

The Elders encourage all parties in Myanmar to advance national reforms, support peace accords

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Concluding a three-day visit to Myanmar, the Elders offer their support to the people of Myanmar during this exciting period of transition. They also encourage decision-makers responsible for the implementation of the political reform process to make further progress. This was The Elders' first visit to Myanmar as a group.

Welcoming the work of a range of local and international actors involved in supporting the peace process with ethnic minority armed groups and addressing ongoing violence in Rakhine state, the Elders noted that they anticipate remaining engaged in the country in the coming years.

The Elders travelled to Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon to meet with President U Thein Sein and other senior officials in the Myanmar government, political leaders, religious leaders and civil society groups including women's organisations.

Commenting on Myanmar's political process **Jimmy Carter**, former US President and Elders' delegation leader, said:

"The Elders have come to listen and give support to all those committed to a peaceful political transition in Myanmar. Our question to everyone on this visit has been: what kind of democracy do you envisage?"

"We had constructive discussions with President U Thein Sein and members of his government, as well as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in Nay Pyi Taw. We were impressed by the pace with which reforms are proceeding. Myanmar is becoming a more open society. The release of political prisoners is particularly encouraging. We trust there will be no political prisoners by the end of the year, as the President has pledged."

"We have also been struck by the growing contribution and leadership of women in civil society, and yet they are under-represented in the political process. A truly vibrant democratic society cannot thrive without women's equal status in all aspects of life."

The Elders encourage a comprehensive resolution of the ethnic conflicts in the country including a political dialogue involving all relevant parties.

Commenting on the prospect of peace between the government and the ethnic minority armed groups in the border regions **Martti Ahtisaari**, former President of Finland, said:

“I always say that building peace only begins once hostilities cease. This is the start, not the end, of a process.

“For Myanmar to reap the benefits of peace, careful attention will need to be given to how the factors underlying conflict are managed, in particular the contest for land and other natural resources.

“Although no two conflicts are ever the same, post-conflict societies share at least one trait: their success depends on the abandonment of an adversarial mindset, on addressing common challenges together. Ultimately, no one can want peace more than the Myanmar people.”

The Elders call for an end to impunity for the perpetrators of violence against the Muslim community and for the meaningful realisation of the right to freedom of religion.

Commenting on the inter-communal strife afflicting several parts of the country **Gro Harlem Brundtland**, former Prime Minister of Norway and Deputy Chair of The Elders, said:

“A lot of attention has been given to the tensions between people of different faiths in Myanmar, but we have also been struck by the extent of the divisions within religious groups. We have encouraged the religious leaders to work for compassion and tolerance.

“It could take decades to overcome the ingrained prejudices promoted by extremist voices in parts of the country. This will require far-reaching cultural changes in all parts of society, including through changes in the education curriculum.

“The targeted violence against the Muslim minority in Rakhine state should also be halted as a priority. All people in Rakhine state, regardless of their religion, should see their basic rights to food, education and security fulfilled. No one can afford to ignore these senseless, destructive, repeated acts of brutality.”

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](#) (Chair), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#) (Deputy Chair), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Hina Jilani](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Ernesto Zedillo](#).

[Nelson Mandela](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) are honorary Elders.

Media inquiries

In the UK

Sylvain Biville, Media Manager, The Elders: media@theElders.org / T +44 7547 736 371

In Myanmar

Elliott Fox, Media Officer, The Elders: media@theElders.org / T +95 (0)9 430 52557

Aye Hnin Swe (Rose), Mango Media: rose-swe@mango.com.mm / T +95 (0)9 4500 54200

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