

The Elders congratulate Aung San Suu Kyi ahead of her appearance in parliament in Burma/Myanmar

'We pray that Aung San Suu Kyi and her country are now on a path to freedom' –
Desmond Tutu

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Elders congratulate Aung San Suu Kyi ahead of her first appearance in parliament in Burma/Myanmar, following her election in the 1 April by-elections. They hope her access to political office will further boost political, economic and social reform, promote reconciliation, and help address the serious human rights issues which persist throughout the country. They also hope that the minority share of parliamentary seats obtained by opposition parties in these by-elections constitute a positive first step towards a robust democratic system.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of The Elders, said:

"I am absolutely delighted for my sister Aung San Suu Kyi. Her election to parliament could be that moment the world never forgets as: 'That is when Burma/Myanmar embraced democracy'.

"But for this to be true, Daw Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and all other political parties need to be given the space to play a meaningful role in the parliament. If not, it will be such a disappointment for citizens across the country, and indeed for us all."

The Elders welcome the reforms undertaken in Burma/Myanmar since the inauguration of President Thein Sein in March 2011, including the release of hundreds of political prisoners, changes to labour laws, the lifting of media restrictions and the re-registration of the NLD. Positive progress has been made and the Elders encourage further steps towards the unconditional release of the political prisoners who still remain in detention and the lifting of restrictions on political prisoners who have already been released.

The Elders remain concerned about reports of persistent human rights abuses and poor humanitarian conditions. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar [recently stated](#) that there remain "serious challenges", such as lack of access to health care and education, land grabs and confiscations, forced labour and portering, and other widely documented human rights violations related to on-going ethnic conflicts.

The Elders welcome the government's efforts in reaching a resolution to ethnic conflicts in the country's border regions. They urge the government and ethnic groups to maintain talks and take further steps to build lasting peace to promote a genuine process of national reconciliation.

The Elders also welcome the government's willingness to establish a dialogue with the international community, as demonstrated by the numerous official visitors to the country in recent months. They advise the international community to find ways to further encourage the reform process, maintain direct engagement with the government and members of parliament, and lift barriers to financial and technical assistance to support human development and help tackle the country's humanitarian challenges.

As she assumes political office, Aung San Suu Kyi will be standing down from her position as an honorary Elder, in line with the requirement that members of The Elders should not hold public office.

Desmond Tutu added:

"While Daw Suu Kyi was under house arrest, we would leave an [empty chair](#) for her at our Elders meetings, to symbolise our solidarity with her struggle for freedom and democracy.

"When she was released we hoped we could stop doing this, since she might be able to be with us. Now our reason for ending the ritual reflects an even greater joy – her election to parliament. We pray that Daw Suu Kyi and her country are now on a path to freedom."

About The Elders

The Elders are independent global leaders working together for peace and human rights. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Brundtland](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) (Chair).

[Nelson Mandela](#) is an honorary Elder.

For biographies of the Elders, blogs, photos, videos and more information about their work please go to www.theElders.org.

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