

## **The Elders condemn Israeli attack on Gaza relief ships Meeting in Johannesburg addresses major international issues**

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For immediate release

The Elders have condemned the reported killing by Israeli forces of more than a dozen people who were attempting to deliver relief supplies to the Gaza strip by sea.

Meeting in Johannesburg, the independent group of eminent global leaders repeated their call for an end to the blockade on Gaza. They called for a full investigation of last night's incident and urged the UN Security Council to debate the situation with a view to mandating action to end the closure of the Gaza Strip.

The group's biannual meeting also addressed a number of other major international issues.

Overnight, Israeli troops stormed at least one ship in a flotilla of vessels carrying 10,000 tonnes of relief supplies to Gaza. Around 600 people are on board the six cargo and passenger boats.

The Elders described Israel's attack on the aid shipment and the resulting killings and injuries as completely inexcusable. They said this tragic incident should draw the world's attention to the terrible suffering of Gaza's 1.5 million people, half of whom are children under the age of 18.

The Elders reminded the world that under international law, the three-year blockade of Gaza by Israel is illegal collective punishment of its inhabitants. They said that the treatment of the people of Gaza is one of the world's greatest human rights violations and that the blockade is not only illegal, it is counterproductive. This is because it creates unacceptable suffering, in the process empowering extremists and undermining moderate forces in Gaza.

During their meeting in Johannesburg, the Elders also discussed a range of other issues in which they are engaged as a group. A brief summary of their views is as follows:

### **Sudan**

The Elders are deeply concerned about the fragility of the situation in Sudan. With less than eight months before a referendum on self-determination in South Sudan, it is crucial that the international community implements a comprehensive strategy towards Sudan and ensures that the will of the people of South Sudan is respected.

The Elders recommend that the international community unites behind Thabo Mbeki, chair of the African Union's High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) as the lead international interlocutor on Sudan. There is currently a plethora of international envoys and special representatives and their diverse activities should support a unified approach by Mr Mbeki.

They call on the international community and regional players to remain neutral and make greater efforts to ensure that the will of the people of South Sudan is respected.

On Darfur, the Elders say the peace process needs to be far more inclusive. They believe the negotiations should include civil society groups representing the unarmed majority who should also participate in negotiations about their future.

## Zimbabwe

Progress on the implementation of the Global Political Agreement is far too slow. Ending the stalemate over the reform process is essential for the future of Zimbabwe and the welfare of its people.

The Elders are currently examining ways to reinforce SADC's role, and especially that of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma as facilitator of negotiations between the parties to the GPA.

The pace of reform of the inclusive government needs to be accelerated so that the suffering of the people can be ended. We welcome the recent initiative of women ministers from all parties and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe to work together. Donors should continue to support Zimbabwe's efforts towards progress.

## About The Elders' meeting

The Elders met from 28-31 May in Johannesburg – the city where the group was publicly launched by Nelson Mandela in 2007. All ten members of the group were present. This is the first time that they have all been together in the same place.

A highlight of their meeting was a private lunch with their founder and honorary Elder, Nelson Mandela on Saturday, 29 May. The ten Elders also met President Jacob Zuma on Thursday, 27 May, and had a lively discussion on Saturday, 29 May with 80 of Africa's top students about the future of the continent.

On the eve of the World Cup, the Elders took stock of the prospects for Africa as a whole. They are deeply concerned about high levels of poverty, poor governance and injustice in Africa, but they are also optimistic and confident about the continent's future.

They found their encounter with young Africans particularly encouraging. The students from all over Africa aged between 17 and 25 were positive, but also realistic about what needs to be done to tackle Africa's problems. The Elders were extremely impressed by the students' commitment to succeed, not

only as individuals, but to use their skills to help many more people benefit from the continent's rich resources and human talent.

The Elders also held detailed discussions during their meeting on other areas in which they are engaged, especially the fight for equality for women and girls.

They met a group of men and women from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East and held detailed discussions on religious and traditional issues affecting women and girls. The discussions will help to inform the Elders' work on gender equality issues.

#### About the Elders

The Elders include Nobel Peace Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari and former US President Jimmy Carter.

Other members are Norway's first woman Prime Minister Gro Brundtland who was also Director General of the World Health Organisation, former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Their fellow Elders, Ela Bhatt and Graça Machel, are globally recognised leaders at the forefront of the struggle against oppression and poverty, and Lakhdar Brahimi is one of the UN and the Arab world's most respected and effective diplomats.

Nobel Peace Laureates Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, are honorary Elders. Having retired from public life, Mandela does not participate in Elders' meetings or activities but is kept informed of the group's efforts. Suu Kyi is under house arrest in Burma, imprisoned by the military regime that denied her party's election victory in 1990. To highlight her cause - and that of thousands of political prisoners in Burma - the Elders always keep an empty chair at their table, symbolically draped in Burmese silk.

For biographies of the Elders, blogs, photos, videos and more information about their work please go to [www.theElders.org](http://www.theElders.org)

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