

## The Elders begin two-day visit to Egypt

**Gro Harlem Brundtland, Jimmy Carter and Mary Robinson offer encouragement and support for an inclusive democratic transition**

23 October 2012

### **PRESS RELEASE**

A delegation of The Elders arrived in Egypt today for two days of meetings and events from 23-25 October: former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland, former President of the United States Jimmy Carter and former President of Ireland Mary Robinson.

The three Elders look forward to meeting the President of the Republic, Mohamed Morsi, religious leaders, senior officials and diplomats, human rights and women's organisations, members of civil society and young people.

Arriving in Egypt, the Elders emphasised their appreciation for the non-violent way in which the Egyptian people brought about the great changes that have swept the country since January 2011 and offered their support and encouragement for an inclusive, democratic transition.

**Gro Harlem Brundtland**, former Prime Minister of Norway, said:

*“What Egypt has achieved in the past 20 months is a credit to the people of this country and an inspiration to millions around the world. We could not take our eyes off our televisions last year when Egyptians of all backgrounds took to the streets together to peacefully demand change. Our hearts rose even further when their demands for an end to dictatorship were met.*

*“During our visit, we look forward to hearing from many sections of Egyptian society about their expectations for the future – including on the forthcoming draft of the constitution. We are especially interested to ensure that we meet groups that often find it hard to make their voices heard, such as young people, women and minorities.”*

The drafting of Egypt's new constitution is a critical moment to secure the political gains of the revolution and chart the way ahead. The Elders hope that wide national participation and public debate will greet the constitution's first draft, due to be issued soon, ahead of a referendum.

**Jimmy Carter**, former President of the United States said:

*“We understand the frustrations of those who may feel that change is coming too slowly. But change takes time. Egypt now has a democratically elected President and the military’s role has changed in a way that would have been difficult to imagine only a year ago. This is a credit to the persistence of the people and the statesmanship of President Morsi.*”

*“Egypt is in the midst of a lively debate over its future constitution. Non-violent protests that take place almost daily are a further expression of the fundamental freedoms to which we all aspire. Change on this scale never happens overnight but the momentum of the past 20 months is a great source of hope and encouragement to us all.”*

Listening to the aspirations of today's youth is a particularly important focus for the Elders' visit to Egypt, where half of the 85 million-strong population is under the age of 25. The Elders will hold a discussion with a panel of young people from across the country about the future of Egypt, and their role within it.

**Mary Robinson**, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said:

*“Last year, Cairo's youth found strength in numbers and diversity. They said to one another, ‘if you go in the street, I’ll come with you’ – and soon they had filled Tahrir Square. It is also true that more than half of those aged 15-24 in Egypt are unemployed. Meeting their aspirations and finding opportunities for these young men and women will be one of the biggest challenges facing the country’s leaders.*”

*“One of the missions Nelson Mandela gave us, as Elders, was to meet and listen to young people. As Elders, we have also learned the value of making way for younger talent. This is a message that we hope will resonate here, and help to emphasise that Egypt’s greatest asset is its people.”*

### **The Elders' work on the Arab Awakening**

Since the beginning of the wave of popular uprisings that swept the Middle East and North Africa almost two years ago, The Elders have stood with all those across the region who have taken their destiny into their own hands to demand dignity, freedom and human rights. The Elders support these legitimate demands and join the call for an end to authoritarian rule, oppression and corruption.

The Arab Awakening ignited an interest in good governance across all sectors of society, which should be embraced and encouraged. The Elders believe that all members of society – including young people, women and minorities – must have the opportunity to participate fully in building the institutions of government, and that new constitutions enshrine the rights and freedoms we all share.

For further information: <http://theelders.org/arab-awakening>

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## Members of The Elders travelling to Egypt



### **Gro Harlem Brundtland – delegation leader**

Gro Harlem Brundtland, a medical doctor, was Norway's first woman Prime Minister, serving a total of ten years as head of government. She chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development – known as the Brundtland Commission – which articulated the principle of sustainable development for the first time at a global level. She was Director-General of the World Health Organization from 1998-2003, and in 2011, she was appointed member of the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Sustainability Panel.



### **Jimmy Carter**

Jimmy Carter was the 39th President of the United States of America (1977-1981). His achievements include brokering the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel, and establishing US diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. In 1982, he founded The Carter Center which works to advance peace and health worldwide. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his "untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development."



### **Mary Robinson**

Mary Robinson was the first woman President of Ireland and is a former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. As an academic, legislator and barrister, she sought to use law as an instrument for social change. A tireless advocate for justice, she was President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative from 2002 to 2010, and now leads efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable populations in the world do not disproportionately suffer the effects of climate change. She is Chair of the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice.

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## About The Elders

The Elders are independent leaders using their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Kofi Annan](#), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Harlem 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](http://www.theElders.org).

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