentum needed to end child marriage."

Education reformer in post-independence Mozambique

Graça Machel joined the Mozambican Liberation Front in 1973 as a schoolteacher. When Mozambique gained its independence two years later, she became the country's first Minister of Education and Culture – the only woman in the cabinet.

Between 1975 and 1989 she was responsible for overseeing an increase in primary school enrolment from 40 per cent of children to over 90 per cent of boys and 75 per cent of girls. As chairperson of the National Organisation of Children of Mozambique, she has also worked closely with families to promote literacy and rehabilitate children affected by the country's long civil war.

For Mrs Machel, the struggle for the right to education and development continues. "It is the meaning of what my life has been since a youth – to try to fight for the dignity and the freedom of my own people."

The Machel Report: children in armed conflict

In 1994, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed Graça Machel as an independent expert to carry out an assessment of the impact of armed conflict on children. Her groundbreaking report recommended the rehabilitation and social integration of children affected by conflict – with emphasis on providing for all opportunities to access education and skills development. The [Machel Report](#) established a new and innovative agenda for the comprehensive protection of children caught up in war, changing the policy and practice of governments, UN agencies, and international and national civil society.

In 1995 Graça Machel was awarded the Nansen Medal in recognition of her contribution to the welfare of refugee children.

Advancing African development

Graça Machel remains a fierce advocate for Africa's successes and potential. As President of the [Foundation for Community Development \(FDC\)](#), a not-for-profit Mozambican organisation she founded in 1994, she promotes development by increasing community access to information and technology. The FDC makes grants to civil society organisations to strengthen communities, facilitate social and economic justice, and assist in the reconstruction and development of post-war Mozambique.

Mrs Machel has also served on the boards of numerous organisations working to prevent conflict and advance development, including the UN Foundation, the Forum of African Women Educationalists, the African Leadership Forum, and International Crisis Group. She was Chair of the Fund Board for the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) for almost 10 years as well as Eminent Person of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and is currently the Chancellor of the University of Cape Town.

In recognition of her lifelong efforts to promote human rights, education and development, Graça Machel has received the Laureate of Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger (1992), the Inter Press Service's International Achievement Award (1998), the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe (1998) and the Africare Distinguished Humanitarian Service Award (1999), among others.